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# Phenomenological Study of Empowering Women Senior Leaders in Higher Education

Mila P. Cselenszky  
*Walden University*

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2012

Abstract

Phenomenological Study of Empowering Women Senior Leaders in Higher Education

by

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M.A., University of Batangas, 1979

B.S., University of Batangas, 1967

Dissertation Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

May 2012

## Abstract

The number of women in senior administrative and leadership roles in higher education is minimal compared to the number of women in higher education jobs in general. This phenomenological study explored pathways women took to advance in their careers and barriers that prevent more women from gaining senior administrative and leadership roles. Research questions addressed perceived barriers participants faced while trying to advance their careers, mentoring and other support strategies women in higher education employed to help them move up the career ladder, and actions female leaders took in order to help establish gender equity. Dambe and Moorad's empowerment-based/transformational leadership theory, Vroom's expectancy theory, and hooks's feminist theory were used as conceptual frameworks for this study. Data collection included in-depth interviews and gestural observations. Data were triangulated through member check, debriefing, iterative questioning, and reflective commentary. Titchen's thematic data analysis and the hermeneutic circle were used to analyze data; analysis was validated by an independent auditor. Mentoring and networking were identified as effective tools for gaining executive skills. Political savvy, determination, and serendipity were factors to which participants attributed success. Based on study results, higher education institutions should focus on succession planning to bring more women into senior leadership roles. The age gap for female senior leaders in higher education is an area for further study. This study may support positive social change by providing female leaders the opportunity to understand the nature of higher education and subsequently to develop strategies and to gain constructive experiences that can improve their status.



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## Dedication

This dissertation is wholeheartedly dedicated to my parents (may they both rest in peace); most especially to my mother, who had always envision that her children attain the highest level of education. And equally the same to my loving, understanding, and supportive families here and in the Philippines and to my very loyal and beloved friends.

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to passionately thank the Lord Almighty for all the love, protection, and blessings He has provided my entire family and me while I am in this arduous, but rewarding journey. I would like to sincerely thank my dissertation team: Dr. Lacy, my dissertation chair and methodologist for his consistent thoroughness, rigorous guidance, strong support, and tireless persistence; Dr. Marilyn Simon, my dissertation content specialist and member, for her steadfast brilliance, kind understanding, and most importantly, for her prompt, accurate, and reliable assistance; and Dr. Asoka Jayasena, my URR, for her diligent and hard work, genuine cooperation, and unwavering support throughout the entire dissertation process. I want to express my deepest appreciation to the professional guidance and able direction provided by the Walden family: Dr. Paula Dawidowicz and the entire research team, Ms. Sherer and the whole IRB team, doctoral academic advising, residency team, writing tutors and dissertation editors at the Writing center, and Walden library. I will remain grateful to my beloved faculty mentors: Dr. Gary Lacy, Dr. Alan Seidman, Dr. Patricia Brewer, and Dr. Noreen Lyne for their ingenious guidance. And I would like to sincerely thank my beloved faculty assessors: Dr. Marilyn Simon, Dr. Teresa Lao, and Dr. Patricia Brewer, for their painstaking guidance during my KAM writing, which is instrumental to achieving this milestone. Apparently, my heartfelt appreciation goes to my resourceful and intelligent instructors: Dr. Gary Lacy, Dr. Gerald Giraud, Dr. Annie Beckett, Dr. Glenn Ayres, and Dr. Rita Edwards, for their quality and effective instructions necessary to better understand the required core courses.

I want to profoundly thank all the participants in this study for their unrelenting support and unselfish cooperation during the data collection process. And of course, my genuine appreciation goes to Ms. Arita Winter and Ms. Pamela Miller from 4-year public colleges and universities along with Dr. Vladimir Briller and Mr. Christopher Vinger from the selected 4-year private colleges, for their resolute guidance and untiring cooperation during the recruitment process.

Last, but not least, my sincerest and most profound gratitude goes to my two daughters, Yolanda and Marissa, my husband, Larry, my sons-in-law, George and John (Jay-Jay) and to my cute, beautiful, intelligent and smart grandchildren, Jonathan and Madisen, for their full, loving, and perpetual understanding and support. I would as well want to deeply thank my sisters (Taciana, Ester, and Gertrudes) and brothers (Avelino and Quintin) in the Philippines, for their fervent prayers and continuous affirmation that I will be triumphant in this doctoral endeavor.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	1
Background of the Study .....	4
Problem Statement.....	9
Nature of the Study .....	10
Research Questions.....	12
Purpose of the Study .....	13
Conceptual Framework.....	13
Empowerment-Based/Transformational Leadership Theory.....	14
Vroom's Expectancy Theory .....	15
Definition of Terms.....	16
Assumptions.....	19
Delimitations.....	20
Limitations .....	20
Significance of the Study .....	21
Summary .....	23
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	26
Introduction.....	26
Title Searches, Articles, Research Documents and Journals .....	26
Other Phenomenological Studies that Solve Similar Problems.....	29

Career Paths to Presidencies in Higher Education.....	30
Traditional Linear Path .....	35
Nontraditional Linear Path.....	39
Hiring Procedures .....	46
Need of Women Presidents in Colleges and Universities for the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century.....	50
Profile of Women Presidents .....	57
Personal and Professional Barriers .....	61
Gender Bias, Stereotyping, and Double Bind.....	62
Glass Ceiling and the Labyrinth .....	65
Gender Gap/Inequality/Diversity.....	68
Empowerment, Gender, and Politics .....	71
Concept of Empowerment .....	72
Empowerment is about Change, Choice, and Power.....	74
Women’s Political Presence .....	76
Power Not Gender.....	78
Women’s Effort to Establish Gender Equity in Higher Education.....	79
Innovative Strategies for Institutional Change .....	81
Summary.....	83
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	86
Introduction.....	86
Qualitative Design .....	87

Quantitative Versus Qualitative Methodology .....	88
Justification for a Phenomenological Inquiry .....	89
Hermeneutic Phenomenology as the Appropriate Methodology .....	92
Sample Population of the Study.....	95
Sample Size and Sample Methods.....	95
Site and Participant Selection .....	96
Ethical Conduct of the Research.....	98
Researcher’s Role in Data Collection.....	99
Data Collection .....	103
Data Analysis .....	104
Establishing Rigor, Credibility, and Trustworthiness.....	109
Conclusion .....	114
Chapter 4: Results .....	116
Overview.....	116
Participants in the Study .....	116
Data Collection and Analysis.....	118
Data Collection .....	118
Data Analysis Procedure.....	120
Results and Findings.....	121
Responses to Research Question 1 .....	122
Responses to Research Question Number 2 .....	137
Responses to Research Question Number 3 .....	145

Discrepant and Nonconfirming Data .....	172
Patterns, Relationships, and Themes .....	177
Overview of the Research Findings.....	177
Category 1: Career Path.....	178
Category 2: Career Mobility Resources.....	180
Category 3: Political Empowerment in Higher Education .....	182
Category 4: Gender Equality Inclusion.....	184
Summary .....	186
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	187
Overview.....	187
Interpretation of Findings .....	188
Perceived Barriers.....	188
Mentoring and Support Strategies .....	195
Gender Equality Inclusion .....	202
Interpretation of the Findings and Empowerment-based Leadership Theory .....	204
Recommendation for Actions .....	206
Recommendations for Future Research .....	207
Researcher Reflections.....	209
Conclusion .....	210
References.....	212
Appendix A: Title of Appendix .....	240
Appendix B: Invitation Letter.....	242

Appendix C: Sample Interview Guide.....	244
Appendix D: Consent Form.....	248
Appendix E: Demographic Survey .....	252
Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement .....	253
Appendix G: Final Interview Questions .....	254

## List of Tables

Table 1. Women in Academia .....	32
Table 2. Pathways to Presidency: 2006 .....	33
Table 3. Stages of Data Analysis Developed for This Study.....	106
Table 4. Participants' Demographic Overview.....	117
Table 5, Emerging Categories and Themes .....	121
Table 6. Career Paths: Traditional .....	123
Table 7. Stumbling Blocks Female Leaders Faced in Career Advancement.....	127
Table 8. Overcoming Barriers.....	131
Table 9. Role of Serendipity in Career Success.....	134
Table 10. Career Mobility Resources - Mentoring Strategies .....	139
Table 11. Career Mobility Resources - Mentoring Suggestions.....	142
Table 12. Major Transformations in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Leadership in Higher Education	151
Table 13. Impact of Gender on Leadership Process .....	160
Table 14. Attitude of Colleagues in the Workplace (males and females) .....	165
Table 15. Strategies to Reduce Gender Gap in Higher Education.....	169

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Background**

The marginalization of women (Gerdes, 2006) has been particularly pronounced in higher education, where masculine ways of functioning and leading have been valued and perpetuated. Although the number of women working and achieving promotion in higher education has increased significantly since 2000, women are still underrepresented in senior management and professorial positions in higher education (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2006; American Council for Education [ACE], 2007; Gonzalez, 2010; Griffiths, 2009). The demographics of female leaders throughout higher education indicate women and minorities are underutilized in senior-level positions (Keim & Murray, 2008; McClellan, 2007), from president to tenured faculty posts (ACE, 2007; Gonzalez, 2010).

Women have historically and frequently been excluded from the academy and especially in higher professorial ranks (August, 2006; Stewart, Ornstein, & Drakich, 2009). Although women held 45% of the senior administrative positions and 38% of the chief academic officer positions in 2006, according to Catalyst (2008), only 23% of the university presidential posts were held by women. West and Curtis (2006) and Catalyst (2008) reported in 2006 full-time women in higher education in the United States held 52% doctoral and 54% master's nontenure-track positions, 41% doctoral and 47% master's tenure-track positions, and 26% doctoral and 35% master's tenured positions. Full-time women held more nontenure-track positions than tenure-track positions, while

men overwhelmingly comprised the majority of tenured faculty (Catalyst, 2008; West & Curtis, 2006).

Women often have been underrepresented in faculty considered for tenure and less likely to be tenured when compared to their male counterparts even though they received PhDs at the same rate as males (Harris, 2009; West & Curtis, 2006; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2009). The underrepresentation and underutilization of female leaders has made women leaders feel devalued and inferior, which has not only undermined their inherent potential and skills but also has thwarted the contributions they might have offered to the particular institution, to the advancement and strengths in American higher education, and to the community development in general.

The *glass ceiling* has been punctured (Eagly & Carli, 2007), as evidenced by the female leaders who have made it to the top executive positions. Women are still unsuccessful in obtaining workplace equity with men, especially in traditionally male-dominated areas (Eagly & Carli, 2009), as well as in corporate management, science, and technology (Ceci, Williams, & Barnett, 2009). Female leaders who have entered the male-dominated workforce often must suppress their female identity to succeed, while they persistently face additional pressure of fitting in (Madden, 2005) and adapting to the masculine leader image and management culture.

In 2009, despite the greater percentage of female leaders in the world's labor force, women's share of top positions remained low ("The White House Project Report," 2009). Women held only 13.5% of executive officer positions at *Fortune* 500 companies (Catalyst, 2009) and only 6.3% of top salary positions. Female leaders generally need to

maximize their effort and must carefully navigate their career paths to overcome obstacles (Eagly & Carli, 2009), compared with their male counterparts.

Women's problems in their careers have historically started upon entering academia. Not only has their career advancement been slow, despite a greater representation in the workforce but also the percentage of women in academic positions is diminished in the higher rungs of the career ladder, thus leaving few women to compete for the top positions (AAUP, 2006; ACE, 2007; Catalyst, 2008; Eagly & Carli, 2007, 2009; June, 2008a). This stalled career advancement has been apparent in community colleges, which often have been viewed as friendlier career pathways (Townsend & Twombly, 2006) where the numbers of women leaders doubled relative to doctoral-granting institutions and any other institutional types.

With many countries facing shortage of talent at all levels, women may be expected to fill this gap (Desvaux, Devillard-Hoellinger, & Meaney, 2008), but that expectation, according to Gonzalez (2010), has never come to fruition. As Eagly and Carli (2009) posited, the *labyrinth* (the complex and winding paths to leadership that women leaders face) could somehow explain the slow advancement of women in higher education. Some female leaders do make it to the center of the labyrinth and enjoy higher salaries, exercise more authority and power, and receive greater respect from colleagues (Eagly & Carli, 2009). Despite reports that the gender gap size in context of leadership roles in higher education tends to stabilize except for female Hispanics, female leaders can simply hope that their position in the forthcoming millennia improves (ACE, 2010),

and that the participation rate of women reaches 47% of the workforce and becomes steady by 2050 as projected by Toossi (2006).

### **Background of the Study**

The “use of the word *man* in the great man theory was intentional until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Bolden, Gosling, Marturano, & Dennison, (2003, p. 6). Leadership as a concept was thought to align primarily with being male and military. The root of male dominance in higher education can be traced back to the perception of college presidents as “great men” (Twombly, 1995) who led the early junior colleges and became the founders of most of the modern day community colleges during the 1960s and 1970s. According to Murphy (2005), the “great man and trait theories secured with perspectives that originated from the Aristotelian philosophy which proffered that leaders were born and not made” (p. 129) dominated the theoretical leadership forum until the 1950s. The trait theory had been widely criticized not only because of its tenet that leaders were born and that leaders could not be developed or trained but also because of additional reports of inconsistencies in some research approaches that brought the validity of the trait theory into question (Murphy, 2005).

Great man and trait theories purported that leaders are powerful and authoritative (Dambe & Moorad, 2008) and capitalize on their vested power and authority to have followers comply. According to great man and trait theories (Dambe & Moorad, 2008) leaders are distinguished from the followers and great leaders need to maintain dominance, power, control, and strength in leadership. These expectations contrast with transformational leadership qualities of being caring, visionary, supportive,

compassionate, sensitive, and empowering (Dambe & Moorad, 2008; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Dambe and Moorad (2008) equated transformational leadership to empowerment-based leadership, which encompassed a number of characteristics such as being (a) visionary, (b) moral/ethical, (c) cultural, (d) servant, and (e) collaborative or group leadership. This grouping was based on some commonalities present in transformational leadership and women leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007), which included supporting and caring for the followers, prioritizing the needs of the followers, working collaboratively with subordinates, and sharing responsibilities and power with followers.

Female leaders have better “people skills” than have male leaders, not only by being visionary, supportive, and caring as servant leaders (Dambe & Moorad, 2008; Werhane, Posig, Gundry, Offstein, & Powell, 2007) but also by being trustworthy, compassionate, democratic, and collaborative (Dambe & Moorad, 2008; Northouse, 2007). According to Campbell, Devine, and Young (1990), a vision is not a one-time event, but an evolutionary process. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004) defined “vision as an act of seeing, anticipating, and imagining” (p. 355). The authors also noted *vision* has become a buzzword in educational circles, and it was popular in almost all organizations. Being a visionary leader in an organization has been associated with being a moral and ethical leader.

As important as vision is for a leader, Dambe and Moorad (2008) argued it could only lead to success when all the people share the concept and trust one another. Speaking about trust and vision as encompassed in cultural leadership, served as one

explanation for why President Barack Obama made Justice Sonia Sotomayor the *empathy* nominee. Obama posited then Judge Sotomayor would deliver what was right based on the judge's lived experiences grounded on compassion and understanding. A cultural leader uses shared beliefs, norms, and values to bond organizations together. A cultural leader focuses on two key elements, trust and vision, which are major aspects that an organization must expect in its leadership (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993).

Empathy is a powerful trait of an empowerment-based leader and/or a transformational leader. Sotomayor described women leaders as sensitive and understanding, mirroring her own experience as a leader. Obama (as quoted in "Empathy' Nominee," 2009) emphasized this point by saying:

Experience is being tested by obstacles and barriers, by hardship and misfortune; but ultimately overcomes those barriers. It is experience that can give a person a common touch of compassion; an understanding of how the world works and how ordinary people live. And that is why it is a necessary ingredient in the kind of Justice we need on the Supreme Court. (p. 1)

Notwithstanding the transformational leadership qualities associated with female leaders, women have not obtained workplace equity with men. Even though the pipeline for women into senior leadership appears strong, women's numbers are still low, and some firms have no female leaders at all (Catalyst, 2009).

In 2008, however, a *leaking pipeline* was reported and a question was raised as to the continuing loss of female talents. Although the hiring of male and female leaders in most developed countries was on a one-to-one basis as pointed out by research

commissioned by PwC UK (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2008), women terminated their services two or three times faster than men once they gained some experience and became a manager and/or a senior manager. According to PwC UK (2008) the problems being felt by the whole professional industry may be attributed to the lack of proactive consideration of females for major assignments, lack of gender consideration for succession planning, and a reticence among senior men to mentor women at the leadership level due to status quo.

Desvaux, Devillard-Hoellinger, and Meaney (2008) reported gender diversity requires the role of women not only in higher-level positions but also in other businesses. According to Sharma and Givens-Skeaton (2010), gender diversity is measured by using the number of women serving as a top officer within the organization and by computing the proportion of women among the top officers. Carter and Silva (2010) reported that with the companies' implementation of diversity and inclusion programs to help eliminate structural biases and foster women's full participation in leadership, workplace equality might be attained and the pipeline for women would suffice.

There remains a need to understand what makes women successful in leadership positions. Tyler, Vaskar, Apte, and Garofano (2009) reported emotional intelligence (which includes soft skills or interpersonal skills), together with relationship management and collaboration, self-confidence and attitude, business acumen, and organizational and political savvy are important in women's leadership success. Serrat (2009) pointed out emotional intelligence (EQ) is the leadership trait modern organizations seek in leaders to improve performance. Madden (2005) reported women who search for administrative

positions must obtain extra education and experience in courses such as finance, strategic planning, and research, because stereotypically, women leaders have been perceived as weak in these areas. Tyler et al. (2009) emphasized that women have the “capacity to be good at both managing and leading,” (p. 5), but despite the positive qualities women leaders demonstrate, gender stereotypes continue to linger.

In academia, women continue to hold fewer positions in higher ranks than men in science and engineering. In a 2010 study, Gorman, Dumowicz, Roskes, and Slattery reported that 42% held the rank of instructor or assistant professor, 34% were associate professors, and 19% occupied the rank of professor. Although women earned 60% of master’s degrees and 48.9% of doctorate degrees for 2005-2006 with the projection of 62.9% of master’s degrees and 55.5% of doctorate degrees between 2016 and 2017 (Catalyst, 2008), Broad (2009) found women’s high level of academic participation did not improve females’ ability to attain comparably high representation in leadership roles, status, and salary. Women faculty members earned less than men faculty members across all ranks and all institutional types. Women, on average, earned 81% of what men earned (Catalyst, 2008).

Northouse (2007) posited female leaders’ inability to move upward in organizations may be due to inadequate training and not being able to obtain sufficient mentoring, which may likely be related to prejudicial tendencies. Because the glass ceiling phenomenon was affected by lack of human capital and murky gender inequalities, the gender bias stemming from stereotyped expectation that women take

care and men take charge (Northouse, 2007) became one major explanation for the glass ceiling metaphor.

Madden (2005) proposed that female leaders should feel empowered and must demonstrate firm determination and self-discipline to withstand the negative atmosphere and remain in their administrative positions. The adoption of the Beijing Conference (1995) highlighted women's empowerment as a key strategy for development by Beijing *Declaration (Section 13)*, which stated "women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, were fundamental for the achievement of equality, development, and peace" (Charlier, 2006a, p. 9). Consequently, while male-domination conveyed men's power over women, women, for their part, wielded as well an often meandering and indiscernible power over men (Charlier, 2006a).

Although changes in how leadership is perceived have taken place, there has been little difference in how men and women describe what it means to be a leader (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). Despite the obstacles women have in terms of empowerment and advancement, Gonzalez (2010) wrote that women have the opportunity for an alternative leadership paradigm for which the traits are inherently female: transformative, inclusive, fostering unity, safeguarding, and not exploiting.

### **Problem Statement**

Women are underrepresented in leadership positions in higher education relative to the labor pool (AAUP, 2006; ACE, 2007; Catalyst, 2008; Gonzalez, 2010).

Marginalization of female senior leaders in higher education leadership positions is a

major problem. Despite women's desire to embrace the academic opportunity as evidenced by an increase of their obtaining PhDs, females' distribution within faculty, administrative ranks of colleges and universities, and in nearly all high-levels leadership ranks is disproportionate (Broad, 2009; Catalyst, 2008; King & Gomez, 2007; NCES, 2007; The White House Project Report, 2009). Tyler et al. (2009) found perceptions and stereotypes have created a barrier to female advancement. Women who have decided to navigate the male-dominated upper stratum often face pressure to cope with cultural expectation of being female (Gerdes, 2006; Madsen, 2008) while projecting a male leader image. Female senior leaders find themselves caught in an ambivalent situation (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

By describing and understanding the lived experiences and significant events that may have helped define and shape the lives of female senior leaders in higher education, along with those individuals who may have influenced their professional careers, this study contributes to the knowledge needed to address the knowledge gap regarding empowering women senior leaders in higher education.

### **Nature of the Study**

Phenomenology focuses on lived experiences and significant events of participants that require rich description, deep understanding, and interpretation of the meanings the participants ascribe to those experiences (van Manen, 1990). Ashworth (2006); Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom (2008); and Todres, Galvin, and Dahlberg (2007) considered the *lifeworld* of female senior leaders critical in understanding the meaning of how these experiences may have defined or shaped their career life; hence a

phenomenological approach was ideal for investigating professional career experiences. According to Sokolowski (2000), the core doctrine in phenomenology is teaching that every act of consciousness an individual performs and every experience an individual has, is intentional: it is essentially “consciousness of, or an experience of something or other” (p. 8). Creswell, Hanson, Plano, and Morales (2007) and Giorgi (2008a) similarly related the term *phenomenon* with the word *describe*. The principal goal of qualitative research is to understand (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Thus, this study of female senior leaders facilitated the understanding of the social and psychological phenomena (van Manen, 1997) from the perspectives of the participants involved, along with the interpretation of those events based on how participants perceived them (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006).

The purposeful sampling logic (Patton, 2005) used for this research was employed to identify information-rich cases that were studied in depth. The sample of eight women included female senior leaders currently serving as vice presidents and other executive positions in 4-year colleges and/or universities in a selected state within the United States. Requirements for these targeted participants included (a) having held senior level positions such as vice presidents, chancellors, chief academic officers, provosts, associate provosts, directors, and deans or their equivalents for at least 3 years; and (b) having sound educational credentials with an earned doctorate.

These women were identified using the *Higher Education Directory 2011* to find names of women vice presidents and other cabinet-level senior executives in a selected state within United States. The participants met the established criteria and experienced

the phenomenon that was the focus of this study; thus, the selection process constituted criterion sampling (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2008; Given, 2008). Participants were contacted either by phone or by email to confirm desire to engage in the research endeavor. Participants who agreed to join the study received the letter of invitation (see Appendix B) and the consent form (Appendix C), along with the four open-ended questions in an email.

Based on the richness of the participants' responses to the questions, a sample size of eight was sufficient to reach data saturation through the use of in-depth, open-ended interviewing. Engaging eight participants to respond to 12 in-depth interview questions that involved selected issues in great profundity and "with careful attention to detail, context and nuance, to understand any single individual's experience" (Patton, 2002, p. 227), justified the amount of time and effort invested along with the major consideration placed in this phenomenological qualitative study (Patton, 2002).

### **Research Questions**

The underlying assumption for this study was empowering women senior leaders in higher education may not only benefit female leaders and their institutions but also the community at large. Most importantly, female leaders' vision could provide the momentum to initiate changes. Thus, for this study, the major research question was: What are the lived experiences and perceptions of women senior leaders regarding their mobility opportunity, social supports, and acceptance in senior higher educational leadership positions? Under this overriding question were three key subquestions:

RQ1: What are the perceived barriers, if any, that female senior leaders faced while trying to advance their careers as well as maintain their leadership roles in higher education?

RQ2: What mentoring and other support strategies, if any, do female leaders in higher education provide other women seeking leadership positions?

RQ3: What actions, if any, do female leaders take to establish gender equity in higher education?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe and understand the significant events and lived experiences of female senior leaders in higher education and how these experiences may have defined and shaped their careers. In addition, this study was intended to illuminate the influences that some individuals may have on the professional career of these women. This study was designed to provide interpretation of those significant events and experiences by determining the meaning the participants provided through their own perceptions.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Three conceptual lenses were used to examine women senior leaders in higher education. They were empowerment-based/transformational leadership theory, Vroom's expectancy theory, and feminist theory. Burns (1978) first conceptualized transformational leadership (TL) and subsequently, "it became the landmark for the shift from the old to the new paradigm, that was, from power-based leadership to empowerment-based leadership" (Dambe & Moorad, 2008, p. 581).

### **Empowerment-Based/Transformational Leadership Theory**

Transformational leadership (Dambe & Moorad, 2008; Eagly, 2007; Gill, 2007) is a broad spectrum that encompasses the initiatives of empowerment as visionary, moral/ethical, cultural, collaborative or group, and servant leadership. There are key features associated with TL: developing the followers into leaders and raising moral standards of leaders, collaborative goal setting, shared power and responsibility, teamwork, and regular reflection (Dambe & Moorad, 2008).

Eagly (2007) theorized that collaborative and participative aspects of leadership are inherent in a culturally approved style of transformational leadership. According to Dambe & Moorad (2008), collaboration “creates a context and decision where one chooses to work with another toward a shared goal” (p. 584). Female leaders often face legitimacy problems because of the employees’ resistance and judgment of their leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women used a more democratic, more participative, and more motivational type of leadership to earn respect and authority and to avoid resistance from subordinates relative to male leaders (Dambe & Moorad, 2008; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Morril (2007) emphasized leaders should have “the potential to motivate the academic community to respond effectively to change” (p. 13) and Eagly, Johanessen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2003) agreed female leaders possess these motivational leadership qualities. With this discussion as a popular construct, transformational leadership served as an anchor for discussing empowerment theories with female leaders.

### **Vroom's Expectancy Theory**

Vroom's (1964) outcome-driven expectancy theory seems consistent with leadership and use of influence that is inherent in transformational leadership. Vroom (1964) suggested that people consciously choose particular courses of action based upon perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs, as a consequence of their desires to enhance pleasure and avoid pain. Based on the notion of expectancy theory, anyone could become a leader (Isaac, Zerbe, & Pitt, 2001), because the key to effective leadership is to have a highly motivating atmosphere. *Expectancy* refers to the strength of a person's belief about whether or not a particular job performance is attainable (Isaac et al., 2001). Vroom (1964) posited if certain actions are properly and satisfactorily done, then, a valued outcome is to be awarded; therefore, managers must ensure they keep their promises.

Leadership is a difficult task because it entails an initiative to personally motivate each follower based on the principles of the model of expectancy theory. The inability to expend this effort as Isaac et al. (2001) explained, means depriving those followers the advancement and other benefits arising from using one's vision. Expectancy theory resonates with empowerment-based/transformational leadership theory in terms of supporting and caring for followers and empowering them.

### **Feminist Theory**

Women senior leaders in higher education who participated in this study were fully engaged in narrating their lived experiences and communicating significant phenomena, thus this study was grounded in feminist theories. Creswell (2003) argued feminist theories are appropriate for "marginalized cases" (p. 10), in which participants may articulate their

marginalized situations either verbally or non-verbally (the use of body language and gestures), and through their tone and inflection. Articulating both issues in theory and practice of feminism may have been ignored (Billing & Alvesson, 1993; Ferree & Martin, 1995), but the intrinsic goal of visionary feminism according to hooks (2000) is to develop strategies to change women by enhancing their personal power and having their vision seen. hooks (2000) stated feminism is the *fight* to end sexist oppression—to benefit exclusively any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women, and it does not privilege women over men (hooks, 2000), but it has the power to transform meaningfully all lives.

Because feminist theoretical perspectives are critical of status quo, Calas and Smircich (2001) considered feminist theoretical perspectives as a critical and political discourse. Feminist politics aims to stop supremacy, to liberate women to live lives where peace is loved, and to provide women the opportunity to live in peace, because feminism is for everybody (hooks, 2000). As hooks (2000) alleged, women and men have made great strides in the direction of gender equality, and those strides toward freedom must give women strength, ability, and empowerment to go further. The push for empowerment in feminist theory made it another appropriate lens for this study.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following key terms are considered distinct in this field of inquiry and may not be thoroughly understood by the general reader; hence, the inclusion of the following operational definitions to facilitate a clearer understanding.

*Barrier:* For the purpose of this study, barrier refers to an exigent situation or condition that impedes an individual's progress, success, or achievement of an objective (Toldson, 2008).

*Empowerment:* Empowerment means a boundless commodity; it is the power to make it to the inner circle by possessing intellectual abilities and economic means to partake in making decisions, exercise power and authority, and find solutions to problems (Oxaal & Baden, 1997). Empowerment is what followers need to enable them to learn, grow, and lead as well (Dambe & Moorad, 2008).

*Glass ceiling:* This term refers to an invisible barrier that obstructs women senior leaders from achieving top positions or presidential positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

*Higher education:* As used in this study, this to a public or private 4-year college or university in the United States that provides instruction, research, and other social services and encompasses undergraduate and graduate or postgraduate levels. It is also that level of education for which current context is shaped by changing student demographics (Hurtado & Dey, 1997).

*Higher Education Directory (HED):* This serves as an indispensable resource dedicated to facilitating communication within the higher education community. The HED is the only single-source for academic and administrative personnel at accredited, degree-granting colleges and universities. Institutions listed in the Higher Education Directory are accredited by agencies recognized by the Secretary of Education and/or the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (<http://www.hepicn.com>).

*Higher Education Resource Services (HERS):* HERS is one of the Higher Education Resource Organizations) that provides training institutes for women in higher education. Women faculty members or administrators, with a proven record of professional growth and responsibility, and who have a keen interest in campus administration and achieving institutional priorities and maximizing institutional - resources are encouraged to review the institutes and apply for the one that best suits individual circumstances (Empire State College, 2010; Higher Education Resources Services, 2011).

*Labyrinth:* This term refers to numerous and circuitous barriers (some rather subtle and others quite obvious) women senior leaders encounter or face in finding the route to high-level positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

*Leadership:* It is the act of guiding and supporting others in an organization such as higher education to achieve the organization's objectives and goals. Leadership can also be used interchangeably with management (Hoyle, 2007).

*Leadership styles:* This term refers to the fashion in which leaders create change from forcing others to comply with "modeling the way for others through the use of empowerment, collaboration, persuasion, professional development and encouragement" (Hoyle, 2007, p. 155).

*Leaking pipeline:* This term refers to the failure of the organization (for example higher education) to maintain a level of parity in hiring and recruiting female leaders to fully utilize their talents and potentials despite their availability in the labor pool (Carter & Silva, 2010).

*Senior leaders:* As used in this study, top-level executives include “president, chancellor, vice presidents, provosts, deans, or their equivalents” (Twombly & Rosser, 2002, p. 459).

*Success and/or advancement:* Success and/or advancement means the ability to break the glass ceiling and achieve cabinet-level positions and to remain successful in those positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

### **Assumptions**

Marshall and Rossman (1995) described phenomenology as “the study of experiences and the way we put them together to develop a worldview” (p. 82). This assumption of a “commonality within human experience” (Patton, 1990, p. 70) is the position taken within a phenomenological research project. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), assumptions are so essential that without them, research problems may be nonexistent. In this study, the following assumptions were made.

The first assumption was that something may be learned from the combined past and present lived experiences of female senior leaders that each leader may bring to the interview. Based on the conceptual framework highlighted in this research, various constructive leadership changes may likely emerge regarding women in senior positions in higher education. The second assumption was that the participants’ views were honest, credible, and sincere about other concerns such as past experience as senior level officers based on their understanding of the reality at the time. It was assumed that during the interviews the researcher would bracket all preconceived perceptions and would set aside personal views to prevent concoction that may contribute to any leading questions

resulting from the interviewee's remarks to jeopardize the study's validity and/or influence the expressions of the participants. There was cognizance that humans may not be capable of absolute objectivity because they were situated in a reality constructed by subjective experiences (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

### **Delimitations**

This study was confined to interviewing female senior leaders who have occupied senior level positions in higher education within the past 3 years and have earned a doctorate degree. *Senior level positions* as discussed in this study include top level executives such as president, chancellor, provost, associate provost, vice president, chief academic officer, associate vice president, and deans or equivalent posts.

### **Limitations**

The study was confined only to female senior leaders in 4-year colleges and/or universities (private or public) who satisfied the inclusion criteria set forth in choosing the sample. Hence, the results of this study could not be generalized or applied to female senior leaders in private colleges and universities and other not-for-profit institutions outside the chosen state. In addition, the findings of this study would not be generalizable among corporate women senior leaders. Use of snowballing to gain participants might have limited the ability to obtain the maximum variation in eligible participants (ethnicity, ranks, ages, institutional type, region) for this study. These limitations reduced the overall generalizability of the outcomes.

### **Significance of the Study**

The outcome of this study may enable higher education officials in particular to understand important issues and challenges that surround female senior leaders' lived experiences as professional career people as they endeavor for advancement in the academe. By recognizing and incorporating women's talents, ideas, and potentials in examining the central organizational and structural transformations in higher education, the leadership system may bring major domestic and global changes.

The emerging insights from participants in this study may reveal themes of primary importance specifically to higher education organizations. As female leaders have continued to form a robust pipeline (Broad, 2009), their representation in senior leadership positions has remained limited leaving the impression that problems ensued in their route to presidency (Broad, 2009). Female leaders not only need to understand their career paths to presidency and the various professional barriers that come along the way but they also should comprehend how other women have succeeded and maintained their positions. This study served to expand the knowledge base in educational research by providing empirical data from higher education female senior leaders who defined these obstacles and tried to assist other female presidential aspirants in overcoming impediments to obtaining senior leadership positions in higher education (Dale, 2007; Klark, 2005; Tiao, 2006).

Several researchers and scholars indicated female leaders face gender inequity in advancing to senior executive positions (Klark, 2005). For the past 2 decades, women's rise to presidency had dramatically decreased, causing gender disparities. As there were

very few studies examining the lethargic flow of female leaders' senior executive promotion in higher education (Eagly & Carli, 2007), this study could serve as a valuable piece of literature related to women's empowerment and advancement in this sector. This research may provide a broader understanding of this experience and contribute to empowering women and solving gender equality issues in higher education.

Empowering women senior leaders may be viewed not only as a welcome change but also as one of the innovative strategies to impact female senior leaders in the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Hur, 2006). These evolving perspectives may be very useful for other scholar-practitioners and researchers who have interest in pursuing other areas related to empowering women in higher education. The outcomes of this study may increase female senior leaders' awareness and knowledge of the varying issues and challenges women encounter in their path to empowerment and the effect of empowerment on their career advancement. The underpinning theme of power as it pertains to leadership could strike a familiar cord among female senior leaders, as power and control may still confine women's future and satisfaction. There were no available studies focused on empowering female leaders in order to create and/or facilitate changes in higher education, so this research addressed this gap in the literature. By empowering capable women in higher education to assume leadership roles and supporting their level of moral, ethical, and cultural aspirations, it was likely that new leadership transformations would occur. Additionally, by hearing and appreciating women's perspectives, utilizing their available talents, and allowing them to redefine terms associated with authority, power, and

politics, not only might this study support initiating leadership transformations but also it might contribute to developing positive social changes.

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 introduced the problem of women senior leaders in higher education being marginalized in achieving senior level status while their male counterparts dominated (AAUP, 2006; ACE. 2007; Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gonzalez, 2010). Women who have pursued the male-dominated upper echelon leadership positions have found themselves trapped in a tenuous situation (Eagly & Carli, 2009). Female leaders have been pressured to fit in and adapt to the male leader image and management culture that was completely and distinctly different and inconsistent with women's ways of leading and learning (Madden, 2005). Despite female leaders' accomplishments in higher education, which includes their prominence in directorship level, doctoral and master's programs, and increased membership and leadership in higher education professional organizations, women remain grossly underrepresented in senior leadership positions (Gonzalez, 2010; Griffiths 2009). Qualified female leaders who have advanced to executive positions found the labyrinth-like process exhausting, difficult, and slow (Eagly & Carli, 2007, 2009).

As more women have aspired to occupy senior leadership positions, it has become critically important to understand what women senior leaders' empowerment means and what effect empowerment might bring to higher education leadership from the female perspective. Although scholars reported that women senior leaders encounter exigent issues in advancing and succeeding in the work management culture in higher education,

nothing has been written about empowering women senior leaders in higher education to initiate changes in leadership and resolve the problem. This study was intended to respond to this gap.

This qualitative phenomenological study supported the goal of describing and understanding the various significant events and lived experiences of women senior leaders in higher education, along with the different individuals who may have influenced their careers. Data collection included in-depth interviews and participant observation (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). I was the primary instrument in data gathering, asking participants to describe the meaning of their experiences and phenomena based on their own perceptions. In this study, I followed an interview protocol and provided copies of an interview sample guide (see Appendix C) to participants to give them a birds-eye view of what was to take place. I used member checking to follow up on formal interviews with eight female senior leaders from a 4-degree college or university in a preferred state within United States to clarify the consistency and accuracy of the data collected. Debriefing and data triangulation helped to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this study.

Three conceptual lenses were used to uncover emergent themes: (a) Dambe and Moorad's empowerment-based/transformational leadership theory, (b) Vroom's expectancy theory, and (c) hook's feminist theory. The framework of this study constitutes both constructivist and feminist perspectives. The data analysis was employed to identify findings and emerging issues through the information-rich, thick, and in-depth data the participants provided during the interview process.

This phenomenological study attempts to portray the participants' positions on empowering women by allowing their participation and exercise of power to be visible and valued within a social and cultural context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The next chapter presents more detailed discussion of research literature relating to the problem statement and research questions, thus validating this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Although there has been an increase in the number of women working and achieving promotion in higher education since 2000, female senior leaders are still disproportionately underrepresented and underutilized in senior management positions and in all professorial ranks as evidenced by the demographics of female leaders (AAUP, 2006, ACE, 2007; Catalyst, 2008; Gonzalez, 2010; Keim & Murray, 2008; McClellan, 2007). Despite awareness of the marginalization of female senior leaders in higher education, related literature lacks research that accurately relates the lived experiences of female leaders who have obtained empowerment in higher education. This chapter summarizes research findings and discussions that may likely illuminate the marginalization and underutilization of female senior leaders in higher education and justify the need for women's empowerment in higher education. The four key areas explored in this literature review are (a) career paths to presidencies in higher education; (b) professional barriers; (c) women's empowerment, authority, and politics; and (d) women's effort to establish gender equity in higher education.

### **Title Searches, Articles, Research Documents, and Journals**

Sources for this literature review included scholarly books, peer-reviewed articles, and scholarly journals relevant to the topic. These sources were identified using Walden University Library Internet search engines EBSCOhost databases such as Education Research Complete, Education: A Sage Full-text Database, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Digital Dissertations and Theses, ERIC, Walden dissertation samples, and

multidisciplinary databases such as Academic Search Complete to identify pertinent literature. Bibliographic citations and reference listings from appropriate titles were used to identify additional titles that were subsequently located using Internet search engines. Other online searches included *Academic Leadership*, the online journal *Catalyst*, American Council of Education, American Association of University Professors, *The Wall Street Journal*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and libraries in the City Universities of New York.

Title searches encompassed career pathways of women presidents, women presidents profiles, women leadership characteristics, women leadership styles, professional barriers, glass ceiling, women and the labyrinth, women making strides in higher education, women in academia, why women make good presidents, women presidents needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education leadership, academic leadership, gender differences and transformational leadership behavior, mentoring and evaluation, professional women and their continuing struggle for acceptance and equality, creating gender equity in academia, leadership, diversity and succession planning in academia, AAUP faculty gender equity indicators 2006, Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, Dambe and Moorad's (2008) empowerment-based/transformational leadership theory, women leading the way: guide to stepping up to leadership and changing the world, community college review on demographics and educational backgrounds, presidential leadership, women leadership in every role, academia seen as gateway to college presidency, 21<sup>st</sup> century women's leadership, minorities and women in higher education and the role of mentoring in their advancement, underrepresentation of female faculty, stereotyping of

U.S. business leaders exposed, and what keeps women from reaching the top, comprised some of the examined refereed journal articles that constituted this literature review. The search led to more than 60 peer-reviewed articles that relate to the four key themes of this literature review.

Little research has been conducted on the role of empowerment among women in higher education or women's efforts in establishing equity in higher education. Only two studies were found relating to this topic (Assie-Lumumba, 2006; Lopez-Claros & Zahidi, 2006). Other studies relate to the theory of empowerment, wage employment as predictors of women empowerment in Nigeria, and empowerment in terms of other theoretical perspectives.

Most of the scholarly journals have featured discussions of underrepresentation of women leaders in major organizations and academia, gender inequity in the workplace, career paths, and mentoring. Contemporary works in empowerment-based leadership theory, feminist theory, and Vroom's expectancy theory of motivation that constituted this study's conceptual lens were also examined. Some phenomenological dissertations available at Online Journal and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses relate to medical practices such as nursing and others in psychology and Christian education. Six dissertations were found on the subject of women in leadership related mostly to leadership traits and barriers; one dissertation was about women and politics, and another included discussion of leadership from troops to teaching. None of the articles focused specifically on women's empowerment in higher education, the problem related to this study. Below is a discussion of two phenomenological unpublished dissertation studies

(Dale, 2007; Tiao, 2006) highlighting marginalization of women in higher education, along with the other two studies (Abiodun, 2008; Vodanovich, Urquhart, & Shakir, 2010), that attempted to solve similar problems as my study using different methodologies.

### **Other Phenomenological Studies that Solve Similar Problems**

Tiao's (2006) phenomenological study featured the disproportionate underrepresentation of women as senior decision-makers. Findings indicated "one obvious pattern of success for women leaders—that all gained visibility, reputation, and the opportunity to lead" (p. 146)—with great competence, courage, tenacity, and persistence. Dale's (2007) research on women's marginalization in higher education was focused on understanding women's lived experiences, and events and individuals influencing their success as members of their institutions' senior leadership teams. The study's findings provided insight into how women student affairs professionals secured their fair share of the student affairs senior leadership positions in higher education.

The experiences of Arabic women that relate to information communications technologies (ICT) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) present a problem about women's segregation in the use of technologies (Vodanovich et al., 2010). The authors used a grounded theory approach because the study's objective was "to develop a preliminary theoretical framework, based around the experiences of Arab women within a particular context, rather than to understand it within an existing theory or framework" (p. 8). The results revealed that censorship was not only appropriate, but also important to preserve

the society's traditions and values. "There was a strong push for modernization to occur at UAE without westernization" (p. 17).

Abiodun's (2008) action research on distance learning and women's marginalization posed a similar issue and chronicled women's profiles demonstrating "clearly that women's immense potentialities in education and other facets of life could be translated into realities by eliminating all the known barriers to participation in decision-making and involvement in the development process—thus, the adoption of a gender-oriented perspective to development" (Abiodun, 2008, p. 9). This action research called for immediate change as the only viable route to achieving equal treatment of women in the participation and provision of education (Abiodun, 2008).

Bryman (2007) argued that a "leadership that undermines collegiality, autonomy, and the opportunity to participate in decisions—that creates a sense of unfairness, that is not proactive on the department's behalf, is likely to be ineffective because it damages the commitment of academics" (p. 707). What Bryman (2007) espoused closely aligns with the definition of the term *empowerment*. Although the empirical research of empowerment may still be in its infancy, this pioneering research study contributes to the knowledge base regarding women's empowerment and advancement in higher education.

### **Career Paths to Presidencies in Higher Education**

This study was intended to provide a deeper understanding of the career paths female senior leaders undertake in order to advance in their careers and become empowered to create a change in higher education. Consequently, I examined this topic to draw attention to the challenging pathways women follow prior to becoming a college

or university president. Higher education offers extensive opportunities for individuals searching for careers, career transition, and career advancement (Betts, Urias, Chavez, & Betts, 2009), so a clear understanding of pathways observed in higher education could provide great interest and motivation to aspiring presidential candidates. Gonzalez (2010) noted visible career paths are essential for recruiting and retaining mid-and-senior-level administrators who are seeking advancement leading to senior administrative positions (president, provost, vice president, vice chancellor, associate/assistant provost, associate/assistant vice president, and/or associate/assistant chancellor). Hearn (2006) argued teaching involves leadership, and leadership entails teaching, so there should be a way to prepare faculty members to develop their leadership skills and become academic administrators.

Although the percentage of female presidents in ACE's (2007) report was unclear, the rate of women as presidents appears to have more than doubled, while minority presidents increased 68%, mostly at schools targeted to minority students (Cook, 2007). Despite the strong pipeline provided by the female leaders, women in the academe continue to be marginalized, holding only 23% of president positions at all colleges, 26.6% of all college president positions at public institutions, and 18.7% of all college president positions at private institutions. Women full-time faculty holding tenured positions are also underrepresented at the doctoral, masters, and bachelor's institutions with 25.8%, 35% and 26.1% respectively (ACE, 2007; Catalyst, 2008; West & Curtis, 2006; June, 2008a).

Table 1 shows women in academia as reported by Catalyst (2008).

Table 1

*Women in Academia*

	% Presidents Private Institutions	% Presidents Public Institutions	% Presidents All Institutions
Women	18.7	25.6	23
Men	81.3	73.4	77

*Note.* Table based on data from American Council of Education (2006) survey.

Data in Table 1, as reported by Catalyst (2008), indicated ample planning must be done in preparing, training, mentoring, and recruiting women future presidents in colleges and universities in higher education. Succession planning must be in place not only for CAOs or other presidential aspirants from nonacademic backgrounds but also for women and individuals from other ethnic groups who possess the same leadership qualities and adopt similar leadership styles (Betts et al., 2009; Gonzalez, 2010). Making this opportunity available and open to a diverse group of talented women and minorities may both strengthen and enrich the sterile grounds of higher education through diversity.

Table 2

*Pathways to Presidency: 2006*

Second Prior Position	Prior Position	Current Position
Chair/Faculty (18%) CAO (17%) NonAcademic Officer (8%) Outside Higher Education (7%)	CAO or Provost (40%)	President
Other Academic Officer (38%) Chair/Faculty (37%) Outside Higher Ed (13%) CAO (6%) NonAcademic Officer (5%)	Other Academic Officer 16%	President
NonAcademic Officer (52%) Outside Higher Ed (18%) Other Academic Officer (13%) Chair/Faculty (11%) CAO (6%)	Non-academic officer 23%	President
Outside Higher Education (41%) Chair/Faculty (39%) Other Academic Officer (12%) CAO (7%) Nonacademic Officer (1%)	Chair faculty 5%	President
Outside Higher Education (69%) NonAcademic Officer (11%) Chair/Faculty (10%) Other Academic Officer (6%) CAO (4%)	Outside Higher Ed (17%)	President

*Note.* Table based on data from American Council of Education (2006) survey.

Table 2 maps the pathway to the presidency for leaders serving as a president for the first time. The most common preceding role was Chief Academic Officer (CAO) or provost: 40% of these presidents ascended from this position, and 85% of this group had served as faculty or academic administrators prior to becoming CAO. Though 16% of

first-time presidents occupied other senior executive positions in academic affairs such as associate provost or dean, more than 80% of these leaders came to their positions from academic administrative or faculty roles (American College President, 2007).

Of those first-time presidents, 23% served as senior executives in non-academic areas such as finance, development, or student affairs; 5% held faculty or department chairs positions; and 17% worked outside higher education. Because 70% of those who became presidents come from chief academic officer or faculty roles, ACE's 2007 report specifically identified those individuals as being on the presidency pathway (ACE, 2007). Regarding the preparation for presidential responsibilities, first-time presidents felt inadequately prepared in the following areas as indicated by their responses: (a) fundraising (19%), (b) risk management and legal issues (18.3%), (c) capital improvement projects (17.9%), (d) budget and financial management (17.6%), and (e) entrepreneurial ventures (16.3%). These findings suggest CAOs lack the fundraising and managerial skills necessary for presidential success (Hartley & Godin, 2009). In fact, ACE's survey showed only 25% of CAOs at CIC was interested in pursuing a college presidency (Hartley & Godin, 2009).

Despite the diversity of first-time presidents of CIC member colleges and universities during the past 20 years, gains in diversity have decreased in other subsectors. Specifically, the modest gains of female presidents were surpassed by a margin of two to one by presidents of public baccalaureate and master's level institutions. This trend was true with presidents of color as well (Hartley & Godin, 2009).

The average age of first-time presidents was increasing. First-time CIC presidents in 2006 were on average 7 years older than first-time presidents in 1986, who averaged 59 years (Hartley & Godin, 2009). Regardless of how much preparation first-time presidents require, these individuals followed various routes as they climbed to the presidential ladder, starting with the most traditional linear path as discussed below.

### **Traditional Linear Path**

To understand the career pathways to presidencies in higher education, female senior leaders should acquire an in-depth knowledge of the traditional linear path. The traditional linear path, according to Gonzalez (2010), entails becoming a department chair, then dean, then provost, and finally president. The challenge for women trying to pursue this path is the difficulty they face in becoming department chairs, “a selection controlled by the academic guild, which continues to be largely white and male” (Gonzalez, 2010, p. 3). Consequently there is a relatively low percentage of woman and minority deans.

Gonzalez (2010) argued moving to the presidency seems easier from the position of dean than those of provost, chancellor, or vice president. According to Gonzalez deans were more adapted and prepared for higher level service due to their familiarity with the institution’s everyday affairs and their previous knowledge and understanding of local issues compared to their counterparts who may lack adequate experience running an institution. Gonzalez (2010) pointed out academic deans appear natural candidates for provosts and presidents who may need proper mentoring to prepare and equip themselves with the necessary presidential tools.

The surveys (Gonzales, 2010) revealed the common path to college presidency, particularly in community colleges, remains through the academic pipeline, even though several colleges openly look for presidents among private-sector businesses to improve their day-to-day campus operations. Decision-makers must assure women and minorities gain access to traditional academic leadership roles. Recognizing that faculty members represent just less than one third (31%) of all full-time higher education positions is prudent for colleges and universities to “become more open to individuals with career paths other than the traditional academic route” (ACE, 2008, p. 1). Those who demonstrated leadership capability in less traditional positions should be deemed possibilities for higher-level administrative posts (Gonzalez, 2010).

Eddy (2008) recognized 22% of the current community college presidents came from within their institutions, 56% of the participants had mentors, and the career trajectory of presidents followed a traditional academic pathway of promotion through the hierarchy. According to Eddy (2008), the route to presidency is often marked by a series of promotions up the ladder. For instance, among community college presidents, 26% of them came to their current position from a previous presidency and 34% from the chief academic officer position (Eddy, 2008). Women represented 21% of deans of instruction (or similarly titled positions such as vice president for academic affairs or chief academic officer) at community colleges, although there was still no level of parity with the number of male presidents. Recent research has suggested most top-level college CEOs are educators at heart in an era during which much is made of the community

college leader's ability to apply businesslike and entrepreneurial thinking to the challenges of academia ("Academia as seen as gateway," 2008).

According to the *American College President: 2007 Edition*, only 13% of presidents came directly from a position outside the academe, 21% came to their current presidency immediately after leading another institution, and 4% moved directly to the presidency from a faculty or department chair position. The remaining 61% of presidents came from other senior administrative positions within higher education. Although these findings might strike some similarities with Eddy's (2008) study, there are differences in terms of the positions female presidents held previously. Although opinions vary on the role of early decision and planning for direct path among presidential aspirants, higher educational leaders consider these preparations important.

**Early decision and planning for direct career path.** An aim of this research was to achieve a more profound knowledge of the career routes female senior leaders pursued in order to move up in their careers and become empowered to create change in higher education. It was necessary to know whether early decision and planning for direct career path play an important role in achieving the presidency in higher education. Some researchers suggested women should decide early and plan more direct career paths toward their intended leadership goals. Eddy (2008) wrote, "Taking the time to consciously think and plan out career moves may result in quicker advancement through the career ranks, and higher levels of self-actualization may prove a robust lever for the participants to contemplate the option of moving up the career ladder" (p. 63). Davis (2008) noted higher education needs to "create a system that activates and develops

leadership skills much earlier in people's careers than we do today" (p. A64). According to Davis (2008):

There is simply no structural focus on leadership. So, what do colleges do? First, they seduce someone into becoming a department chair, then a dean, then a provost, or a vice president of academic affairs, and eventually a president. Is there any required management or leadership training in the process? Not consistently. Is there any rigorous and continuing assessment of management ability? Not consistently. (p. A64)

Madsen (2010) and Eddy (2008) showed women could become leaders even if they lack preparation and take an indirect path. Although examples of successful college and university presidents who followed an indirect path are limited, Fain (2008), Leubsdorf (2006) and Selingo (2009) all recognized the administrative ladder is shifting and therefore expanding the leadership pipeline is necessary.

Furthermore, in order to proactively prepare for the projected turnover of senior administrators in higher education through 2014, recruitment, professional development, and succession planning must be in place (Fain, 2008; Leubsdorf, 2006; Selingo, 2009). Gonzalez (2010) supported this idea, indicating the need for professional development that defines discernible career paths within and across institutional divisions to create a larger and stronger pool of candidates for senior administrative positions. Carter and Silva (2010) found that women face serious consequences for stepping off the traditional career track and taking a nontraditional path, relative to men who found "no difference in

advancement, salary growth, or career satisfaction” (p. 7) regardless of the career path they took.

### **Nontraditional Linear Path**

In this study I provided experiential data from women senior leaders in higher education who endured professional barriers in their effort to advance in their careers. Highlighting nontraditional paths to presidency might enable female leaders to choose their career paths appropriately to avoid serious consequences. Carter and Silva (2010) emphasized that women who aspire to become top leaders must carefully select their pathways so as not to pay a price. Catalyst (2010) found “women who took nontraditional paths prior to returning to work full-time in a company or firm paid a penalty by advancing slower than those women who stayed on traditional paths post-MBA and *less* than men on either path” (Catalyst, 2010, p. 7). Although this finding is representative of business organizations, it may hold true as well with higher education.

Madsen (2010) discovered all women participants in her study are content and happy with the indirect path they take. Madsen’s (2010) major finding was the value of informal or nonlinear career paths for women. The women presidents in this research neither planned early nor aimed intentionally for leadership roles. They maintained a spirit of industriousness and good work ethic in the performance of their jobs—one of the nontraditional ways of achieving executive senior positions such as the presidential role.

Scholarly literature also addressed career path differences. For instance, a *Community College Journal* report (“Academia as seen as a gateway,” 2008) indicated 55% of community college presidents surveyed were in an academic position prior to

assuming their first presidency. A much smaller number of presidents ascended to the role from nonacademic posts. In 2006, however, 8% of community college presidents said they made the jump from student services, and 6% stated that they worked formerly as chief business officers ("Academia as seen as a gateway," 2008).

Hojgard (as cited in Madsen, 2010) found "women achieved their leadership positions via professional and middle management jobs" (p. 25). Henning and Jardim (as cited in Madsen, 2010) argued women perceive "a career as personal growth, as self-fulfillment, as satisfaction, as making a contribution to others, as doing what one wants to do; contrary to men, who (although indubitably want these things as well), visualize a career as a series of jobs, a progression of jobs, as a path leading upward with recognition and reward implied" (Madsen, 2010, p. 2). Women consider self-education critical to the development of one's career, life experiences, and particularly in the enhancement of development exercises (Madsen, 2010).

Although traditionally the administrative ladder leading to the presidency is affiliated with academia, data published in the *American College President Report* (2008), revealed a decrease in the percentage of presidents who previously have been faculty members. In 1986, only 25% of college and university presidents indicated they have not been faculty members previously. In 2006, 31% of the presidents responded that they became presidents without faculty experience. The data also reflected educational diversity relating to the highest degree earned by college and university presidents. Though 75% of the college and university presidents had earned their doctoral degrees (PhD or EdD), the remaining presidents had varying educational backgrounds (such as

master's, JD, and MD). It seemed critical to define visible career paths and provide professional development to increase the pool of candidates for the leadership pipeline leading to positions in senior administration across the various divisions as well as to the role of presidency (*American College President Report, 2007*). Recruitment is central to increasing the pool of candidates and examining different educational backgrounds and career paths.

**Different educational backgrounds and career paths.** In order to understand the career paths female senior leaders in higher education face in their pursuit for career advancement, discussing the different educational backgrounds and career paths may be enlightening. Seeking to understand presidents' backgrounds, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2005) published an issue that reported university president perspectives as follows:

Forty six percent of the women held provosts' positions or chief academic officers compared to 28.5 % of the men. Before assuming their current posts as presidents included other presidencies, provost/CAO, nonacademic university VP, other academic posts, dean and other. Nearly 84% had doctorates (PhD, EdD, etc.), 7.2% attained professional degrees (JD, MD, PsyD, etc.), and 5.2% held a variety of master's degrees. Nearly 57% had never had a tenured faculty appointment. (*The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2005*)

The findings revealed these women university presidents had a history of desire and a drive for continuous learning and development, as demonstrated by their histories of

advanced degrees (master's and doctoral) and their interest, openness, and drive to take on new responsibilities, positions, and opportunities in a variety of areas.

Elman's (2009) speech on "A New Emphasis on Leadership Development" highlighted at CIC (2009) featured the success of some college and university presidents who did not follow the traditional linear path but hailed from nontraditional backgrounds. Elman noted some of today's most effective college presidents entered their positions following successful careers in development, finance, and student affairs. Indeed, some successful college presidents moved from high-level positions in the worlds of business, government service, or the military directly into college presidencies.

Santovec (2008) explored the career paths of six female community college presidents who rose to the presidency from a diverse array of positions. Despite the differences in their career paths, their personalities and dispositions appeared similar. Three of the participants were particularly motivated and welcomed challenges. Accordingly, these women reached for positions consistent with their desire to widen their orbit of influence and satisfy their enthusiasm to create change. Other female presidents not only had various educational backgrounds and indirect career paths but also lacked intentionality (Eddy, 2008) with regard to becoming college and university presidents.

**Lack of intentionality.** This study was intended to provide observed data from women senior leaders in higher education who encountered some barriers while advancing in their careers. Intentionality may have inspired some presidential aspirants in their quest for this top position. Lacking intentionality here means that women presidents

did not intentionally envision themselves becoming college or university presidents or aim high with the ambition becoming college or university presidents someday (Eddy, 2008). Madsen (2010), who studied 10 university presidents, found in addition to being driven to acquire more learning and develop professionally as revealed by an array of educational experiences from undergraduate to post graduate degrees, these women possessed enthusiasm, sincerity, and energy that facilitated undertaking novel responsibilities, positions, and opportunities in diverse areas. The presidents loved the challenges, and they embraced the changes brought by the opportunities for continuous personal and professional development and the prospect provided to create a difference. Madsen (2010) also found these women leaders did not “intentionally” (p. 6) look for these leadership positions; it was a matter of course for them to work hard and perform to the best of their abilities in their jobs.

Eddy’s (2008) study of six women community college presidents produced similar results. One of the emerging themes in the research was the “lack of intentionality along with the career path” (p. 53). Eddy (2008) noted many of the women president participants did not think about aspiring to presidency when they began working in higher education. The participants indicated serendipity played a role in their career paths (Eddy, 2008). These participants, who became community college presidents, said holding a variety of positions at their colleges provided them a broad base from which to draw experiences that were helpful in their current leadership role. One of the participants commented:

People come to the presidency from such a different way. My trek was through the academic world, through the community college, just having every kind of job that you can possibly have in a college, and then well, what else is there? (p. 53)

One participant explained the presidential position was not a position she sought, but rather the only position left within the college for a promotion (Eddy, 2008).

This appointment came to her by surprise although by protocol. The chancellor had no other choice except to appoint her as the current college president. Another female president was appointed by the same chancellor, but in a sister institution, because the former male president seemed to be tired of serving the institution. Both women had 30 years of multi-college system experience (Eddy, 2008). Having an expansive and far-reaching professional experience and being ready and prepared for the presidential office requirements were the best ways to go, according to these female presidents, even if the position was not initially one they sought (Eddy, 2008).

The role of mentors in career advancement is yet another experience that appears to have bearing on being tapped for a presidential position. This was the case for one research participant who was in her first presidency after working for 25 years in the K-12 sector (Eddy, 2008). She became an assistant to the president and this was her first position in the community college. Meanwhile, the president mentored the woman for the role of vice president of planning and ultimately provost at the college. When the presidency became vacant, she was content with her position and did not initially consider applying. Due to a failed presidential search the position was reposted and after

initially resisting, the woman eventually became a candidate for the position. This path led to a 5-year presidency.

In Eddy's (2008) study of six presidents, there were two forces that ultimately moved these women ahead: self-awareness and self-actualization, not intentionality.

For some, the route to the presidency emerged as someone encouraged them to apply and gave them the confidence that they could do the job—in essence, pulling them up. For others, it was a push up to the position, generally resulting from a level of self-awareness that they could do the job or the fear of what would happen if someone else did the job. A level of self-actualization was necessary for these women to move to the top level position. (Eddy, 2008, p. 64)

Mitchell (2004) echoed Eddy (2008) regarding the lack of intentionality among some female presidents. “What allowed these women to become successful was the fact that they were prepared for the opportunity when it presented itself since they had broad experiences in the college system” (Eddy, 2008, p. 63). Bornstein (2007), Eddy (2008), and Mitchell (2004) shared the view that female presidents such as Hanna Gray of University of Chicago and Donna Shalala formerly at University of Wisconsin-Madison and currently at the University of Miami were among the few who led acceptance of women at the helm of large universities by demonstrating their capacity to operate as leaders and agents of change (p. 21).

Lack of intentionality did not really pose a barrier for advancing to the presidential role—as long as the candidates were determined and committed to hard work and dedication that the post requires, they could be successful. The secret to women's

presidential success appears to be the preparedness to handle the job due to their extensive professional and multicollege experience including, but not limited to, their diligence and hard work as they continuously demonstrate their job commitment (Eddy, 2008; Madsen, 2010). While lack of intentionality did not appear to be a barrier for some presidents, hiring processes may be (Betts, Urias, Chavez, & Betts, 2009).

### **Hiring Procedures**

To describe the significant events and lived experiences of female senior leaders in higher education, examining the hiring procedures in the academia may help facilitate a clearer understanding of the career paths women follow as they move to the top leadership position—the presidency. The underrepresentation of women in the academe’s leadership positions relative to the labor pool (AAUP, 2006; ACE, 2007; Catalyst, 2008; Gonzalez, 2010) caused work disparities that prompted higher education officials to examine their hiring procedures. Betts et al. (2009) reported, nationally the need for qualified administrators to fill impending vacancies has increased as a large percentage of baby-boomers has retired and the field of higher education continues to grow. ACE (2007) and CIC (2008), indicated higher education will likely face a critical presidential shortage due to the impending number of retiring college presidents. Women represent a significant share of the senior campus administrators whose jobs are likely to lead to a college presidency, according to a new survey by a leading higher-education group.

Santovec (2008) posited a tremendous opportunity is waiting for women with some 7,000 positions and about half of the community college presidencies expected to open in the next years due to retirements. The percentage of women presidents more than

tripled from 1986 to 2006 with an increase from 8% to 29% (King & Gomez, 2007). The percentage of presidents from minority groups rose from 8.1% to 13.6%. Based on these figures, the pipeline appears vigorous (King & Gomez, 2007).

There were conflicting reports regarding the condition of the pipeline. Record numbers of women have been graduating with advanced professional degrees that often equalled or exceeded the rates of men (Carter & Silva, 2010). Given these achievements, one might expect the pipeline to be strong, especially because “women represented 40% of the workforce with projected growths in some parts of the world to reach double digits” (Carter & Silva, 2010, p. 1). It was expected that with the same prestigious credentials, women and men would be equal in the pipeline and their career trajectories gender-blind, yet the pipeline for women has not been as promising as expected (Carter & Silva, 2010). Women lagged behind in advancement and compensation from their very first professional jobs and were less satisfied with their careers overall (Carter & Silva, 2010). Carter and Silva (2010) found “women are more likely to leave their first post-MBA jobs because of a difficult manager. According to Carter and Silva, female leaders also paid a penalty for pursuing a nontraditional career pathway such as working in a nonprofit organization, being self-employed, and/or working part-time while advancing in their career” (p. 4).

These are not the only contradictory reports regarding the condition of the pipeline for women. The American College Presidents’ (2008) study indicated the pipeline looks robust, but have very few people of color. Although the current data indicates a growing percentage of institutional presidents will be retiring in the next 5

years, there are no projections on who will fill those positions and lead the nation's colleges and universities. ACE (2007) claimed the information about those senior campus administrative positions that most typically lead to presidency is missing. Broad (2009) indicated although women have surpassed men in college, exceeding them in the number of master's degrees received, and have equalled men in most doctoral and professional programs, "these positive educational pursuits do not translate to comparably high leadership women representation in academia" (Broad, 2009, p. 16). In fact, women still remain underrepresented in leadership positions and trail behind men in status and in salary (Broad, 2009). By examining those issues, higher education needs to reevaluate how institutions should recruit and retain the future leaders of the nation's colleges and universities to be able to fill the huge number of vacancies due to the imminent college presidents' retirement despite women's remarkable and available opportunity to develop a vigorous pipeline.

Gonzalez (2010) considered the destinies of university presidents dependent on the changing moods of their campuses, their trustees and the public. A change of administration may result in the replacement of many or all members of the executive team. Because presidential searches, as Gonzalez argued, are highly political, three issues should be considered: (a) the existence of shared governance and consideration of internal hires, (b) advantages of external hiring, and (c) the perceptions of external hires' ability to effect change that justifies hiring them (Gonzalez).

**Internal hires.** Understanding the pathways that female senior leaders undertake while advancing to the top executive positions may serve as an incentive for those

women with similar professional track records and a desire to satisfy their self-actualization need. Even though higher education started to emulate what most businesses have been doing—(grooming talented employees for positions of leadership and hiring chief executive officers from within), the academe, unfortunately, lacks training programs for preparing academic leaders (Gonzalez, 2010). Most colleges and universities have never taken this course of action seriously, even if recommendations to identify, mentor, and promote diverse pools of internal candidates through succession planning appear abundant (King & Gomez, 2008). In the American Council on Education's (2007) survey on college and university presidents, nearly one third of institutions selected their presidents from within their own institutions (Bornstein, 2007, p. 21). Identifying and promoting leaders from within may offer a great opportunity for elite universities to develop their own women administrators; even so, women remain underutilized in high-level positions (Gonzalez, 2010).

At the best American research universities, the majority of the presidents were insider presidents, and they might be responsible for their success. Prestigious universities such as Ivy League schools, Stanford, and the University of California patronized more insider presidents than other institutions of higher learning, because of their "stronger sense of institutional self-confidence" (Gonzalez, 2010, p. 4). In those universities, insider presidents were predominantly white males. Those presidents and other high-level administrators were hired internally, although there were neither hiring notices nor grooming procedures that might have formally and visibly extended the opportunity for marginalized women. This issue is evidence of what Broad (2009)

speculated when saying something may be happening in women's route to the president's office.

**External hires.** Because a purpose of this study was to gain better knowledge of the career routes of female senior leaders, examining the issue of external hires may help promote an effective and competent leadership in the academe as well as solve the underutilization of women. External hires, as Gonzalez (2010) described, were appropriate, important, helpful, and desirable under certain circumstances, especially for middle management positions and for the dean level. Tarr-Whelan (2009) claimed women presidents hired externally may also bring a fresh and new outlook finding the most needed solutions to some exigent issues of leadership. Although deans may not be instrumental in bringing novel ideas to the table, they can help in expanding the potential presidential pool of applicants. Tyler et al. (2009) pointed out that to better understand what is going on in higher education requires an efficient way of managing and leading female leaders. The compelling need of women presidents in colleges and universities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century may present a stimulating idea to hire these talented female leaders from outside the academe.

### **Need of Women Presidents in Colleges and Universities for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Because this study was intended to obtain a clearer understanding of the pathways female senior leaders chose, looking into the pressing need of women presidents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century may help solve the problem of marginalization of female leaders in the academia. Presidents in 2006 were older than their counterparts 20 years ago, which is indicative of an impending and inevitable wave of retirements in academic presidency.

This situation could create potential for more diversity among presidents in terms of traits such as gender, race, and sexual preference (June, 2008a). The shortage of administrative leaders from academia might be the result of: (a) “an aging professoriate, (b) rising numbers of part-time and nontenure-line faculty, and (c) students completing doctoral education and entering the professoriate late in life” (ACE, 2008, p. 1).

The presence or absence of female academic leaders, according to Broad (2009), could have far-reaching influence not only on the institutions themselves, but even on the scope of research and knowledge that affects everyone. The presence of more women in senior policy-making positions in higher education, particularly the presidency, might have a significant affect on diversity (Broad, 2009). Bronznick and Goldenhar (2008) contended when women bring their voices, vision, and leadership to the table alongside men, the debate turns stronger and the policy seems more inclusive and sustainable. Bronznick and Goldenhar (2008) emphasized the importance of having a balanced leadership with adequate women on the top, as it yields better results by creating a different future and a positive affect. Broad (2009) asserted, “Women in senior faculty positions and top-level leadership positions in academia provide male students, faculty, and staff an important opportunity to work with talented women—an experience that will prove increasingly valuable as the overall gender balance in the workforce changes” (p. 16).

Women’s full engagement in leadership improves outcomes. According to Tarr-Wheelan, (2009), this positive affect is seemingly a well-kept secret in the United States

even though numerous books and studies have been published about it. Maxwell (2007) argued:

Women are the primary care-givers for children and elderly and the scarcity of females in decision-making positions reduces the odds of those in power who truly understand the need of family-friendly and work/life balance policies that support women, and increases their opportunities for advancement. (p. 3)

Tar-Wheelan (2009) reiterated when women step into leadership roles, life turns better not only for themselves and the company or organization, but most essentially for the global society.

According to ACE (2007), the outlook for women with nontraditional backgrounds leading higher-education institutions looks more promising at the present than in the past. As “students, faculty, and staff become more diverse, developing a more varied pool of senior leaders has become increasingly important” (ACE, 2008, p. 58). ACE (2008) identified a dearth of young permanent faculty who may be able to advance on the academic career ladder into positions of administrative leadership at colleges and universities (ACE, 2008).

The failure of the traditional administrative ladder to provide entry into the leadership pipeline has necessitated higher education institutions to: (a) “bring more young people through graduate school into the permanent faculty and advance them through the academic ranks more quickly; (b) alter the career ladder so that people can skip rungs and rise to the presidency with fewer years of experience; or (c) become more open to individuals with career paths other than the traditional academic route” (ACE,

2008, p. 7). Assuming the pipeline to the presidency is really leaking or is in peril, higher education officials should focus on training, preparing, and mentoring qualified, talented, and highly credentialed women, and consider them in succession planning for presidential posts (Betts et al., 2009; Gonzalez, 2010).

There are other challenging issues such as the absence of women and minorities in the pipeline, missing information, negative correlation between the high percentage of women's educational pursuits and representation in the academe, and unavailable projections as to who would fill presidential vacancies; thus, posing a major problem for higher education (ACE, 2007; Broad, 2009). The qualified prospective female presidents deserve the necessary mentoring. Mentoring is essential, and thus higher education institutions need to implement programs now in order to facilitate filling vacant presidential posts with qualified women in the future.

**Mentoring women for presidency.** This research study was intended to provide a deeper understanding of the career paths that female leaders faced while advancing in their careers. Therefore, it was necessary to examine mentoring and other support strategies female leaders provided other women who were seeking leadership positions in higher education. The significance and benefits brought by mentoring as the single best factor to help women advance seems invaluable, which is why presidential candidates have multiple mentors who drive them to succeed (Gonzalez, 2010; Jenifer, 2005). Mentors must encourage those applicants to complete their doctoral studies and be prospective executive leaders to advance to executive positions.

Harvard Business Review (2009) reported mentoring has been considered an effective executive training technique for potential presidential candidates. Indvik (2004) argued mentoring is currently the forerunner for advancement strategies in workplace learning. Career advancement and mentoring relationships are considered among the most essential types of relationships for career advancement in which a senior individual provides task coaching and emotional encouragement along with sponsoring the protégé within the organization.

Interviews with a group of senior executives from the Jewel Companies revealed, “Everyone who makes it has a mentor” (Jenifer, 2005, p. 28). After examining and analyzing recently hired executives, Tener (2004) found mentoring is a key factor to their success. Mentoring could be a more effective means of preparing women for executive positions (Jenifer, 2005). Jenifer (2005) noted, “The ideal mentor is usually [someone] more senior and experienced who takes the responsibility of helping a promising person (protégé) prepare for promotion to presidency” (p. 28). Mentors oversee the professional development of the protégé by placing mentees in more challenging situations and by emphasizing the importance of strong values to enduring respect (Jenifer, 2005).

Mentoring programs vary in their role of operation and content, but most contain at least three components: (a) mentoring by seasoned current presidents, (b) teaching of essential skills, and (c) networking (Jenifer, 2005). Some of the programs were designed for specific groups—women, minorities, or community college mid-level administrators. The available mentoring programs included: (a) “The American Council on Education

(ACE) Leadership Program, (b) Harvard University Institute for Educational Management (IEM), (c) Higher Education Resources Services (HERS) Summer Institute for Women in Higher Education, (d) American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), and (e) Millennium Leadership Initiative (MLI)” (Jenifer, 2005, p. 29).

Each of the leadership preparation programs has a unique approach. Jenifer (2005) reported HERS Summer Institute for Women in Higher Education brings together 75-80 women faculty and administrators worldwide. The program’s purpose is to improve the employment status of women in higher education by providing participants with an intensive training program to enhance management skills associated with the global administration and governance of higher education institutions. The Millennium Leadership Initiative (MLI) has been preparing senior academic executive leaders for higher education for 11 years (Jenifer, 2005). With the original conceptual framework and organization structure of MLI designed to focus on the preparation of qualified, high-performing, underrepresented individuals, applicants are required to possess terminal degrees and attain the rank of vice president, provost or dean in the academy or garner equivalent achievements (Jenifer, 2005). Although the initial audience served was primarily African Americans and women, the MLI Institute has been expanded to include Asian Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders and has accepted all qualified applicants who met the requirements (Jenifer, 2005). MLI’s fundamental objective is to enhance protégés ability to be recognized and prepared for selection at the senior executive level. The number of successful college and university presidents

nationwide who have come through the program illustrates MLI's success (Jenifer, 2005).

Apart from those women mentoring organizations, several national higher education associations, university systems, and individual universities have launched executive mentoring and leadership development programs. During the last 30 years these programs have been focusing on senior college faculty and administrators who have the skills for and interest in university presidency (Jenifer, 2005). The key to bringing sustainable change in the racial and gender traits of college and university presidents is to start grooming and mentoring members of minority groups and women for academic presidency and to participate in succession planning (Betts et al., 2009; Gonzalez, 2010; June, 2008a; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Although most potential presidential candidates became successful through mentoring, there were other college presidents who succeeded without it. For instance, Santovec (2008) studied six female community college presidents who considered mentoring the single most important factor for women's advancement. One participant in the study, however, revealed she never had a mentor, but possessed a strong sense of self, and of her strengths and weaknesses. She indicated she was not a people's person, but she surrounded herself with hiring deans (Santovec, 2008).

Even though mentoring is a prominent topic in higher education, Gonzalez (2010) found mentoring has not been widespread at universities and there is very little training for executives at the institutional level. The author suggested successful organizations should be more engaged in promoting mentoring and coaching programs to facilitate

identifying, developing, and utilizing existing talents, including the talents women and minorities provide. Presidents were advised to take this matter personally. Bornstein (2009), like Gonzalez (2010) argued aspiring presidential candidates should be prepared through talent development programs that afford them resources. Bornstein (2009) and Gonzalez (2010) both maintained mentoring has been successful in colleges and universities, and its impact is important in the profiles and advancement of female presidents as they attempt to continuously work in the executive field.

### **Profile of Women Presidents**

In order to describe the significant events and lived experiences of female senior leaders in higher education and to understand the effects of these experiences on their careers, studying the profile of female presidents is invaluable. As the roles of the president change, so do the presidents' profiles. Those presidents who had been in the office for more than a decade described the changes they encountered in the job. Hartley and Godin (2009) reported more than academic affairs, fundraising, accountability/assessment, budget/finance, capital improvements, and technology planning were demanding presidents' attention.

Elman (2009) stated "on many campuses, leadership talent, often assumed in the past to be innate in scholars and teachers were being sought instead among individuals with experience in nonacademic aspects of institutional management" (p. 2). Elman (2009) elaborated that higher education consultants become concerned about the health of the presidential pipeline due to the massive retirements looming in the next decade—

suggesting the pipeline for presidency may have lost its appeal among presidential aspirants.

ACE (2007) indicated half of all senior administrators were promoted to their current positions internally, indicative of the active role of succession planning in enhancing diversity in campus leadership. Despite this potential, racial minorities comprise only 16% of executives and less than 10% of CAOs. A significant effort that was both critical and necessary manifested some signs to broaden the sphere of diversity at the presidential level in higher education. Some important areas of opportunity have included Asian Americans at doctorate-granting institutions, African Americans at master's and baccalaureate institutions, and Hispanics at community colleges (ACE, 2007).

Higher education institutions must not only turn to the current pool of senior female administrators but also attract more minority faculty into administrative positions to increase the number of women and minority faculty who might aspire to the presidential role (Cook, 2007). Candidates in the presidential pipeline need to be in eye-catching jobs, mainly in terms of (a) improved and balanced leadership, (b) coaching on the presidential search, and (c) opportunity in the selection process (Cook, 2007). Boards and other search committees must then be more flexible to succeed in hiring, as hiring guidelines may render it difficult for a broad group of people to be qualified (Cook, 2007). As Cook (2007) stated, leadership opportunities may be expanded to benefit women and minorities with predictable results. With the potential for increased

opportunities for assuming presidencies, perceptions about women constitute another area of consideration.

**Perceptions about women.** The research problem of this study highlighted the marginalization of female senior leaders in higher education leadership. Understanding the perceptions about women may illuminate some major concerns of professional women in the academe. According to the Catalyst Organization (2005),

the negative perceptions and stereotypes about women's management styles and abilities was not only a detriment to their reputation and integrity as professionals but also became the primary reason for the inequity between men and women in leadership and decision-making positions. (p. 4)

In Madden's (2005) study, women in general were perceived to be less likely to display key leadership behaviors, whereas male managers were seen by men as more likely to use inspiration, delegation, intellectual stimulation, and problem solving than female managers. Gonzalez (2010) had similar findings and reported women and minorities have trouble being perceived as leadership material. This was evident even though women have the most traditional administrative credentials. Women were not considered excellent leaders by nature despite their distinguished qualities (Gonzalez, 2010). They were generally not seen bringing the same kind of prestige to an institution as white males bring. As Glazer-Raymo (1999) indicated, "promotions are more likely to be based on trust" (p. 5) at the top of the administrative hierarchy, and women and minorities are simply not trusted the way white males are.

Unlike business where there is a simple and clear bottom line, which is profit, higher education focuses on excellence. Excellence is a concept open to interpretation. Readings (1996) thought excellence is the currency of the transnational university, which he described as a bureaucratic corporation, “as opposed to the nation-state university, which was centered on the concept of culture” (Gonzalez, 2010, p. 5). In the absence of a vivid finishing outcome, it is not easy to evaluate the performance of a higher education administrator. Because the administrator’s success is often a matter of perception, women and minorities were not viewed as high achievers (Gonzalez, 2010). “Women have higher levels of referent power, (which relies on developing relationships), relative to men, who possess higher levels of expert and legitimate power compared to women” (Madden, 2005, p. 5). However, women were found to be modestly more effective in education and government, which suggests higher education may be the place for women to make inroads into leadership positions.

Researchers found women leaders possess communal traits and emotional intelligence—subtle women-empowering attitudes that align with leading and managing higher education. Such qualities of female leaders may not only change the status quo but may also bring innovative ideas that could improve decision-making and team performance (Bornstein, 2007; Gonzalez, 2010; Nally, 2010). Madden (2005) argued female leaders need to develop extensive expertise to exhibit command and adeptness in theory, community outreach, budgets, admissions, finance, strategic planning, and research as they may not only be stereotyped as weak in these areas but can also pose a professional barrier.

### **Personal and Professional Barriers**

This study was intended to provide empirical data from female leaders, who not only overcame perceived or actual barriers but also successfully advanced in their obtained leadership positions. Consequently, exploring and highlighting women's professional barriers relating to their successes and/or failures in higher education may be extremely enlightening, helpful, and appropriate. Despite the robust pipeline provided by the female leaders, controversies surround women's marginalization in higher education (Gerdes, 2006). There have been talented female leaders in the academe who were strong presidential candidates, but failed in their aspirations because they were obstructed on their career route (Eddy, 2008). Professional barriers as defined in this study refer to those obstacles that hinder women's professional career advancement. For instance, gender discrimination continuously cripples women's future regardless of their ranks—whether they are faculty or senior leaders. Gender discrimination persists even though women have garnered 48% of the doctoral level degrees and more than half of all graduate degrees awarded by the U.S. institutions (Wylie, Jakobsen, & Fosado, 2008).

Gender inequality has been ingrained at the professoriate level, yet women continued to persist in part-time or full-time faculty positions, as well as in all levels of administrative ranks. Although women have been employed in academic positions, their advancement rate has been exceedingly slow compared to their male counterparts (AAUP, 2006; ACE, 2007; Catalyst, 2008, 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007, 2009; Gonzalez, 2010; June, 2008b; *The White House Project Report*, 2009). Women's representation at

the highest faculty ranks and salary rates has remained lower relative to men. This problem is compounded among minorities and intensified in elite institutions.

Eddy and Cox (2008) observed community colleges have been gendered-organizations and have created barriers for women's advancement and enactment of leadership. Bornstein (2007) reported the inability of women leaders to be both ideal as presidents and perfect in handling their family responsibilities and their fear of failing contributed to the delay of their advancement to higher positions. Madden (2005), Eagly (2007), and Tyler et al. (2009) argued though gender inequality constantly lingers; gender bias, stereotyping, and prejudicial attitudes overtly operate as they pose significant affect on women's career advancement and representation in senior leadership positions.

### **Gender Bias, Stereotyping, and Double Bind**

As this study was intended to provide experiential data from female leaders, who overcame perceived or actual barriers and successfully advanced in leadership positions, it was imperative to look deeper into gender bias, stereotyping and double bind as the most common professional barriers female leaders encounter in their quest for career advancement in higher education. Such an examination of the most common professional barriers female leaders encounter in their quest for career advancement in higher education may help clarify the continued prevalence of women's marginalization in higher education (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Bronznick and Goldenhar (2008) described the assumptions underlying gender bias as a "set of widely shared conscious and unconscious mental associations about women, men, and leaders" (p. 4). Although discriminatory practices might be less overt

now than in the past, “bias involving matters such as start-up funds for new faculty hires, bias against certain kinds of research, overburdening women with committee and other service obligations, and the underrepresentation of women in senior administrative positions” (Madden, 2005, p. 3) still prevail. These areas tended to affect women and ethnic minorities, and because of the subtlety of these types of gender stereotyping, female leaders have difficulty redressing them (Madden, 2005). Stereotypes of women appeared one-dimensional—operating in the form of the false dichotomy of housewife versus career woman (Madden, 2005). Feminists were seen as competent, but not likeable, because they threaten the status quo power structure.

Catalyst (2005) claimed that the saying that women take care, and men take charge, still persists. Gender stereotypes attribute traits such as sensitivity and being emotional to women, while attributing traits such as aggressiveness and rationality to men. The question remained whether this refrain spilled over to leadership that might have caused women to be more prone to be judged better at caretaker leadership behavior, and men more apt to be judged better at taking charge leader behaviors (Catalyst, 2005). Because men perceived women as less effective at problem-solving, men were likely to view women to be less capable as well at inspiring and team-building (Catalyst, 2005). This perception, however, was not only surprising but also in contrast to the interpersonal traits attributed to female leaders. Women were found to be effective both in inspiring and team building, which resonates with emotive, relationship-building traits ascribed to women (Catalyst, 2005; Dambe & Moorad, 2008; Tyler et al., 2009).

These findings countered the argument that women tend to be rated better than men when feminine traits such as caretaker stereotypes are considered.

Santovec (2008) pointed out some female leaders feel jealous and are not appreciative to see that their female colleagues advance in their careers. In fact, they regret having a female boss; thus, gender-bias comes from both men and women. According to Wylie et al. (2008), unconscious gender bias tends to systematically disadvantage women and minorities; therefore, outcome-wise, the cumulative impacts could be significant. Eagly (2007) explained prejudicial attitudes could hinder women's access to leadership roles and foster discriminatory evaluations when they occupy such positions. Richardson and Loubier (2008) asserted by disproportionately employing females in jobs that lack regular promotion procedures, employers effectively encourage females to relinquish aspirations of progress, while the so-called old boy's network effectively manages freezing women's success.

Crediting men with leadership ability and readily accepting them as leaders has yielded cultural stereotypes (Eagly & Carli, 2007); consequently, female leaders have faced a double bind. Women leaders were expected to demonstrate communal traits due to the expectations inherent in the female gender; simultaneously, it behoved them to exhibit agentic traits, as these qualities are associated with leaders. Because agentic traits portray confidence and assertion, these traits may not be compatible with being communal, which position women leaders as vulnerable targets of prejudice (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

According to Eagly (2007), this conflict between communal and agentic traits produced cross-pressures on female leaders that caused them disapproval for being more masculine—asserting clear-cut authority over others along with their being especially supportive and caring of others. If women adopted some of the so-called masculine traits to fit in the male-dominated workplace and “to improve acceptability, they were seen as nonconformists, unpredictable and unsuitable for promotion” (Syed & Murray, 2006, p. 70). This double bind presents a no-win situation for women. It would be desirable if the best leadership qualities of both genders were merged, taught, and rewarded—and it could be much better if genderless leadership were learned. Genderless leadership may likely reduce the gender gap and inequality in the workplace; and diversity could make working environments stronger, more facilitating, and enriching. The metaphoric *glass ceiling* and the *labyrinth* were perceived to have caused the sluggish promotion and disproportionate underrepresentation of female leaders in senior executive leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

### **Glass Ceiling and the Labyrinth**

This study examined the career paths undertaken by college and university presidents to better understand female leaders’ lived experiences and to know why women have been disproportionately underrepresented and underutilized in the administrative senior leadership and professorial ranks (AAUP, 2006; ACE, 2007; Gonzalez, 2010; Griffiths, 2009). Higher education had ample opportunity to create greater gender diversity in the presidency as evidenced by the fact that half of all senior administrators obtained their promotion internally (ACE, 2007; Gonzalez, 2010). Women

leaders still lag behind their male counterparts in senior leadership. This gender disparity in higher education may have been caused by barriers such as the labyrinth. As Bronznick and Goldenhar (2008) emphasized, “The route to leadership is complex and circuitous at every stage” (p. 3).

The outdated glass ceiling metaphor, as Maxwell (2007) argued prevents professional women from reaching their full potential. According to the U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission, *glass ceiling* referred to those “artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that hinder eligible individuals from advancing upward and prevent unquantifiable numbers of qualified people from fairly competing for and holding top management and executive positions” (U.S. Department of Labor, as cited in Glass Ceiling Commission, 1991-1995, p. 1). The *Wall Street Journal*, more than 20 years ago, confirmed the glass ceiling existed in the workplace. The word “ceiling” (Strauss, 2007, p. 1) suggested women were blocked from advancing in their careers, and the term “glass” (p.1) was used because the ceiling was not always discernible. The U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission confirmed the glass ceiling served as a professional barrier obstructing female leaders and minorities from reaching the *top O* or presidential positions. Eagly and Carli (2007) and Maxwell (2007) also agreed that the glass ceiling has something to do with the slow advancement of women leaders in higher education, even though times have changed. Eagly and Carli (2007) claimed not only is the glass ceiling inaccurate but it also is a single-deceptive image. Its persistence occurred at different levels depending on the degree to which female leaders achieve progress in organizational structures (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Eagly and Carli (2007) paved the way to articulating a new framework in place of the glass ceiling metaphor, called *the labyrinth of leadership*, which implies a more complicated, circuitous road to advancement. Some women who make their way through the labyrinth enjoy high wages, earn greater respect, and exercise more authority (Eagly & Carli, 2009). Relative to their male counterparts (who take a straight route to the top), however, women generally exert more effort to navigate and overcome obstacles (Eagly & Carli, 2009). Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) pointed out for women to be able to negotiate the *labyrinth* they must possess both agentic and communal skills and create social capital through interaction with colleagues, establishing relationships, and mentoring.

During the cooperative inquiry, women participants responded strongly to the metaphor of the labyrinth of leadership. Bronznick and Goldenhar (2008) reported the route to leadership is complex and winding at every stage. As the participants explored this concept's application to their own lives, they identified a set of distinct features and barriers that included: (1) the narrow band of women's leadership, (2) ambivalence about ambition, (3) challenges of transition, (4) race and gender, and (5) expanding the conversation and supporting each other.

Glass ceiling and labyrinth metaphors have created some controversies. After all statistics were stripped away, there was one truth that has prevailed: "Women are just as capable as men. Great ideas have no gender, race, ethnic background or age" (Di Russo as cited in Strauss, 2010, p. 4). The underlying cause for why glass ceiling exists as research suggested was the perception that white males were losing their position of

dominance specifically because women and minorities were assuming higher-level management positions (Hester, 2007). “Even in the highest earning positions, women were underutilized, and the glass ceiling began at the first job for the most talented young women” (Catalyst, 2010, p. 14). Academia started to recognize the presence of this untapped talent pool (Williams & Norton, 2008). Overall, the gender gap has persisted even as women have earned more advanced degrees than men and have comprised nearly 50% of all management and professorial positions and/or U. S. labor force (Catalyst, 2005, 2010).

### **Gender Gap/Inequality/Diversity**

Understanding the career paths of female senior leaders who face professional impediments while ascending to the top leadership positions gave essence to this study. Discussing gender gap, gender inequity, and diversity that closely align to women’s marginalization in higher education is central in understanding this knowledge base. Until gender equality exists in senior level leadership positions, research is needed on the ways to empower women senior leaders (Hur, 2006). Although women have made noticeable progress, certainly they have not reached workplace equity with men, and occupations are still segregated. Job segregation has remained a problem for women, because salaries are lower in female-dominated professions where women receive less pay than men for their level of education and training (Eagly& Carli, 2009). Women have remained disadvantaged in their access to leadership positions although there is considerably more equality than in the past.

Based on the national demographics, (from the period of affirmative action up to the present time), African-Americans and Hispanics have constantly established significant gains in several key indicators of college enrollment, faculty employment, and promotion to senior administrative appointments (Ramirez, 2002 as cited in Jenifer, 2005; Stoops, 2004). The incessant “institutional discrimination and its subtle impact in higher education had frustratingly narrowed the education gap between African-Americans and Hispanics and their white counterparts; in fact, both groups were both far from attaining equity in employment and key executive policy positions” (Jenifer, 2005, p. 13).

Earlier negative impressions about gap issues in higher education, surprisingly, have changed after ACE (2010) reported this issue in higher education that most groups except Hispanics have reached a plateau. The follow-up report to ACE’s original 2000 study and 2006 update, titled *Gender Equity in Higher Education: 2010*, said for the first time, several indicators suggested the size of the gender gap in higher education may have been stabilized. Since 2000, the distribution of enrollment and undergraduate degrees by gender has remained consistent with 43% of enrollment represented by men as well as 43% of bachelor’s degree completion. “Hispanic women appeared to have pulled away from their male peers since the late 1980s, increasing their bachelor’s degree achievement rate while the male rate remained flat” (p. 1). Despite the progress made by African Americans (both genders) and Hispanic women, the gaps in bachelor’s degree attainment rates between these groups and whites are larger today relative to 1960s and 70s.

After a spike in the mid-1970s that reflected the surge in male enrollment during the Vietnam War, the share of young white men with a bachelor's degree declined and remained flat until the early 1990s. At the present time, 32% of white men aged 25 to 29 are bachelor's degree holders compared with 49% of white women. These rate increases in the number of degrees earned for both whites, and Hispanic young men had been surpassed by population growth, resulting in flat attainment rates. (*Gender Equity in Higher Education: 2010*, ACE, 2010)

With graduate degrees, women and men are equal in terms of their professional and doctoral degree attainment. Women also garnered the majority of master's degrees due to their prevalence in popular areas such as education and nursing while men earned master's degrees in engineering and business administration (ACE, 2010). King (2007) emphasized the critical importance of gender gap and suggested educators and policy makers address this issue, as these findings revealed the current female majority might be higher education's new normal.

By not only promoting gender equity but by also addressing and resolving the gender gap issues in the workplace, women might feel more empowered. King (2007) said for women to feel empowered, they must be welcomed to the inner circle and allowed to participate in major decision-making. Additionally, women need to exercise their authority involving policy changes in higher education and let their voices be heard and respected.

### **Empowerment, Gender, and Politics**

As this study sought to achieve a deeper understanding of the pathways women senior leaders took in order to advance in their careers and become empowered to create a change in higher education, discussing empowerment, gender, and politics may assist female leaders in navigating their route to the top and help them maintain their leadership roles. “Since power is *shared*, it strengthens the people sharing it; in fact, shared power as defined in relationships, empowers individuals” (Hur, 2006, p. 524). Empowerment resonates with changing, gaining, expending, diminishing, and losing power, and thus “the concept of empowerment was conceived as the idea of power” (Hur, 2006, p. 524). Power, according to Hur (2006) is something that is shared, and thus benefits all the parties sharing it. As Freire (1973) espoused, empowerment theory is a plan to liberate the oppressed and marginalized people of the world through education.

Maxwell (2007) asserted that the “reasons for the disparity of power between women and men in the workplace are multifarious and political” (p. 4). One of the most prevalent reasons was the adoption of a passive role by women in society to gain acceptance and respectability. This conditioning has influenced the attitudes women have brought to the workplace and has provided a foundation for negative perceptions of their management abilities to exist (Maxwell, 2007). Every interaction and relationship in an organization involves an exercise of power; therefore, it is necessary to understand the implications of these interactions to be able to gain and use power effectively.

Power is often presented as a gendered concept in organization since gender is one of the primary ways by which power is articulated. The mere mention of

gender in organizations can imply unequal access and control, thereby making an inextricable link between power and gender. To understand the meaning of *empowerment*, it is important to visualize the notion of power. Women typically demonstrate a greater reliance on interpersonal relationships, the rules of fairness and competency in the pursuit of power. (Maxwell, 2007, p. 4)

As explained by Foucault (as cited in Charlier, 2006a), power must be taken in its plural form—*powers*, because there are multiple dominant powers, diffused as a constellation of stars. Empowerment may therefore be considered as the *process* to acquire *power* individually and collectively, and the process should be divided into four levels such as “power over, power to, power with, and power within” (Charlier, 2006a, p. 10). According to Charlier (2006a) power is an amorphous process that is difficult to predict. “Meanwhile, empowerment as an *outcome*, is measurable against anticipated achievement” (p. 524). The perception of empowerment has formed part of the vision to acquire power, to control one’s life, and make choices.

### **Concept of Empowerment**

To better comprehend the career paths female senior leaders undertook to acquire executive level positions in higher education, it is important to relate the concept of empowerment to this study’s underlying phenomenon—the marginalization of female leaders in the academe. The concept of empowerment was adopted after the Beijing Conference (1995). *The Beijing Declaration (section 13)*, which presented women’s empowerment as a key strategy for development, stated: “Women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including

participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.” In keeping with the spirit of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women the Beijing Declaration emphasized:

The advancement of women achievement of equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women’s issue. They are the only way to build a sustainable, just, and developed society. Empowerment of women and equality between women and men are prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental security among all people. (Charlier, 2006a, p. 39)

As a group, women still have limited access compared to men when it comes to education, production resources, and economic and social opportunities. Female leaders are restricted in decision-making participation. Furthermore, females’ roles in the division of labor has been inflexible and unequal compared to their male counterparts. These disparities between genders posed a barrier to leadership development. Women’s empowerment has been a key ingredient to building a sustainable and developed society by allowing these women (a) partake in major decision making, (b) exercise some forms of influence, authority, and power, and (c) have their voices heard in the inner circle. To be empowered was one of the most important scenarios that is rarely seen in higher education upper management, but could effect significant changes in managing and creating changes in higher education; hence, empowerment is about change, choice, and power as this study implies.

### **Empowerment is About Change, Choice, and Power**

By gaining an understanding of the career paths female senior leaders in higher education experienced in order to advance in their careers and become empowered to create a change in higher education, it would be suitable to connect one of the objectives of this study to the concept of empowerment. Empowerment entails change, choice, and power. These characteristics closely align with the conceptual lenses that support this study: empowerment-based transformational leadership theory (Dambe & Moorad, 2008) for which a leader's role is to empower her subordinates so they can become leaders as well. The more followers become empowered, the better it is for the organization, because empowerment is a boundless commodity (Dambe & Moorad, 2008).

Sharma and Varma (2008) explained that the context of women's development empowerment provides a way of defining, challenging, and overcoming barriers in a woman's life. Female leaders develop the ability to shape their lives and environment. "Empowerment is an active, multifaceted process that enables women to realize their full identity in all phases of life" (p. 46). In almost all parts of the globe, women possess less power than men, have less control over resources, receive lower wages for their work, and remain as an invisible work force (Sharma & Varma). Because of centuries of passive inertia, ignorance, and conservatism, the actual and potential role of women in this society has been ignored, depriving them from making their rightful contribution to social progress and change. Seemingly, women were denied their just status and access to developmental resources and services, contributing to their marginalization (Sharma & Varma, 2008). With regard to women's multidimensional responsibilities, they have to be

socially, economically, and technologically empowered to enable them to make decisions and exercise authority for the good of the organization and the communities they represent. Thus their sphere of influence and authority is felt in the system as they effect a change, and people hear their voices and recognize their power.

Women's untapped talents, capacity, and leadership are being more frequently recognized (Wollack, 2010). In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the rate of women's global representation in national parliaments had increased from 13.1% at the end of 1999 to 18.6% at the end of 2009. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, "the increase was more pronounced, where women in parliaments rose from 10.9% to 17.6%" (Wollack, 2010, p. 1). The evidence about women's contributions toward a strong and vibrant society demands attention in terms of considering meaningful participation in building and sustaining democracy as well as economy (Wollack, 2010).

With so many changes happening in women's positions along with the cultural element of good leadership, women may continue their ascent toward greater authority in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The number of women's network and the creation of a greater critical mass for women could be some of the potential indicators of this immense transformation. Smart (2008) argued that gender and status placed scientific fields at the core not only because of the pecking order feature of gendered relations but also because of the inequity and the power of science in particular. According to Smart (2008), higher education could be better understood if people were knowledgeable about science. Because science has played a vital role in transforming colleges into universities in the 19th century, Smart (2008) posited science would still continue to shape U.S. universities

in the future. In higher education this type of transformation is described “as systemic, deep, cultural, and intentional” (Smart, 2008, p. 95) and is facilitated by leadership, networks of shared stakeholders, positive and innovative incentives, as well as empowerment and support coming from external sources.

### **Women’s Political Presence**

This study was an attempt to enable female leaders not only to understand the political nature of higher education, develop useful strategies, and provide them the practical experience, but most importantly, to contribute to social change. Politically savvy women in organizations tend to appear assertive and ready to lead, but too aggressive. Carly Fiorina, former CEO of Hewlett-Packard was considered the most powerful business woman in America at the height of her career with the company; nevertheless, she was fired (Maxwell, 2007). It was not because of the financial problems the board was experiencing when her termination was announced; “but the impact of her gender and style—the dangers facing powerful women in organizations; politics sometimes allows for blatant displays of raw power by women” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 4). Although there has been inconsistent research on the relationship of gender and politics, one thing remains obvious—women were more affected by politics relative to their male peers.

Research indicated that a legislator’s gender has a clear impact on policy priorities (Wollack, 2010), making it critical for women’s presence in politics to represent the concerns of females and other marginalized citizens and to help improve the responsiveness of policy-making and governance. Thus, there is a strong and positive

connection between a larger representation of women (critical mass) in political offices and an increase in policy-making decisions. The greater the representation of women in politics, the more likely decisions can be made to favor women and reflect the priorities of families, women, and ethnic and racial minorities.

Women's political involvement has profound positive and democratic impacts on communities, institutions, legislatures, political parties, and lives of citizens (Wollack, 2010). Women's political participation has generated concrete benefits for democracy that include broader and more rapid response to citizen needs, growing participation and cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and more sustainable peace (Wollack, 2010). Furthermore, building sustainable peace necessitated transforming power relationships that involve achieving more equitable gender relation. While this transformation was true in parliaments, it may also hold true for higher education, where women's meaningful participation seems a rarity.

Maxwell (2007) viewed political empowerment (both formal and informal) in the formulation of policies that affect the societies, as equitable representation of women in decision-making structures. Maxwell (2007) pointed out the absence of women from structures of governance inevitably means that national, regional, and local priorities, (for instance, how resources are allocated) are typically defined without meaningful input from women. In order to change spending and other development priorities, there should be a critical mass of women. The greater the presence of women, the stronger the impact they create in changing rules during the decision-making process.

## **Power Not Gender**

To facilitate a clear understanding of the career paths female senior leaders followed in achieving top leadership positions in the academe, it would be necessary to know that power is more important than gender in the leadership roles of women. “The major problem in higher education is *power*, not gender per se” (Assie-Lumumba, 2006, p. 5). Therefore, in order to solve the gender problem, it is important “to actualize the democratization of the institution” (p. 5). Gonzalez (2010) argued women and minorities, who are perceived to have less power than white males, may simply not be able to get as many things done, unless they are empowered through succession planning that will allow them to lift themselves from the institution’s political arena toward the center of gravity.

“Inequality in higher education cannot be considered gender-free; even equal access does not translate into equality on every ground of education including output, outcome, and the value attached” (Assie-Lumumba, 2006, p. 7). In Hur’s (2005) study, empowerment was not a panacea for all individuals and social illness. Actually, people had been critical that it was “overly individualistic and conflict-oriented” (p. 536), as a result of emphasis on mastery and control rather than cooperation and community. Even though empowerment’s practice effectively removes powerlessness, certain factors still exist that could inhibit empowerment. Darlington and Michelle (2004) discussed the concept of reciprocal empowerment as a means for the oppressed and marginalized to compete with the traditional power models of control, authority, and influence through the application of personal authority and self-respect. Empowerment could be a remedy

for individuals and groups as in the case of female leaders in academia who have been underrepresented and underutilized (Gonzalez, 2010; Griffiths, 2009).

### **Women's Effort to Establish Gender Equity in Higher Education**

Because this study was intended to provide a more intense understanding of the career routes women senior leaders carried out in an effort to climb the ladder of success in their careers and become empowered to create a change in higher education, it was vitally important to check the efforts that women had afforded to establish gender equity in higher education. As women welcome academic opportunity and as the numbers of women achieving PhDs in all areas increase dramatically, their distribution within faculty and administrative ranks of colleges and universities appears disproportionate to their labor pool availability (Gonzalez, 2010; Keim & Murray, 2008; McClellan, 2007).

According to Equal Rights Advocate (ERA, 2003; Zimpher, 2009), the pipeline has had a problem. It has been leaking, and as such is in peril, rendering it less promising in terms of helping women attain executive positions in higher education (Zimpher, 2009).

Leaking pipelines might be due to companies' inability or failure to level the playing field to more fully utilize this highly talented group of women. Consequently, women are more likely to have left their first post-MBA job because of a difficult manager and to have paid a penalty for pursuing a nontraditional career pathway such as working in the nonprofit, government, or education sectors; being self-employed, or working part-time before returning to work full-time in a company or firm (Carter & Silva, 2010).

Women lag behind men in advancement and compensation from their very first professional jobs and are less likely satisfied with their careers overall (Carter & Silva,

2010). In academia, women are clustered in ranks of part-time, nontenure faculty and staff positions. Among all ranks of tenure track, tenured, and senior administrative level faculty, women are underrepresented (Catalyst, 2008; ERA, 2003). This underrepresentation was why in 2003, Equal Rights Advocate (ERA) convened in a roundtable to push through with their three-fold objectives: (a) “to identify continuing barriers to women’s advancement, (b) to analyze past efforts to address those barriers, and (c) to develop strategies for future work” (p. 1). Three groups, comprising 15 participants, discussed the ongoing efforts to promote gender equity that presented the following issues:

1. Women are not being hired in proportion to their availability in the labor pool;
2. Women faculty are disproportionately burdened with mentoring and advising responsibilities;
3. Sporadic efforts to create gender equity do not work;
4. Lack of clarity about the criteria for advancement and lack of transparency in the decision-making process lead to inequitable application of standards;
5. Characterizing women’s family responsibilities as career distractions that signal lack of commitment hinders ability to succeed; and
6. Insufficient attention paid to cultural and environmental factors make some departments hostile environments for women.

After identifying those major problems, corresponding solutions were presented for every issue for institutional change consideration such as:

increasing women's number in the hiring process, reducing excessive burdens and changing reward structure, perpetuating practices that promote gender equity, ensuring application of equitable standards, accommodating and integrating women's family standards, and addressing cultural and environmental factors that discourage women. (ERA, 2003, pp. 2-3)

### **Innovative Strategies for Institutional Change**

My research provided empirical data from female leaders, who tracked those perceived or actual barriers and obtained leadership positions. This study may enable female leaders to understand the political nature of higher education, develop useful strategies, and provide aspiring leaders practical experiences, but most importantly, to contribute to social change. In terms of social change, innovative strategies for institutional change exemplified useful suggestions that are necessary to solve exigent issues discussed above. For example, several roundtable participants submitted brief reports for consideration to improve gender equity in hiring and advancement (ERA, 2003). A large group discussion placed the summarized points in historical context and facilitated consideration of how they would fare in the current political climate (ERA, 2003). The summary suggested utilizing:

a federal agency to investigate systemic bias, employing a legislative audit and hearings to publicize institutional backsliding, using individual cases to create increased opportunities for minority academics, considering a Congressional oversight to increase opportunities for women in science, and lastly, using

research to illuminate and counter the negative effect of women's family responsibilities on academic careers. (ERA, 2003, p. 3-5)

The sobering reality disclosed in these roundtables is women in academia lack an infrastructure for national communication and mutual support. Women do not also have adequate financial and staff resources to collect, maintain, and disseminate pertinent data, and lack research findings and other information to support gender equity efforts (ERA, 2003). Furthermore, effective avenues to promote public education and awareness of the need for continued vigilance around gender equity issues are not available.

It is important to address all those exigent issues and needs because they are key requisites in maintaining women's power and influence (ERA, 2003). To promote women's gender equity, the roundtable suggested the creation of an infrastructure in order to (a) ensure a meaningful and timely report regarding women's status in comparison with males in the academe, (b) increase the public awareness about the history and persistence of gender inequity in academic institutions, (c) overcome bias and discrimination effects, (d) create strategic alliances, and (e) seek leadership opportunities (ERA, 2003).

Williams and Norton (2008) discussed the frustrations aired by highly credentialed women not only for having been marginalized in the academe but also for having stayed briefly at the academy. As Williams and Norton (2008) reported, low tenureship of women is caused by the leaking pipeline. The authors suggested recognizing female leaders' potential in order to achieve excellence in academia. William and Norton (2008) posited restructuring the academic workplace is necessary through the

development of worthy practices of recruiting, retaining, and advancing women, and that only by adopting those practices will the course of action most likely produce the best return on limited resources.

### **Summary**

The percentage of women managers in higher education indicates that higher education management and leadership positions are underrepresented with female leaders (Griffiths, 2009). In terms of career advancement and compensation, women lag men (Griffiths, 2009). Women, compared to men, have faced heavy consequences for stepping off the traditional career track while advancing their careers. Additionally, women's salaries have not kept pace with men's, even if women are equally evaluated on the merits of their qualifications. Overall, women have been reported to be less satisfied with their careers (Carter & Silva, 2010). Traditionally, CAOs or provosts were the next in line to presidency; however, a number of women presidents have become college presidents nontraditionally, and still many successful college and university presidents lack intentionality and early planning. The key to success in becoming a president has been to be prepared with an array of far-reaching multicollge experiences, outstanding work ethic, spirit of industry, and commitment to excellence.

The historical barriers to women's advancement termed as glass ceiling, concrete ceiling, and sticky floor have been captured in the new concept of the labyrinth, which has been used to explain the diverse challenges posed by child care needs, sexism, and discrimination on the basis of identity (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Eagly & Carli, 2007). While an imminent potential opportunity for female leaders to occupy presidential seats

exists due to anticipated mass retirement among baby-boomer college presidents (ACE, 2007; Betts et al., 2009; Gonzalez, 2010), proper mentoring, training, recruiting, and succession planning must be in place for the opportunity to be realized. Although women do make it to the top of senior leadership, most of them do so laboriously. The sluggish promotion of other women with presidential potential may be better explained by the glass ceiling and/or the labyrinth. Despite the urgent need of female leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century academe leadership, women still have a chilly reception and passive promotion history (Broad, 2009; Eagly, 2009). More research on the persistence of professional barriers is warranted. The barriers for female leaders in higher education place serious limitations on the success of educational institutions themselves (West & Curtis, 2006) where women, minorities, and other nontraditional leaders who are keys to institutional diversity have shown the least degree of personal sustainability.

Training, mentoring, and coaching are critical in obtaining executive positions (Catalyst, 2010). Additionally, women need a combination of communal and agentic traits. They must master these combined qualities as they simultaneously develop social capital (Maxwell, 2007). Organizations frequently expect dominant and assertive leaders akin to male leaders; however, if women of color display this kind of agentic leadership they are disadvantaged, and they face the double bind. While it has been widely believed that union leadership is still male-dominated, this perception creates gender disparity in the workplace, and it may be difficult to quantify the gender gap (Kaminski & Yakura, 2008). Measuring and tracking representation in leadership could be a powerful tool for women and minorities who currently feel shut out of leadership positions and for

members who feel their interests are not being equally represented, or even worse, not represented at all.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe the significant events and lived experiences of female senior leaders in higher education, and to understand how these experiences may have defined and shaped their careers.

“According to the interpretative paradigm, meanings were constructed by human beings in unique ways, depending on their context and personal frames of reference as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, as cited in Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 614). The study was also intended to help identify the role of other individuals perceived by participants to have influenced their professional careers. This goal aligned with the philosophy, strategies, and intentions of the interpretive research paradigm.

The findings emerged as I interacted with the participants; therefore, subjectivity was valued. There was cognizance humans may not be capable of absolute objectivity because they are situated in a reality constructed by subjective experiences (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Due to the nature of the questions posed, the research was value-bound; the values were being held by the researcher along with the means by which findings were generated and interpreted (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

This chapter includes (a) an introduction, (b) discussion of qualitative design, (c) differentiation between quantitative and qualitative design), (d) justification of a phenomenological inquiry, (e) identification of hermeneutic phenomenology as the appropriate methodology, (f) description of the sample population, (g) justification of the sample frame and sample size, (h) explanation of the site and participant selection, (i)

role of the researcher in data collection, (j) description of the data collection process, (k) description of the data analysis process, (l) discussion of measures for ethical protection of participants, and (m) means for establishing the study's rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness. A brief summary of the methodology concludes this chapter.

### **Qualitative Design**

Qualitative scholars and researchers define qualitative design in many ways. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) defined qualitative research as an umbrella term that refers to several research strategies sharing certain characteristics. Simon (2010) and Denzin and Lincoln (1994) described qualitative research as naturalistic, holistic, interpretative, and reflective. The data collected are statistics-free and *soft*, which refers to the rich description of people, places, and conversations that emerge in the process (Simon, 2010).

Simon (2010), Creswell (2009), and Johnson and Christensen (2008) all have suggested that qualitative research shares three basic assumptions: (a) a holistic view, where the phenomenon is understood in its entirety in order to develop a thorough understanding of an individual, situation, or project; (b) an inductive approach, which uses an unstructured approach, (not an organized structure or any prior assumptions about the interrelationships among the data before making observations), and tends to produce results that are less likely to be generalized; and (c) a naturalistic inquiry, for which qualitative research study begins in the natural settings and involves multiple methods of data collection in an attempt to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the

meanings people bring to them and which provides a naturally discovery-oriented approach.

Because this research was designed to identify the underlying phenomenon—the disproportionate underrepresentation and underutilization of female senior leaders in higher education based on their availability in the labor pool—an appropriate and effective research design that matched these three fundamental assumptions was in order (AAUP, 2006; ACE, 2007; Gonzalez, 2010; NCES, 2007). This phenomenon identification was congruent with the determination of various professional barriers that obstruct women’s career advancement (Eagly, 2007) and the empowerment they need to create change (Charlie, 2006; Hur, 2006).

### **Quantitative Versus Qualitative Methodology**

Simon (2010) argued that quantitative design entails use of numerical data and investigation of a problem, while featuring objectivity and generalizability. In contrast, the qualitative design usually “involves multiple methods of data collection—collecting data emerges with the process that is conducted in a natural setting—and is essentially holistic and interpretive and engages personal reflection” (p. 79). The qualitative design suitably matched the data collection method of this study. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) stated quantitative design deals with inquiries about relationships involving measured variables with the purpose of explaining, predicting and controlling phenomena. Conversely, “a qualitative tradition was used to answer questions regarding the complex nature of those phenomena that aim to describe and understand the event from the participants’ perspectives” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 101); hence, a quantitative

methodology would not have fit with the aim of this study. Simon (2010) posited quantitative research attempts to test a theory and uses statistical data analysis. In contrast, Johnson and Christensen (2008) and Patton (2002) noted qualitative methodology is used to generate theories based on participants' open, deep, and rich description about those experiences and significant events. Therefore, the quantitative approach was unsuitable for this research purpose. Quantitative researchers have questioned the credibility of relatively small purposive qualitative sampling procedures tied to in-depth interviews, in relation to the validity of randomly large selected samples in quantitative studies. Thus, the quantitative methodology would then be inappropriate with this study's sampling frame and method.

### **Justification for a Phenomenological Inquiry**

As Sokolowski (2000) argued, phenomenology is used to discover and describe manifold structures in intentionality. Intentionality means that "every act of consciousness a person does and every bit of experience human beings have, is *intentional*; it is essentially consciousness of, or an experience of, something or other" (p. 8). Moreover, everyone's awareness is directed toward objects, which could be an object of what one sees or what one imagines. Sokolowski (2000) added that phenomenology, as a science, seeks to illuminate the essential and general structures of a phenomenon. According to van Manen (1990), the operative word in phenomenological research is to *describe*. van Manen (1990) agreed with Giorgi (1985) that phenomenological text is descriptive "in that it names something; and in the naming, it points to something and it aims at letting something show itself" (van Manen, 1990, p.

26). As van Manen (1990) posited, the assumption is that the meaning of lived experience is hidden, and its ultimate goal is the fulfillment of human nature to become more fully aware who we are.

As a qualitative approach, phenomenology explicitly focuses on the *lifeworld* (Ashworth, 2006; Dahlberg, Dalhberg & Nystrom, 2008; Todres, Galvin & Dahlberg, 2007), which is perceived to be universally human composed of fundamental attributes. This study reflected the lifeworld of women senior leaders. Phenomenology is concerned with lived experience, and is thus ideal for investigating professional career experiences to gain an understanding how those experiences may have shaped and/or defined their lives, as was the intention of this study. The “lifeworld is understood without resorting to categorization or conceptualization, and quite often it includes what is taken for granted or those things that are common sense” (Lavery, 2003, p. 4). The lifeworld of female senior leaders is critical in understanding the experiences that may have affected their professional career.

Case study focuses on descriptive research based on a real-life situation, problems, or incidents and situations; however, this research tradition requires analysis, planning, decision making, or action with limitations established by a single researcher (Simon, 2010). This qualitative study focused on lived experiences and significant events of participants that require rich description and deep understanding and even interpretation of the meanings the participants ascribe to those experiences. Therefore, phenomenology fits this study’s purpose more appropriately.

Participatory or action research engages “members of a group to identify a problem, do something to resolve it, and see whether they succeed, and if not they can try again” (Simon, 2010, p. 55). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), the participants (in a program or institution) “together design and implement a research project in order to make recommendations for changing practice” (p. 222) and look at ways to make them happen. In contrast, this study was focused on defining the essence of experiences and making sense of the meaning; hence, this contrast made participatory research unfit for this study’s intent.

Grounded theory, designed by Strauss and Corbin (2005), represents the strongest type of grounded theory, because of its specific data analysis steps (Simon, 2010). As Denzin and Lincoln (2000a) described, grounded theory is the most powerful paradigm for qualitative research in the social sciences today. Glazer and Strauss (1967) stated that the primary goal of qualitative research is to generate a theory rather than test or merely describe a theory. In a grounded theory, the researcher collects data based on the emerging theory (Simon, 2010). What makes this tradition distinct “from other research methods is that it is explicitly emergent” (p. 61). In this study, I sought not only to discover the participants’ lived experiences (Patton, 2002; Simon, 2010) through the participants’ rich and thick description of them but also to understand how participants make sense of those experiences. Therefore, grounded theory was not the appropriate approach.

Ethnography literally means a picture of the “way of life” (Wolcott, 1997, p. 156) of some identifiable group of people—those people conceivably, could be any culture-

bearing group—notably strange to the observer. Simon (2010) pointed out that ethnography’s main “focus of investigation centers on the participants’ everyday behaviors with the purpose of identifying cultural norms, beliefs, social structures, and other cultural patterns” (p. 59) in which the researcher considers “an entire group—more specifically, a group that shares a common culture—in depth” (p. 59). Wolcott (1997) shared the same opinion as Simon (2010) regarding the anthropologist’s purpose as an ethnographer, which is “to learn about, record, and ultimately portray the culture of this other group and study human behavior in terms of cultural context” (p. 156). On the other hand, this research aimed to identify the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by the participants (van Manen, 1990). Consistent with the purpose of this study, phenomenology’s end result involves “plausible insights that bring in more direct contact with the world” (p. 9) and long engagement with coresearchers to develop patterns and relationship of meanings (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, a phenomenological approach not only fit this research study but also offered the potential to help fill this literature gap on empowering women senior leaders in higher education.

### **Hermeneutic Phenomenology as the Appropriate Methodology**

Because lived experiences comprised the focal point of this study, it was important to utilize a research methodology that aligns with its purpose. A paradigm informed by the work of van Manen (1997)—hermeneutic phenomenological methodology—was appropriate for this study, because this methodology is attentive to the philosophies underpinning both hermeneutics and phenomenology (van Manen, 1997). The purpose of this study was to describe and understand the lived experiences

and significant events that may have helped define and shape the lives of female senior leaders in higher education, along with understanding the contributions of those individuals, who may have influenced their professional career. From the identification of the experience of phenomena, a deeper understanding of the meaning of that experience was sought. Through this study, I aimed to interpret the meanings the participants gave value to and how they shaped their perceptions, as well as to make sense of these experiences as they are captured in the interview.

The chosen methodology depends on the research questions and the philosophical perspectives from which the questions are to be investigated (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to discover why female senior leaders in higher education are marginalized. The following research questions yielded the necessary data:

RQ1: What are the perceived barriers, if any, that female senior leaders face while trying to advance their careers as well as maintain their leadership roles in higher education?

RQ2: What mentoring and other support strategies, if any, do female leaders in higher education provide other women seeking leadership positions?

RQ3: What actions, if any, do female leaders need to take to establish gender equity in higher education?

The key focus of phenomenology is prereflective experiences (the essence of phenomenon). A major aspect of this research was to empower women senior leaders in higher education by providing them the authority, the force, and the confidence to

participate in making major decisions in the inner circle. Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the lifeworld or human experience as it is lived (Lavery, 2003). The focus is to illuminate details and similar trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in individuals' lives, with a goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Through understanding, one determines what is real, although one's background cannot be made absolutely explicit.

It is in the way lived experiences are explored that Husserl (1970) and Heidegger (1962) disagreed. "While Husserl focused on understanding beings or phenomena, Heidegger focused on *Dasein* that is translated as the mode of *being human* or the situated meaning of a human in the world" (Lavery, 2003, p. 7). Meaning is found as the world constructs us while at the same time we construct this world from our own background and experiences (Lavery, 2003). By using hermeneutic phenomenology as a research paradigm, self-reflection is actively involved (Lavery, 2003). Van Manen (1990, 1997) reiterated the importance of self-reflection in the preliminary phase of a phenomenological study. *Writing* separates people from their lived experience and through this separation people are able to reflect on everyday experience (van Manen, 1990, 1997). It is important to keep a reflective journal to help in the reflection process and interpretation.

Unlike phenomenology, the biases and assumptions in a hermeneutic approach are not bracketed or set aside, but rather embedded and essential to the interpretive process (Lavery, 2003, p. 17). The explicit naming of assumptions and influences contributes to the research process in hermeneutic phenomenology as opposed to the

bracketing of bias or preconceived notions in phenomenology (Laverty, 2003). The employment of hermeneutic phenomenology facilitates the exploration of participants' experiences with further abstraction and interpretation by the researcher based on the researcher's conceptual and personal knowledge. The participants conveyed their belief that they have had the experience being sought for in this study within the work environment as was revealed in the open-ended interviews.

### **Sample of the Study**

The study included eight female senior leaders in higher education. To identify the sample for this research, criteria for participants recognized women who (a) have held senior level positions such as vice president, chancellor, chief academic officer, provost, associate provost, deans or their equivalents, directors for at least 3 years and (b) have obtained sound educational credentials with an earned doctorate.

In choosing the sample, purposeful sampling was used along with criterion strategy (Patton, 2002). Particular subjects were selected purposively, because they were believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Because the underlying phenomenon of the study involved female leaders' marginalization in higher education, the main focus centered not only on participants' career pathways but also on professional barriers.

### **Sample Size and Sample Methods**

Two of the main differences between quantitative and qualitative research are the size and method of sampling. According to Patton (2002), there are trade-offs involving breadth and depth. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses on depth through purposively

selected small samples that entail careful attention to detail, context, nuance (Patton, 2002), and to the use of maximum variation such as ages, race, rank, institutional type, and region. Conversely, in a quantitative inquiry, the randomly chosen samples have both limited breadth and depth due to its standardized questions (Patton, 2002). A qualitative study generates a wealth of detailed data that is deeper, and leads to more thorough results (Patton, 2002) while preserving the uniqueness and independence of each coresearcher.

Patton (2002) stated the logic and power of purposeful sampling derived from the emphasis on in-depth understanding, leads to selecting information-rich cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. Purposive criterion sampling was used as a result of the narrow and specific research question coupled with the unique population being investigated (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006). Johnston and Christensen (2008) stated purposeful sampling is used to describe the same process as criterion-based selection to enable the researcher to develop inclusion criteria to be used in selecting people or other units. The criterion used for this study included women senior leaders in higher education who met the inclusion criteria mentioned in the sampling requirements. As other criteria for participants' selection were value judgments and could not be controlled, they might not be applicable and suitable in this study.

### **Site and Participant Selection**

The targeted participants for this study were those executive women leaders such as presidents, chancellors, chief academic officers, provosts, vice presidents, deans of 4-

year colleges or universities, and directors who met the criteria described in this study's sample method. To find these participants, *Higher Education Directory (HED) 2011* was employed. When the *Notification of Approval to Conduct Research* was received from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (07-11-11-0113407) on July 11, 2011, I approached the potential participants through an invitation letter (see Appendix B). This letter was emailed to each of the participants, along with the consent form (see Appendix D).

Snowballing was also used for this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 64). Snowballing is a method of expanding the sample by asking one informant or participant to recommend others for interviewing (Groenewald, 2004; Patton, 2002). By using recommendations from insiders suitable informants from varying ethnicity, positions, and types of institutions were considered for this study (Groenewald, 2004).

This phenomenological study used in-depth interviews that involved chosen issues in great profundity “with careful attention to detail, degree, and context, in order to gain an understanding of any single individual’s experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 227). The amount of time and effort to be invested was a major consideration (Patton, 2002). Consequently, eight individuals comprised the participant pool. To filter the sample size to at least eight, (although more than eight was better) I considered richness of prospective participants’ responses to the four open-ended screening questions listed below:

1. What factors, if any, have contributed to your success as an academic leader?

2. What academic support and/or influence, if any, have you obtained from your superiors? How have they supported you if in case?

3. As you reflect on your career in higher education administration, what factors, if any, do you perceive would influence your lived experiences? If so how? If not, why not?

4. What challenges, if any, would you consider are impediments to your success?

### **Ethical Conduct of the Research**

Ethical approval for this research was obtained from Walden University IRB committee before any data collection took place. Ethical consideration included compliance with the two official guidelines of ethics in research with human subjects: informed consent (protection of subjects from harm) and maintaining participant confidentiality. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) asserted informed consent acknowledges the subjects not only to enter the research project voluntarily but to also understand the nature of the study along with the dangers and obligations that are involved. Further, with the informed consent, participants are made to understand that their exposure to risks is not greater than the gains they might derive. Creswell (2009) also emphasized informed consent must acknowledge the participants' rights are protected during data collection. Participants' confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms during the entire data collection process, as this issue is a major concern of interpretative research due to the personal nature of the research and the type of questions asked. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) explained that in order to understand how and what meaning participants constructed around the events in their daily lives, phenomenologists should emphasize

the subjective component of the people's behavior. All participants for this study participated in the informed consent process. They were provided a detailed letter of invitation telling them about the study and informing them about their rights to participate, decline, and withdraw from the study.

### **Researcher's Role in Data Collection**

Before conducting a qualitative study, Hoeffel (2009) emphasized that a researcher must do three things: (a) adopt the stance suggested by the characteristics of the naturalist paradigm, (b) develop the level of skill appropriate for a human instrument, or the vehicle through which data was collected and interpreted; and (c) prepare a research design that utilized accepted strategies for naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990) referred to what they called the *theoretical sensitivity* of the researcher, a concept that Hoeffel (2009) considered useful in evaluating a researcher's skill and readiness to attempt a qualitative inquiry. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 42),

Theoretical sensitivity refers to a personal quality of the researcher. It indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data. [It] refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't.

Community partners received a letter requesting their cooperation in allowing recruitment of employees for the study. This approved request allowed recruitment of the potential participants from those 4-year public and private colleges and universities. I sent these community partners' letters of cooperation and/or approval to

IRB@waldenu.edu along with my IRB application and other supporting documents, as they are requisites to the official approval of the application.

Qualitative research is interpretative, and I was typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with the participants (Simon, 2010). This involvement introduced an array of strategic, ethical, and personal issues into the qualitative process (Lock, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2007), which required explicit identification of my biases, personal background, and values such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status, for these may have shaped interpretations formed during the study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 177). As Moustakas (1994) emphasized, bracketing means “freedom from suppositions the epoché,” and that, “the researcher must set aside all prejudgments as s/he entered into the individual’s lifeworld” (p. 69). In this hermeneutic phenomenological study, “the biases and assumptions were not bracketed or set aside, but rather were embedded and essential to interpretive process” (Laverty, 2003, p. 17). The explicit naming of assumptions and influences contributes to the research process in hermeneutic phenomenology as opposed to the bracketing of bias or preconceived notions in phenomenology.

As an interviewing protocol, I sent in advance the sample interview guide with broader areas of questions to the interviewing partners for them to reflect on the possible responses. In this study, face-to-face, in-depth interviews were used. These interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Gestural observation was noted as well. Before the interview started, I received all the signed informed consent documents (see Appendix D) as evidence of informed consent (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). To ensure and

to safeguard confidentiality and safety of the participants any references or names that could have exposed the identity of the participants were replaced by pseudonyms (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). In addition, participants' curricula vitae were collected and reviewed before the interviews, to gain more knowledge about the participants, along with their institutions, and to add a more individual touch to the inquiry process (Shenton, 2004).

Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) and Gay and Airasian (2000) asserted in order to encourage participants to share more insights, perceptions, and details during the interviews as well as build a strong and warm relationship between the interviewing partners and the researcher, the latter needed to be patient, respectful, compassionate, flexible, and focused (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). One way I built relationships with the participants was by expressing the importance of my study and the opportunity it would provide them to have a voice in the issue of women's role in senior leadership in higher education. I also developed relationships by talking with participants informally before the start of the interviews.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) emphasized field notes represent "the written account of what the researcher heard, saw, experienced, and thought in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in the qualitative study" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, pp. 110-111). Therefore, it was essential to take descriptive and reflective field notes to accurately grasp what had been observed, felt, experienced, perceived, and reflected during and after the interviews. This particular researcher's role—to carefully take down notes while the interview is in progress) served as an excellent backup in case the audio recorder fell short. To prevent memory lapse, field notes were expanded within 48 hours. For security

purposes, all taped recorded data and field notes were properly kept in Archival heavy-duty envelopes after the interviews and were securely locked in the researcher's home. Once the tapes were transcribed, a master tape was made from the originals. The master tape was kept in my possession and the originals were erased. Three years after the publication of the dissertation and upon the completion of the study, the master tape along with all pertinent data and documents will be destroyed (Janesick, 2004, p. 165).

Because observation is one of the main data collection methods, I had to actually see things as they are through intuitive seeing and by means of careful description. Observations were noted descriptively as a result of watching and listening (Patton, 2002). In this study, I "exercised more active control over the observation, as in the case of a formal interview, to elicit specific types of information" (Hoeffel, 2009, p. 7). With an open mind, I observed things keenly through the participants' eyes and body language. Further, I closely monitored both verbal and nonverbal and used concrete, unambiguous, and descriptive language (Hoepfl, 2009).

Miles and Huberman (1984) pointed out that memoing was another important data source in qualitative research. This tool served as another essential supporting document to help me refocus during data collection. A balance between descriptive notes and reflective notes such as hunches and feelings was maintained, as they appeared quite important as well.

The dissemination of key findings upon project completion is a crucial step in any type of research design. Returning results to the research participants is the first priority in any dissemination plan. All other dissemination strategies to any other group should take

place *following* such feedback. In this study I asked the participants how they would like to be informed of findings. Multiple methods are available to disseminate research results that are accessible to various audiences such as websites, newsletters, question and answer forums, articles in the lay media, reports, and conferences. Dissemination of results to stakeholders is determined necessary after evaluating if the research results have a potential policy affect.

### **Data Collection**

Knowing the significance of preserving natural contexts for qualitative research design (Patton, 2002; Schram, 2003), I studied selected participants in their natural settings (Patton, 2002; Simon, 2010). Building trust and showing appreciation to these women senior leaders was manifested in respecting their preferential choices of time and place to hold the interviews. Ideal venues were participants' offices or in their conference rooms, where utmost privacy could be maintained.

Prior to the interview process, I solicited as much background information as possible, such as each participant's personal curriculum vitae (CV). Because all their CVs were available both prior and during the formal interviews, the need for participants to complete a demographic survey (see Appendix E) was precluded. The main source of data collection constituted an individual, face-to-face interview with each female senior leader in higher education, with an option to revisit participants for follow up or clarification if needed. In-depth interviews constituted open-ended and unstructured questions that facilitated understanding the participant's perception of reality and shared experiences and patterns along with the emerging themes. The nature of the questions

allowed every participant to express her personal commentaries and views as openly as she could. All participants took part in the formal interview; hence, telephone interviews were not necessary. Participants revealed their emotional attitudes when they described their lived experiences. Two participants skipped one question, which they thought was irrelevant to their career experience.

Interviews continued until the topic was exhausted and saturated (Patton, 2002; Groenewald, 2004). A topic appeared saturated or exhausted when the participants could no longer introduce or generate different or new insights about the topic, or when the information obtained becomes redundant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). At the end of the interview, participants were given a chance to ask questions.

Observation constituted one of the key data collection methods; therefore, the use of field notes was essential (Janesick, 2004). Data obtained through gestural observation were written down and analyzed to determine whether they matched what the participants said. Gestural observation also helped in checking against participants' subjective reporting of what they believed and did.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is an ongoing process involving continuous reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Because of the mass generation of qualitative data inquiries, data organization, as well as reduction of those transcriptions is necessary in order to ensure a smooth-flowing analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). As Patton (2002) explained, a qualitative inquiry is particularly oriented toward exploration, discovery, and inductive

logic. To discover themes, issues, and relationships, as well as develop and modify emerging theory, I thought an inductive presentation of the interview transcripts was appropriate (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Patton, 2002). This analysis entailed starting with specific observations and building toward general patterns in which case categories or dimensions of analysis emerged from open-ended observations as I came to understand patterns that existed in the phenomenon being investigated (Patton, 2002).

In keeping with the adopted methodology, this study employed data analysis methods developed from hermeneutic phenomenological principles and research methods. Patton (2002) explained hermeneutics phenomenology as follows:

The hermeneutic circle, as an analytical process aimed at enhancing understanding, offers a particular emphasis in qualitative analysis, namely, relating parts to wholes, and wholes to parts. The hermeneutic circle is a metaphor for understanding and interpretation, which is viewed as a movement between parts (data) and whole (evolving understanding of the phenomenon) each giving meaning to the other such that understanding is circular and interactive.

Construing the meaning of the whole, means making sense of the parts and grasping the meaning of the parts depends on having some sense of the whole. (Patton, 2002, p. 497)

Table 3

*Stages of Data Analysis Developed for This Study*

Stages	Tasks to be completed
Immersion	Organizing the data set Iterative reading of texts Preliminary interpretation of texts to facilitate coding
Understanding	Identifying the first order (participant constructs) Coding of data using the appropriate software
Abstraction	Identifying second order (researcher) constructs Grouping second order constructs into subthemes
Synthesis	Grouping subthemes into themes Further elaboration of themes Comparing themes across subdiscipline groups
Illumination and illustration of phenomena	Linking the literature to the themes identified above Reconstructing interpretation into stories
Integration and critique	Critique of the themes by the researcher and externally

In this process of applying the hermeneutic method, a “set of procedural rules was used to help ensure that my historical situation does not distort the bid to uncover the actual meaning embedded in the text, act, or utterance, thereby helping me to ensure the objectivity of the interpretation” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 114).

Van Manen (1997) stated the aim of phenomenological data analysis is to “transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful” (p. 36). According to Ajjawi and Higgs (2007), hermeneutic circles allows for systematic identification of participants’ interpretations and constructs, referred to as first order constructs. These constructs are then layered with the researchers’ own understandings, interpretations, and constructs, referred to as second-

order constructs. The first stage dealt with text organization, often referred to as *immersion*. Texts were constructed for each participant from the interview transcripts, field notes, and written exercises that were collated into disciplinary subgroups (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

During the first step, *immersion*, I read the interview transcripts, field notes, and reflective journals and listened to the audio taped interviews repeatedly to gain familiarity with the text set and to obtain a holistic view of the breadth (Patton, 2002); thus, I became fully immersed with the data (van Manen, 1997). Immersion is important for the researcher in order to obtain a *sense* or a preliminary interpretation of the data to facilitate coding. At the same time I was able to inductively build concepts and themes through comparison, connection, and integration (Creswell, 2003). From the reflective journals and field notes written, along with the synthesis of the data, the analysis progressed (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). By placing all those concepts and themes together and analyzing them, I was able to attach meanings in the process (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). It was also through immersion that a dialogue between the participants and the researcher was developed. Dialogues served as a vehicle for reflection on emerging insight and for the expansion of those ideas. Such dialogue was useful for providing perspectives, considering other disagreements, and diligence in the data inquiry (Barbour, 2001).

The second step, *understanding*, required thorough knowledge of the participants' lived experiences to be able to identify their exact words and phrases (also known as first-order constructs). These constructs related to the research questions associated with empowering female senior leaders that involved describing, explaining, understanding,

and interpreting meanings ascribed to those significant events. I coded these constructs using NVivo 9 software as a tool, and connections between first order constructs were identified. Probing questions, as a form of iterative member checking were reviewed to provide a richer and deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences.

The third step, *abstraction*, dealt with identifying and grouping of my own understanding, interpretations, and constructs also known as (second order constructs), to create sub-themes (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 624). Files were generated for each second order construct to facilitate clear organization of all relevant extracts from the transcript. A file for each second order construct was generated by copying into that file all the relevant extracts. Any second order constructs found identical to an existing one was simply copied into the existing file. I developed a composite data set for each sub-group to facilitate understanding participant data and determining whether similarities existed between those groups. I found this method useful as well as necessary at the third stage to enable responding to the research questions (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

The fourth step, *synthesis*, was mainly grouping sub-themes into themes through constant reading and re-reading of the data. As van Manen (1997) stated, "In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme the concern is to discover aspects that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (p. 107). This process helped in elaborating themes and subthemes and clarifying their relationships. In order to understand the text holistically, the whole text was referenced to the individual parts and vice versa; thus, illustrating how to understand hermeneutics. The

in-depth interpretation formulated helped me in seeking meanings that participants were unable to express.

The fifth step, *illuminating and illustrating*, allowed examination of the literature in order to discover connections to the themes and sub-themes as well as to the main themes identified from the whole data to sustain the conceptual development. Finally, the sixth step, *integration*, I dealt with testing and refining themes along with undergoing a final review of the literature to determine if there were major improvements that could alter or influence my understanding of the phenomenon before the final interpretation of the research findings. First order constructs were reconstructed based on the themes and subthemes and their interrelationships to allow the major findings from the data to stand out (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The data collected and the resulting structures of analysis wrapped during the formal in-depth interviews provided me the groundwork for the data analysis as well as the conceptual and nonacademic themes.

### **Establishing Rigor, Credibility, and Trustworthiness**

There have been lingering questions by positivists regarding the trustworthiness of qualitative research; perhaps, because it is impossible to address their concepts of validity and reliability in the same manner naturalists do (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Eisner (1991) and Patton (1990) argued the credibility of a qualitative research report relies on the confidence readers have in the researcher's ability to be sensitive to the data and to make appropriate decisions in the field. Many naturalistic investigators have chosen to employ different terminology to dissociate themselves from the positivist paradigm. Guba, for instance, proposed four criteria in pursuit of a trustworthy study: (a)

“credibility (in preference to internal validity), (b) transferability (in preference to external validity/generalization, (c) dependability (in preference to reliability), and (d) confirmability (in preference to objectivity)” (as cited in Shenton, 2004, p. 64) to ensure quality in qualitative research. Shenton (2004) and Ryan and Bernard (2000) maintained these four criteria must be congruent with the philosophical and methodological assumptions on which the research is based.

Several strategies were identified in the literature as rigor enhancers in interpretive research, including consistency between the adopted paradigm and chosen methods, prolonged engagement with the participants and the phenomena, multiple methods of data collection, and auditable records (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). To ensure the trustworthiness and credibility, I used data triangulation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Shenton, 2004), which means various methods such as in-depth interviews, gestural observation, document examination, member checking, iterative questioning [probing], debriefing, and writing reflective journals were utilized (Shenton, 2004).

Before the commencement of this study, I needed to gather as much background information as possible about each participant and her institution. Personal CVs that were accessible through the Internet, or hard copies provided by each participant seemed appropriate. Document examination helped elucidate the attitudes and behavior of those in the group under investigation, and it facilitated as well the verification of specific details supplied by the participants.

Data triangulation was helpful in contrasting and validating the data to determine if it yielded similar findings (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Holloway, 1997). Member

checking was as well employed. The main emphasis focused on whether the interviewing partners said what they really intended to say or whether their words matched what they actually meant to say. Because a tape recorder was used, all these articulations were expected to have been accurately captured (Shenton, 2004). To this end, it took approximately 15 minutes for each participant to engage in a member check to bolster the study's credibility. Data analysis results were subject to member cross-checking whereby the researcher asked the interviewing partners to thoroughly read transcripts for accuracy and consistency. Informants were asked to read any transcripts of dialogues in the course of, and at the end of the data collection dialogues in which they had participated to determine if their words coincided with their intended meaning. Another element of member checking included the verification of the emerging theories and inferences formed during the dialogues (Shenton, 2004).

As part of the data collection process, I observed participants' facial expressions along with the hand and body movements to check against the subjective reporting of what participants believe and do. Through gestural observation, I was able to uncover factors important for a thorough understanding of the research problem that were unknown at the outset or prior to designing the study.

Although participant selection was purposive, the researcher considered a wider range of informants; thereby different viewpoints and experiences could be verified against each other. There were some essential tactics used to ensure honesty responses from participants. Participants were not only encouraged to be candid from the outset of each session but were also asked to focus on questions that may seem important,

meaningful, and interesting to them. Participants could also “contribute ideas and talk of their experiences without fear of losing credibility from the organizations they represent” (Shenton, 2004, p. 67). Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point, without disclosing any explanation to the investigator.

Iterative questioning was another preventive strategy to uncover deliberate lies, which included the use of probes to elicit detailed data. Iterative questioning was used to return to matters previously raised by an informant and to extract related data through rephrased questions. This method allowed me to decide whether there was a need to discard the data because “falsehoods emerged or were detected” (Shenton, 2004, p. 67).

Holding frequent debriefing sessions with my dissertation chair and committee member was not only important but was also necessary. Through discussion, my vision was broadened (Shenton, 2004). These frequent meetings also served as a “sounding board” (p. 67) for me “to test the developing ideas and interpretations” (p. 67). This process helped me to recognize my “biases and preferences” (p. 67). These collaborative efforts facilitated discussion of alternative approaches to draw attention to flaws in the proposed course of action (Shenton, 2004).

Another useful method this study employed was the researcher’s reflective commentary. “The portion of the commentary that deals with evolving patterns and theories should inform that section of the research report addressing the study’s findings which may be based on the researcher’s methods analysis within the reflective commentary” (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). Reflective commentary is useful in recording the researcher’s first impressions of each data collection session and patterns appearing to

emerge in the data collected and theories generated (Shenton, 2004). I employed reflective commentary to facilitate identifying themes in the data and noting similarities and differences among the participants' responses.

To verify the my credibility, it was important to examine my own background, qualifications, and experience, being the primary instrument in this study's data collection. Therefore, the CV was attached (see Appendix H). As Patton (2002) explained, the scrutineer's trust in the researcher is of equal significance to the adequacy of the procedures themselves. Patton (2002) made it clear that even those funding arrangements received by investigators must be disclosed and made explicit along with all the access approvals in gaining entry to collect data (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability, dependability, and confirmability are central to establishing rigor in qualitative studies. Transferability of a qualitative study is to ensure sufficient contextual information about the fieldwork sites is supplied to enable the reader to transfer the work considering the richness of information provided (Shenton, 2004). Dependability in quantitative studies refers to its repeatability—showing that the work can be repeated obtaining the same results by employing similar methods and the same participants (Shenton, 2004). I addressed issues more directly by reporting the processes in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily gaining identical results (Shenton, 2004).

The concept of confirmability entailed the role of triangulation and the reduction of effect of the researcher's bias and the audit trail, which “allows any observer to trace the course of the research step-by-step via the decisions made and procedures described”

(Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Miles and Huberman (1994) considered a key criterion for confirmability the extent to which the researcher admits his or her own predispositions (p. 65). In this study, I did not bracket my ideas as they are entrenched and were vital in the interpretive process (Laverty, 2003). Moreover, the overt naming of these assumptions was as well necessary to the research process.

### **Conclusion**

An interpretative paradigm using van Manen's (1997) hermeneutic phenomenological methodology was employed in this study. Multiple methods of data collection were utilized encompassing in-depth interviews, observation, document examination, iterative questioning, member checks, debriefing, and reflective commentary. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and field notes were expanded as quickly as possible. Interviews, field notes, and written documents collected from interviewing partners comprised the texts that were used for data analysis. For data analysis, Titchen thematic analysis model informed by Titchen and colleagues along with the hermeneutic circle (Edward & Titchen, 2003; Titchen & McIntyre, 1993) were applied. Strict and proper observance of those ethical considerations in the researcher's role in data collection constituted the moral issues that were central in this study.

This study focused on the description of female senior leaders' lived experiences that surrounded their career paths. It also focused on an array of professional barriers participants encountered as they progressed through the ranks. Hermeneutic phenomenology proved to fit the methodology of this study especially in analyzing its data because, as van Manen (1997) stated, the aim of phenomenological data analysis is

“to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful” (p. 36). To this end, the engagement I had with the participants during the data collection process facilitated careful reflection of my own experiences as a school director.

This study may be an invaluable addition to the body of knowledge aligned with learning to rationalize and to communicate reasoning why female senior leaders needed to become empowered to help reduce if not to eliminate the number of women marginalized in higher education. The study’s implications for practice could involve implementation of powerful and effective ways to empower women to establish gender equity in higher education (Hur, 2006). This research strategy may enable other researchers to engage in their own learning journey toward a more profound understanding of the phenomenon investigated, the strategies adopted, and themselves.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to describe the significant events and lived experiences of female senior leaders in higher education and to understand how these experiences may have defined and shaped these women's careers. I fulfilled this purpose by analyzing the data to identify patterns, themes, attitudes, insights, and unique perspectives. Phenomenology, as a paradigm, captured this information-rich description of the lived experiences and significant events.

### **Participants in the Study**

Through this qualitative phenomenological study I explored and chronicled the lived experiences of eight female senior leaders in 4-year public and private colleges and universities in a chosen U.S. state. These participants had served in executive positions for at least 3 years, were tenured, and possessed sound academic credentials with an earned doctorate. Table 4 shows the demographic characteristics of each of the participants.

Table 4

*Participants' Demographic Overview*

Participants	Highest Degree Earned	Marital Status	Years in Current Position	Current Administration Position	Years in Senior Leadership	Current Position Security
Participant 1	EdD	Married	1	Senior Vice President Administration	9	Tenured
Participant 2	JD	Married	4	Dean, School of Professional Studies	13	Tenured
Participant 3	PhD	Married	1	Director of Global Studies	17	Tenured
Participant 4	EdD	Married	13	Dean, School of Education	26	Tenured
Participant 5	PhD	Married	4	Provost, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs	8	Tenured
Participant 6	PhD	Single	7	Dean, Research & Graduate Studies Senior Fellow	13	Tenured
Participant 7	EdD	Married	10	Dean, Continuing Education	27	Tenured
Participant 8	PhD	Married	13	Dean & Vice President of Student Affairs	24	Tenured

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

### **Data Collection**

Formal face-to-face, in-depth interviews that involved a series of open-ended questions (see Appendix G) were used to elucidate the participants' views and to identify shared experiences, patterns, and emerging themes (Law et al., 1998). Interviews in the hermeneutic phenomenology paradigm were used as a means for exploring and gathering narratives (or stories) of lived experiences and as a vehicle to develop a conversational relationship with the participants (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

Gestural observation took place simultaneously with the interview to check the data obtained against participants' subjective reporting of what they believe and do. I looked for emotional indicators such as crying, laughing, giggling, screaming, and frowning (Ekman, 2007). Bodily movements and expressions are forms of nonverbal communications that provide 60% to 70% meanings from nonverbal behaviors (Ekman, 2007). Gestural observation in terms of nonverbal communications can also be vital for obtaining a more profound shared meaning "in which both the interviewer and the interviewee increase their awareness of the contextual nature of the voice" (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010, p. 696). Indeed, facial expressions and hand gestures may clarify the meaning of words spoken, and words clarify the meaning of body languages (Kelly, Barr, Church, & Lynch, 1999, as cited in Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010).

I used multiple methods and sources of data to provide rich, deep data and reduce systematic bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a). Iterative questioning in the form of probing

questions was used throughout each interview. Document examination was done by reviewing the CV of every participant prior and/or during the interview process. Examining participants' curricula vitae enabled me to obtain updated information regarding participants' professional career paths and affiliations with the various institutions.

To ensure data quality, data triangulation was employed. I wrote reflective journals to facilitate reflexivity and to clarify my belief systems and subjectivities (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 695). This study employed member checking to allow participants to review the data and interpretations for appropriateness and accuracy (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Debriefing was necessary "to explore inquiry aspects that might otherwise remain only implicit and to uncover taken for granted ideas, perspectives and assumptions on the researcher's part" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). I used peer debriefing on numerous occasions throughout the research process to check the authenticity and/or credibility while ensuring rigor in the data (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002).

Transcribed data were reviewed and edited to eliminate extraneous information such as incoherent responses and unnecessary commentaries deemed irrelevant to the research questions (Creswell, 2005). Each of the participants received two versions of the transcripts: verbatim and edited. Participants were asked to carefully review and check both transcripts for accuracy and consistency purposes and to alter any sentence that may appear incongruent to the participant's intended meaning. The interviews ranged from 78 minutes to 120 minutes, averaging 81 minutes.

I took field notes during the interviews, and expanded them within 48 hours to vividly recall all the laughter, nuances, and sighs manifested during the interview. With gestural observation, a deeper understanding and a general flavor of the participants' lived experiences were obtained from the interviews. Participants' facial expressions as well as their hand and body gestures were observed and described in terms of how they relayed messages and/or clues regarding participants' state of mind (Tarnow, 1997).

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

I used NVivo 9 software to help identify and group categories from the in-depth interviews. The process involved automated coding to organize major ideas and themes into nodes that enabled me to see all the pieces of information recapitulated under a theme. Subsequent phases involved reading every word of the data to further refine coding and highlight key points along with merging nodes into broader themes. With the use of NVivo 9 software as a tool, I explored trends, themes, and answers to the research questions. The final interpretation and analysis reduced the data into four categories relating to the overarching research question and three related subquestions in the study.

This study employed manual coding as well for each of the interviews. Akin to NVivo 9, manual coding helped to manage the data and explore the interview transcripts for emerging themes and patterns, along with the key words representing each of the categories derived from the interviews. The participants' emerging thoughts were documented in the form of memos linked to the relevant portion of the text in NVivo. During repeated readings of each participant's transcript, I recognized key words and phrases, leading to the identification of four major thematic constructs. Manual coding

ensured the consistency and reliability of codes. The final coding scheme resulted from an iterative list of codes (Bell, 2010). Table 5 illustrates the four emerging themes and ten subthemes for this study.

Table 5

*Emerging Categories and Themes*

Major categories	Related themes
Career paths	Professional and personal barriers/strategies to overcome challenges Role of intentionality and serendipity in success
Career mobility resources	Mentoring strategies Preparing aspiring leaders (mentoring suggestions) Support groups and involvement needed
Political empowerment in higher education	Empowering female leadership qualities and impact Political savviness Changes needed in 21st century leadership
Gender equity inclusion	Role of gender in career path Strategies to reduce gender gap in higher education leadership

### **Results and Findings**

The following sections describe the interviews that relate to each of the key themes using the interview questions and examples of participants' responses. Key words within the sets of texts were identified with the use of content analysis. Words that appeared more than five times were coded automatically by NVivo 9 software. These words were then grouped into one of the four major categories related to the overarching research question and three subquestions of the study.

### **Responses to Research Question 1**

Participants were asked to answer the first three interview questions consistent with Research Question 1, “What are the perceived barriers, if any, that female senior leaders faced while trying to advance their careers as well as maintain their leadership roles in higher education?”

**Interview Question 1.** *As a female senior leader, how did you advance and succeed in obtaining the leadership position that you have right now? What made you pursue a senior level position in higher education? Can you fully describe the different paths you have pursued while moving up and their impact to your professional career?*

As Davis (2008) described, there is no structural focus on leadership and so, what most colleges do is first seduce someone into becoming a department chair, then a dean, then a provost or a vice president of academic affairs, and eventually a president (p. A64). Table 6 details the participants’ career paths for their most recent three leadership positions held.

Table 6

*Career Paths: Traditional*

Participant	Last three positions held
P1	Senior vice president, administration Associate provost of academic support and administration Assistant vice president of academic affairs
P2	Dean, school of professional studies Executive director for accrediting commission Associate provost
P3	Director of global studies Assistant chair, department of management Vice president & executive product manager
P4	Dean, school of education Dean, school of liberal arts and education Board chair for achievement first
P5	Provost and senior vice president for academic affairs Dean, college of humanities and social sciences Associate dean, college of arts and sciences
P6	Dean, research and graduate studies senior fellow Acting dean, research and graduate studies Director, research initiative for science enhancement program
P7	Dean, continuing education Director, adult education, grants, and public contracts Director, office of adult education and workforce development
P8	Vice president and dean for student affairs Program head elementary education Special assistant to the president/faculty intern

All eight female senior leaders pursued a traditional career path even though two of them (P2 and P3) had nonacademic backgrounds. P2 has a J.D. degree specializing in law and psychiatry while P3 holds a Ph.D. with specialization in international economics.

Initially, they were all instructors, chairs, assistant chairs, acting deans, interim deans, directors, associate deans; then they successfully advanced in their professional career either through promotion due to good performance, hard work, and/or serendipity. The traditional career archetype has served as the background for most career research, because it stresses long-term employment along with an expansive career commitment.

The following excerpts from participants' interviews represent narratives of how these female senior leaders advanced in their careers and landed in the positions they currently hold.

P1 explained serendipity was a major factor for her career path, which started at a college in New Jersey in a junior position after she received her bachelor's degree. She continued to move into higher-level positions over the course of several years and eventually ended up being the director of administration and finance.

Then, I became the director of a state college, which I had done for several years. I was here 8 months in a job I had taken just to be closer to home, and within 8 months they moved me up to chief operating officer and from there, associate provost and later, assistant vice president and currently, senior vice president, administration.

P2 articulated her experiences as a nonacademic leader who had been extremely successful in her career. She followed a traditional path, moving up the ranks from a tenure-track teaching position.

I started as an assistant professor in health services, and my specialty is healthcare law. And after several years in the position, I took my turn as a department chair.

I got tenured and was promoted to associate professor then the college president asked me if I would be willing to serve as the interim acting dean. So, that is how I got involved in my position as an academic dean. I served in that position for several years. I was the associate provost at [the university] when I applied for the job with [an accrediting organization]. When my contract [with the accrediting organization] was up, I was really lucky to get hired by [my current university] as dean of professional studies.

P4 started her career path working in a public school system in Florida, where she had earned her bachelor's degree.

I have to say that experience...was absolutely instrumental in how I look at my work now and what the pathway was. I came back to New York after that Miami experience to finish up my doctorate at Columbia Teachers College while I was doing adjunct teaching at this city college. I ended up staying for almost 15 years. So, my path started there.

P7 took a more traditional path in route to leadership, starting out in a faculty position doing teacher training. After P7 began assuming increasingly more nonteaching roles, she moved into administrative positions.

I began to do grant writing, and I was very good at it. I started to do program development and decided that I like to create things...and so that sort of became the path. And, rather than staying on the faculty side, I moved off into continuing education administration. After I made that decision, it was a fairly straight path and I sort of moved up within the context of Continuing Education (CE). First,

being coordinator, then a manager, then a director, then I left from being a director of CE in another college to the deanship here. So, that was fairly straightforward.

P7 moved up in her career slowly but smoothly, although her qualifications seemed quite irrelevant for what the job requires.

**Interview Question 2.** *While obtaining your present leadership position, have you stumbled upon any professional barriers that may have hindered or delayed your mobility journey? If so what stumbling blocks have you encountered? How did those barriers affect your professional career and what strategies have you employed to overcome them? If not, with what would you attribute this to?*

Participants indicated structures of some colleges and universities still vividly reflect great man and trait theories, paternalism, and the old boy's club network that cannot be shaken off. P8 recalled some gender stereotyping in the workplace and said, "I mean, I guess I can go back, and I can count the number of times that I've been told, 'Oh my God, you're going to take that person's position? Oh, you really have some big shoes to fill.' Or, I even heard someone say, 'You are a smart woman!'" P2 affirmed, "There is no doubt there is under-representation in higher education in women, particularly in senior management positions." Wisker (1996) pertinently argued, "women are under-represented in higher and middle management positions in higher education, even in the current postfeminist climate when many people claim there is no need to assert that equality must continue to be striven for" (p. 90). It is not discrimination, but equality, that lies on robust democratic beliefs (Mathipa & Tsoka, 2001). Historically, women have

frequently been kept out from the academy, particularly in higher professorial ranks (Stewart, Ornstein, & Drakich, 2009). These impediments are detailed in Table 7 below.

Table 7

*Stumbling Blocks Female Leaders Faced in Career Advancement*

Barrier type	Barrier	# of responses out of eight participants
Professional	Gender issues	5
	Colleagues	3
	Time and overload	4
	Double standard policy—salary gap	4
	Lack of support	4
	Bureaucracy and politics	2
	No professional barriers	2
	Lack of budget	1
	Unavailable budget	1
Personal	Family issues and time	4
	Naiveté	2
	Implicit barriers	2
	Internal standards	1
Competitive	Politics	1

Even though women completed their PhDs at the same time as their male peers, women were often underrepresented in faculty considered for tenure and less likely to be tenured when compared to their male counterparts (Harris, 2009; West & Curtis, 2006; and Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2009).

What could be the best strategy to reduce, if not completely eliminate, this salary gap is to learn how to negotiate salaries in a more aggressive yet tactful tone after studying the situation. As P5 shared, “Women have a very hard time—I had a talk last year on negotiating your worth. There are strategies to use and women tend to be very bad.” And they do not have confidence in their own worth. P5 asserted, “You are hiring

me to be an associate provost; you are not paying me as an English professor. I have to get paid as an associate provost! And I know the market! That's the way it is. Women tend to settle for too little. I think, for women, this is important." All the participants expressed various types of barriers that obstructed their career paths and advancements: professional, personal, and competitive. Some of the professional barriers are workplace bullies, bureaucracy, balancing career and family, unsupportive bosses, and lack of budget and time, as well as racial discrimination and stereotyping. Personal barriers ranged from internal standards to family time issues.

To balance family over career while moving up the ladder appeared to be a challenge for female leaders. Between P2 and P7, the most striking difference was the kind of family support obtained from their husbands. P2 received the full support of her husband, in contrast with P7, whose husband was unavailable, inaccessible, and unsupportive during the crucial stage in her career.

The following comments from participants provide examples of the types of barriers they encountered:

P1: "We have a bully at this College. A college bully who really did everything she could do to sabotage me from the work that I had done—to attempt to destroy the relationships I had built and worked hard to build."

P2: "I'm thinking about my career before academia in other environments. I think I felt more blocking, because, I was not a traditional academician. About personal barriers, I think there always are issues of time." Apart from P2's difficulty in balancing

her career and family life, she felt as well that her nonacademic career poses a stumbling block in her career advancement although she was extremely successful as a Dean.

P3: “Okay, I think there are two types of what you call...barriers. One is I think are natural business barriers, and the other is what I call competitive barriers.”

She described competitive barriers as follows:

So, as you go up the ladder, I think those competitive barriers, rather pressure increases. Along with them, I think politics increases. The second one I think is a real barrier—is actually time. I would consider time as a professional barrier.

P4 noted: “The stumbling block that I’ve encountered basically is bureaucracy. I mean if anything holds you back in this, it is bureaucracy and the overly regulated teacher preparation in this [State]”

P5 emphasized the importance of balancing work and family in discussing barriers as she perceived them along with some implicit barriers.

I think it’s a real issue. But I always wanted that, and I fully believe that it was compatible. Why is it compatible for men but not compatible for women? I needed to do the work that had to be done in a way that was of quality while also balanced it with my family. I’m finding that there are more implicit barriers than I admitted to myself early on. Part of the reason I didn’t admit early on is that I always had the personality that I didn’t care.

P5 knew balancing work and family would pose a barrier, but she did not anticipate or think the same way for implicit barriers until recently.

Because P7's department is distinct from other deans' departments, she responded to this question quite differently:

Yes, it's continuing education, so we don't get a budget. I work in continuing education within this university in a very entrepreneurial way. We are supported, my salary is supported by the college, but every, all of the 50 other people that you see working around here are paid by monies we have to raise ourselves, either by tuition, grants, and contracts. So, that if I need \$6 million to run this office, I have to bring in \$6 million to run the office.

Coming from a different background and ethnicity, P8 knew from the very start she would have difficulty as she moved up in her career. To come from a different background and ethnicity and to adapt to a new working environment was challenging. She felt she had been a victim of gender bias in the workplace for two reasons: stereotyped remarks made in the workplace and being hired as a junior employee regardless of her credentials and work experience. She persevered and completed her PhD. With her new title and expertise, she felt ready to pursue new opportunities. Table 8 below details the different strategies employed by the participants in this study.

Table 8

*Overcoming Barriers*

Strategies Employed	Number of Responses
Be realistic	8
Build connections and/or relationships	5
Family and friends' support like mentoring	4
Working hard	4
Prioritizing family over career	3
Negotiation	3
Patience and perseverance	3
Religious faith	2
Choosing people to work with	2
Acquiring skills—doctoral degree	1
Being a pacifist/follow the golden rule	1
Setting personal boundaries	1
Exercising intolerance	1

The following is from the process notes and interviews that support the notion of overcoming barriers.

P1 addressed the topics of being firm and intolerant of inappropriate workplace behavior: “I called her in and I said, ‘Ok, here is the deal. You now work for the person who works for me. Do not do what you do anymore because I am not going to tolerate it; and if I see you doing the same thing to others, I will put an immediate halt to it.’ ”

The participant further explained:

I find that I don't attack back and what I do is just continue to do my work. I always find that people that are not nice like that, something will always happen to them. Somebody is watching over, and I am a firm believer, and those people will be taken care of. I exercise intolerance, and I closely observe them and I talk to them straight.

P3 identified politics as being an issue, and noted that doing the right thing pays off. “Politics, as I said, starts coming in much later, at least in my experience. I didn’t quite sense it; now I realize you need people to protect you, to root for you, and to know you.” She continued:

I think I am more comfortable with doing what you need to do with your own and do the best that you can do with your job, and the second, is the golden rule.

Don’t go around trying to manipulate it, because it doesn’t get anywhere. So, I am much more prone to being a pacifist. I believe in the golden rule, which is never, ever to speak ill of anybody.

P4 indicated persistence and patience are important for women in university leadership roles.

Sometimes your journey to where you want to go is blocked by things that are out of your control. It is because of the faculty governance. If the faculty members don’t support it, you still have to keep trying to find another way.

P5 had this to share: “Once I had children, I said, ‘I used to do a lot of my scholarship on the weekends.’ I’ve always had to set up boundaries.” Work/personal life balance was identified by P5 as being important.

Have a life that makes you happy outside of work. Again, it could be any kind of life that makes you happy, because you have to have a way to balance the two.

P5 emphasized not only the need but also the importance to find balance between career and family and to satisfy both personal needs and professional goals.

P8 found that expanding her skill set helped remove barriers:

I would say that I did it through education, advancing myself in terms of my education experience. So, I think going on for a doctorate was very helpful advancing my career by taking Ph.D. in environmental developmental psychology. I was patient and never gave up.

**Interview Question 3.** *As a female senior leader, do you think there is any lack of intentionality affecting women's desire in career advancement? Would you consider serendipity (chance events) to play a role in women's career paths by altogether altering their perspectives? Please elaborate.*

All the participants—except P6 who never intended to become an administrator, let alone a senior administrator—considered intentionality a key factor in their career advancement. P6 said she held executive leadership positions only because it felt like she could help the institution and the students and make a difference. P4 had been thinking about leadership in her high school days. P5 had presidential aspirations after reading a recommendation letter that noted she had the ability to become a college president. P7 said that the economy enhanced her intentionality.

As far as serendipity is concerned, each of the participants found her career path serendipitous in distinct ways. Being at the right place and at the right time serves as the most popular definition of serendipity; however, P5 looked at serendipity in a more sophisticated way stating, “Luck is when opportunity meets experience or preparation, and serendipity is the ability to recognize an opportunity when it's there.” P3 indicated

serendipity does not just occur, but rather it is more intentional. Table 9 illustrates participants' views about serendipity.

Table 9

*Role of Serendipity in Career Success*

Serendipity in Career Success	# of responses
Serendipity plays a role in everything	8
Being in the right place at the right time [serendipity is unpredictable]	7
Serendipity is set up	5
Combination of luck and brains	3
Serendipity follows and changes path	2
Serendipity builds its force	2

The following detailed statements from the interviews support this idea of serendipity in career success:

P1 approached the issue with training that focuses on planning and experiences supporting the idea of lucky circumstances.

I think it's both. I am a graduate HERS of their Wellesley class, and when you are there, you are forced to draw a career path; you are forced. So you know you have to have a path and you have that intention to get to these next steps; however, I have been in these places, and I do believe in serendipity. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time a number of times in my career that's been how it worked. So, yes it's been a combination of luck and brains.

P2 opined female leaders lack intentionality because they fear rejection. Rejection may be due to lack of confidence in their backgrounds, their skills, and their abilities;

inadequate work experience for the position; or insufficient publications. P2 shared, “Ok. I think why some women and minorities suffer from this as well as racial and ethnic minorities suffer, is that sometimes they are afraid to try, because they’re afraid they will be turned down.”

One of the probing questions I asked regarding inadequate credentials was, “Do you think women who lack the necessary credentials will ever envision being a vice president or a top executive?” In response P2 pointed to the so-called we/they gap in higher education:

There is still this we/they gap between the administrators and the teaching faculty. They will still refer to administrators as suites, because they are up on the eighth floor or down on the first floor or over in the other building, the administration building. It’s still so we/they. A lot of that has to do with the way faculty view their work, and also the way that administrators treat faculty. It’s actually more of the rule than the exception.

P2, in terms of serendipity, noted that it is primarily an issue of being in the right place at the right time.

My first job in academia began after several years as a stay at home mother. My husband and I were at a dinner party, and one of the guests was the chairman of a department that was hiring faculty. He asked me to apply for a position and the rest was history.

P3 said she did not see serendipity as something that was completely built on the notion of chance.

I think serendipity is also set up. It is one of those things that builds its force. So there was a general sense of accomplishment and focus. And people had a very positive sense about what I can do, my leadership skills, or collaborative skills, or team spirit. No one thinks about it, and it's not done from a strategic perspective; it is just a mention of somebody you know and it sticks in someone. That could be serendipity.

Unlike P1 and P2, P3 would not associate serendipity with luck as she indicated that she knew the college's culture. She had been there for a while and there were other forces that may have played an important role. She had taken a different approach—a business strategy to generate some revenue for the college and at the same time attract students from abroad. As the director for global studies, she wanted to create an opportunity for the college to resonate the terms global institution; hence, she had taken the strategic management approach.

P2 and P5 were both critical of women leaders in general who are hesitant to put themselves forward for fear of rejection. In fact, P5 would perceive that gesture as a lack of intentionality. P5 differentiated male leaders from female leaders in the sense that male leaders seem daring and are ready to do and to risk everything. In contrast, women prefer knowing everything first. If there were teachable and learnable moments, then serendipity would have taken place because no one can predict its occurrence.

As far as P8 was concerned, intentionality plays a small role, but serendipity plays a significant one, and it led to her current position. She described going to college as serendipitous because had it not been for a friend and had it not been for being at the right

place at the right time, she would have lost that opportunity. P8 recalled in high school when her friend came to reveal to her that she just broken up with her boyfriend. Because of this emotional dilemma, she became so upset and depressed that she intended to leave the country to become a nun or join a missionary.

And so, she asked if I did want to take a spot that she had at a special program in the [city university] that was College Discovery. And so, she says, “I can’t go, but I think that you [referring to the College Counselor] only had one slot. But since I’m not going to use it; I want her to use it.” And so, the counselor who kind of knew me a little bit; took down my name and everything and put me into the program. That was how I got into college. And so, that was serendipity I think.

## **Responses to Research Question 2**

To answer the second research question, all the participants were asked to respond to the three interview questions classified as subquestions that relate to Research Question 2, “What mentoring and other support strategies, if any, do female leaders in higher education provide other women seeking leadership positions?”

**Interview Question 4.** *What important career mobility resources did you obtain while climbing the ladder? Were these resources accessible at the time, or did you have difficulty attaining them? Would you consider inadequate mentoring strategies to critically affect those aspiring female leaders for top leadership positions? Please elaborate.*

Formal mentoring was not available and/or accessible in most public and private city colleges and universities, as six of the eight participants in this study maintained.

Five of the eight participants attended formal leadership training outside their campuses. They attended programs such as Higher Education Research Services (HERS), ACE, or Harvard Management Institutions. Two participants considered their mentoring experience extremely beneficial. They picked up a large volume of valuable information not only about mentoring, but for networking as well.

Those who attended formal mentoring found their experience satisfying and productive. P1 articulated:

There is no other program with so many women who are senior leaders to begin with. They bring in presidential panels and speakers and so forth. They give you exposure to so many different people. The networking is incredible. In fact, I graduated from HERS.

P4 stated that she got to participate in the networking and the mentoring that occurs within that same group.

Two of the eight participants attended Harvard Management Institute, and they were comfortable with the institute as it was not exclusively for women leaders. Neither of them had chosen to get involved at Harvard for personal reasons. P2 never intended to vie for president, and P8 had issues with time. Meanwhile, two of the eight participants who obtained neither formal nor informal mentoring instead devised their own strategies based on their strengths. P6 said by knowing the system well, she was able to get things done and succeeded in cultivating relationships.

In addition to formal mentoring from leadership training institutions, the same group of participants also obtained informal mentoring from colleagues, dean's groups,

community members, very close friends, and other top leaders. Meanwhile, three participants in this study did not get any formal mentoring. P7 who was informally mentored by a former boss said she obtained bad mentoring from him as well, which she simply dismissed. P3 was not offered any opportunity to attend formal training, and P6 decided not to go for personal reasons. P7 had chosen not to attend because of her very demanding work schedule and concern that her absence would have compromised her position as a dean. Table 10 below illustrates the amount of career mobility support received by the participants in this study.

Table 10

*Career Mobility Resources - Mentoring Strategies*

Support	Description	# of responses
Mentoring	No mentoring or inadequate mentoring in city universities	6
	Obtained formal mentoring from HERS, ACE, Harvard	5
	Obtained both formal and informal mentoring	5
	Received bad mentoring	4
	Received no mentoring at all	2
	Received very little mentoring	1
Networking	Exposed to networking opportunities	5
	No exposure to networking	3

The following detailed statements from the interviews support this idea of mentoring strategies. P1 described her mentoring and networking experiences as follows: “You know I think that mentoring and networking are two of the most important things that you could have in Higher Education.” P1 said she found it interesting for mentoring groups to bring in headhunters who will look at participants’ CV. “I have met so many great people, and they’ll call you. You know those types of telephone calls are the ones

you want to have for the rest of your life.” P1 also found the provost and president of the college where she works to be good mentors. “Their thought is – we are not preparing you for a presidency here at this college; we are preparing you for a presidency anywhere.”

P1 indicated she has learned as much from bad mentoring, as she has from good mentoring. “I have just seen some really bad despicable people that you just say to yourself, ‘If I can ever get out of this then I will be a better leader and a better mentor,’ because this person is ridiculous.” P1 said she believes people learn from those around them, whether they are good or bad.

P2, in contrast with P1, did not receive any formal mentoring from HERS, but she attended Harvard Leadership Management and expressed her ambivalence regarding the role of mentoring. “I guess for mentoring the person I rely on most heavily for advice has been my husband. He’s been my greatest mentor; he’s been very supportive, and I’ve been very blessed to have somebody like him.” Beyond having her husband’s support, P2 did not reach out to other women much; she did, however, participate in conferral among deans at her university. “We help each other out to serve as sounding boards for each other's issues. We get advice from each other when we have particularly thorny or prickly issues that we need to deal with.”

P3 responded to Question 4 much differently, stating she did not obtain any type of mentoring from anyone. “I don’t think I had any career mobility resources given to me. I don’t even remember asking for it.” P3 said she considers time the greatest resource she can receive. “One of the things that I was very lucky was that my management

basically said I'm going to leave you alone, you do whatever you need to do...it's like giving you rope to hang yourself, or they are trusting you."

P4, akin to P1, enjoyed attending the HERS mentoring leadership. Both participants had very positive, encouraging experiences from HERS because of the numerous leadership development opportunities afforded to them. P4 shared, "I went to HERS, which is a wonderful experience for any woman. I got to participate in the networking and the mentoring that occurs within that group." P4 said she believed sending people to leadership institutes is the only form of mentoring her university offers female leaders. She said the point at which she considers this form of mentoring inadequate is when people invite institute attendees to call any time, but then they're too busy to walk through the problem if called upon.

P5, who attended HERS and ACE, thought she was lucky in terms of people who wanted to provide her mentoring. Most of these informal mentors were friends who have a lot to offer. P7 had a more formal mentoring experience.

P7: So, my first boss was male. He was very, very supportive and insisted that I continue in graduate school; even though I was working full-time and I had two kids, a husband, and a house, etc. This boss was very supportive and pushed me to keep doing it, reminding me that if I wanted to work within a university, a doctorate degree is important. So, he was a good mentor in terms of encouraging me. I learned a lot of bad habits from him as well, which I had to ignore.

P8 had attended the Harvard Management Institute. She said she found having mentors very important. "I had mentors of different backgrounds, which is really

important too, because the mentors that are sort of people that I grew up with in my community, clearly had one vision.”

**Question 5.** *If there were one mentoring suggestion you can provide to ensure success for a female seeking top-level leaders, what would it be? Please explain.*

Six of the eight participants said knowing the institutions’ culture and politics will make a leader successful. Four of the eight participants strongly recommended HERS as it is inclusive; although P8 noted it is a gender-based mentoring organization. Another five of the eight participants considered networking and building relationships as critical in achieving leadership success. The table below enumerates those mentoring suggestions.

Table 11

*Career Mobility Resources - Mentoring Suggestions*

Preparing aspiring female leaders	# of responses
Know the institutions culture, structure, and politics	6
Connect with people and create relationships	5
Create opportunities for networking and people	5
Attend mentoring leadership institutions [HERS, ACE, Harvard]	4
Know what you need before getting a mentor/do your homework	3
Have a mentor	2
Be supportive of working students and moms	1
Consider a president’s position	1

P4 encouraged leaders to consider a president’s position if they have been in an executive position long enough. This perspective coincides with Jenifer’s (2005) study on

mentoring, which posited the next generation of college presidents would be bold leaders who understand and appreciate research mission and structure of 4-year colleges. The following quotes from the interviews support this idea:

P1 said the HERS program provides participants with exposure to a diverse group of people who are already successful female leaders. “I would definitely recommend the HERS Program—that program is great.” She said the networking opportunities are worthwhile. “They even have their own job website.”

P2 offered practical advice to aspiring leaders. She explained, “Reach out to people. Sometimes, you will have people who will be sort of assigned to you. But my experience has been, you really have to create your own relationships.” P3 suggested when politics are playing a prominent role, having a mentor is important. “I don’t look at it as a female or male thing. You need to first of all, try to understand the context of the institution you are in, because the rules of the game are different with each different institution.”

P5 said she was not convinced of the value of formal mentoring situations. “I think we should create opportunities like what those groups do, and this is what I like about them. I think what I like about them is that they create opportunities for people to meet each other.” P5 said when opportunities for networking are good then good things will happen. She said in retrospect one may realize these opportunities are actually mentoring.

P6 strongly supported P5’s suggestion because the former thought it would be an excellent idea for women to create a mentoring network for both genders. She asserted,

“So I think it is an extremely good idea for women and male administrators to create for themselves a network, a mentoring network, that includes both women and men who are able to help them master the tasks and know the politics, or know how to be sensitive to the politics.”

P6 pointed out faculty members are hard to work with. “They’re interesting, very diverse, and full of big egos. They can kill you if you’re an administrator and you don’t know how to work with them.”

**Question 6.** *Do you know of any women’s institutional and professional support groups that have helped prospective women aspirants acquire top executive positions like the presidency? Have you been involved with any of these groups? If so, how successful have they been? If not, why did you choose not to be involved?*

While mentoring plays a major role in their leadership endeavors, three of the eight participants had been quite successful also in their leadership roles despite the absence of mentoring. These participants realize the benefits of deeper involvement in leadership development training programs to help them lead successfully, and emphasized the benefits of networking. P1 said writing a career path document at HERS training was helpful to her. “And again there is a tight bond of women that they want to see you move into a presidency position. Yes, they want to see you succeed.” P2 asserted she was aware of various leadership training opportunities but did not pursue them, because she knew early in her career she did not want to be a college president. P4 described the focus on grooming women for executive positions made HERS an attractive leadership-training program for her. P5 has also found HERS a helpful group,

and shared she has participated in ACE Net as well. P6 indicated an awareness of leadership training groups and believed they were likely helpful to women. She also declared, “I think a lot of my ability to function well here has to do with the fact that I know the system so well. I know how to get things done and I have cultivated relationships.” P8 stated she attended the Harvard leadership training, but found the HERS program requires more time than she had to devote to it.

### **Responses to Research Question 3**

To answer Research Question 3, each of the eight participants was asked to respond to the last six interview questions. All these questions were congruent to the third research question, which is, “What actions, if any, do female leaders take to establish gender equity in higher education?”

**Question 7.** *How would you describe a politically empowered female leader? By “political empowerment” (Lopez-Claros & Zahidi, 2006, p. 4), is meant the equitable representation of women in decision-making structures both formal and informal and having women’s voices heard in the formulation of policies affecting their societies. Do you see yourself as politically empowered?*

Six participants said they felt politically empowered and acknowledged being politically savvy is instrumental in obtaining political empowerment. While P1 claimed she had been working behind the scenes, two participants indicated being politically empowered entailed ample interaction with people. “Fifty percent of my day is dealing with the politics. Whether it’s putting things in place for a future move, it’s almost like a game of chess.” P2 expressed, “I don’t know if empowerment is the word, but it sort of

goes with the job. If you have a position of authority, and if you do it well, you would keep the job.”

P4 articulated the importance of trust in the relationship. With trust, female leaders can voice their concerns and perceptions relevant to any campus issues the institution faces. “All things are political—especially in a college campus. If you can’t figure out the college campus politics, you can’t be a successful leader.” P4 continued, “Yes, it’s all about politics, but it’s also about building relationships and developing trust in those relationships.”

P5 affirmed her understanding of the institution’s politics enabled her to make tough decisions as a provost without being harsh and aggressive. “I’ve never been in a situation in a room where I haven’t been able to speak my mind. That’s just who I am and so from that sense I would be empowered, because I’ve never been afraid of what that meant.” P8 stated political empowerment requires bringing something extra to the table, such as additional knowledge and skills. P6 said she is not politically empowered, but politically savvy. P3 was unsure if she is politically empowered because she is not politically savvy. P7 expressed, “I’m not politically active in political groups, but within the university, I sit on many decision-making bodies. They’re all women in high leadership positions in terms of vice chancellorships, etc., in this university.” P8 described her political empowerment as rooted in her role in her ethnic community “I see myself politically empowered because of where I come from. I’m not sure I would be that empowered if I also was not seen through that prism.”

**Question 8.** *Do you see yourself as politically savvy? If so, how has this helped you reach your current position? How do you perceive the role of politics in the selection and appointment of top executive positions in higher education? Please explain.*

Three participants agreed they are highly political figures who recognize the existence of politics everywhere. Two participants spent time to understand people they are working with by listening to them and building relationships, as well as trusting those relationships. While P3 had chosen to be a pacifist and stick to the golden rule as far as politics is concerned, P5 managed to become politically savvy. She could easily distinguish bad politics from good politics and could swiftly thwart bad politics to make certain good people win. In fact, P5, who stayed in one institution for 16 years, claimed she is a political expert and that she thinks no one can ever out-politics her.

Meanwhile, P7 felt more business-savvy than politically savvy. Despite her extroverted work experience with the institution, she considered all outside dealings and interpersonal relationships strictly business. Due to lack of funds, P7 and her staff had to work hard to generate the needed revenues to pay her staff.

P1 enthusiastically affirmed, “I do consider myself politically savvy. Just to get the answer on the record. I think that part of my approach is I have always had relationships with everybody at the institution not just those that are in my area.”

P2 shared the opinion of P5 that politics is everywhere. She affirmed by saying, “Politics is always there. And I do think that I am more savvy than some in higher education administration. I don’t consider myself a politician, but I certainly understand the process.”

P2: “I understand as I said before that you have to juggle these conflicting interest groups that are sort of impacting the work that you’re doing. You have to know it’s sort of like playing poker. It’s like the old Kenny Rogers song.”

You have to know when to hold them, know when to fold them,

Know when to walk away and When to runaway.

P2 offered this suggestion, “I think you need to be sensitive to the different interest groups that are impacting on your work—that’s a political process.” P2 firmly stressed, “You need to be respectful of the process and buy into the mission of the institution. I think a lot of colleges and presidents run into problems when they don’t remember the mission of their institution.”

P3 agreed that politics has a key role in everything. “Yes, I think politics plays a very big role in the selection of top executive positions in higher education—everywhere. Why? And I think I have very logical reasons.”

Personally, I don’t think that I’m just reaching the point where the word politics is becoming a key ingredient in my life, and I think that I’m not politically savvy. I have very simple rules and I plan to live by them, because, I want it that way and I’m not interested. As I said these are personal decisions that one makes.

P4, akin to P1 and P2, is also politically savvy. She said, “I’m highly political, but in a different way. I don’t know if I would say politically savvy. I’m talking about women; yet I’m going to use Tip O’Neill, a man, who wrote a book called *All Politics are Local*, it’s one of my favorite books.”

P4: “I do think that being politically savvy is about really spending time trying to understand the people that you’re working with. You have to be a good listener. And so I would describe political savvy as someone that really understands.”

P4 added, “So I would say also that being politically savvy is to know who your enemies are. And then you’ll have to figure out how to work with them. And that helps me in my current position. I know who they are and I don’t in any way punish them.” To be politically savvy, it is really important to know those individuals who don’t really like you as a leader and to try dealing with them professionally. It is just impossible to please everyone in the workplace.

P4: “So it goes back to that trust, and I think part of that also comes from transparency. I think a leader to be politically savvy has to be transparent. If you’re not transparent, you’re dead in the water.”

P6: I think it helps if people have at least had [University] experience because it’s not about just learning the politics of the school. It’s about learning politics at [University] and it’s a whole different level of politics. So it’s a very hard system to enter as an outsider, and obviously, it then depends on who you listen to.

P8: “So, I think, being politically savvy is to recognize that change is the most constant thing around you and being prepared to address the change, or even just to understand the change.”

One of the probing questions was, “How does building a good relationship with your peers relate to this?”

P8: What I can tell you is if people think you're politically savvy, even though you're not always politically savvy; they attribute that to you and it is a big plus. Because they will come to you and say, "What do you think?" And that means you're in the conversation. You may not be at the decision making point, but you're at least in the conversation which means that you get more empowered with more information.

**Question 9.** *Based on your own experience, can you envision changes to occur in higher education leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What major leadership transformations do you think are in the horizon if these happen? In what way would these changes be beneficial in the overall higher education leadership arena?*

These women are pursuing higher education leadership now more aggressively compared to years before, and the number of female presidents in colleges and universities is as well increasing. Table 12 illustrates the major changes needed in the 21st century higher education leadership as identified by the participants.

Table 12

*Major Transformations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leadership in Higher Education*

Changes needed in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century higher education leadership	Number of responses
Female domination or increase	6
Current status	6
Changes in job requirement	4
Higher Ed jobs	4
Generational considerations- retirement	3
Leadership development – succession planning	3
Little or no change	3
Global vision	2
Family Medical Leave Act	1
Racial and ethnic inclusiveness	1
Creation of a huge pipeline	1
More outsiders and external hires to join higher education	1

Six of the eight participants agreed that female leaders might increase and/or dominate higher education as evidenced by their current number soaring in that sector. Meanwhile, other anticipated changes to occur in higher education included changes in job requirement, higher education jobs, massive retirements, and succession planning. Interestingly, three of the eight participants envisioned very little or no changes whatsoever to occur in the 21st century leadership in higher education. Racial and ethnic inclusiveness and creation of a huge academic pipeline occupy the bottom list. It was also predicted that more outsiders and external hires might join higher education to replace the growing number of retirees.

The following excerpts indicate participants' views as to the key transformations in 21st century higher education leadership. P1 stated, "Years and years ago, our

grandparents would never believe that there would be more women going to college than men. Now when I look at this New York College, there are 70% women and 30% men.”

When a probing question about *critical mass* was addressed to P1, this is how she responded:

I believe this will happen gender-wise in Higher Education. In one recent article, about the University of Saint Thomas, a Catholic university in Saint Paul, MN, recently changed their by-laws to allow a layperson to lead the university as president. The pool of priests who have attained PhDs and are prepared to lead a university is so limited that the school changed their by-laws, which had required the president to be a priest. It’s admitting that there isn’t the critical mass of priests to choose from like they used to. So these institutions will have a larger pool of women than men to choose from when they fill these posts.

P2: “I think higher education itself is undergoing a major transformation, and I think there are a number of issues that higher education has to work with. One is how do we deal with inclusiveness.” Furthermore, P2 explicated:

And that is not just gender inclusiveness, but racial and ethnic inclusiveness as well. I don’t think we are doing as good a job there as we can. Another major challenge is the under-prepared student. Do we want to let everybody in and then hope that some small percentage of the few will make it through, or do we do something else and be more selective?

P3 approached this question with globalization in mind. “I think the first thing that higher education industry needs to realize is that it’s global—the convergence of

globalization and technology. These institutions cannot survive the way they are in isolation unless you have something really distinctive to offer.”

P4 said she would welcome and embrace globalization for the 21st century leadership. “I think the women are going to transform higher education in the 21st century because I think women get it. And in this new world with all the technology and everything else, women have found a way to lead from a global perspective.”

Probing questions that related to academic pipeline, critical mass, and succession planning were addressed and this is how P4 answered.

P4: “I think they have to build on it (academic pipeline), because I think there’s such a gap in the middle. I think we have those of us who were like 55 plus and then there’s a real gap in the middle, and then we have a really young group. I keep talking about this in the organizations.”

When asked about succession planning, P4 admitted that higher education has not really done enough. She elaborated:

And I did have a group here when we were moving into the new structure, it was called *Emerging Leadership*. So anybody who may have thought they wanted to be a leader but wasn’t quite sure, or I really encouraged some women and men whom I thought might want to explore the possibility of being a leader. Trust matters. But when you’re in this kind of situation you have to be able to trust your leader.

P5 said she believes the challenge is for women who are leaders to create a pipeline—an opportunity for women beneath them to have the kinds of experiences

that will make them competitive. P5 elaborated:

On the academic side they have to be getting the jobs. They have to be getting tenure. They have to be getting promoted. And if that is not happening along with having other experiences, you will not see greater numbers of women in the highest levels in the deans and up positions.

P5 also noted, "I think women will always be the dominant; they will always be the highest numbers in the community colleges. I think that is true. I think we are seeing that already."

One of the probing questions addressed to P5 pertains to the massive retirement in 5 to 10 years from now. P5 shared, "It will be interesting to watch. When you deal on the presidential level as opposed to anything below the presidential level, you are primarily dealing with an internal constituency. You are dealing with a committee." She also highlighted the importance of gender balance. P6 portrayed higher education to be distinctly different for the following reasons: "I think higher education is going to be very, very different in the next 20 years. I just think the format and the delivery systems are going to be very different. I think the big problem is that higher education tends to be a lagging; not a leading institution."

P6 affirmed she believes the real innovations are happening at the margins right now, but the margins are moving into the middle. She indicated more flexible schedules recognize a student does not need to sit in a desk a certain number of hours to show competency. "That's not a valid learning index." She elaborated:

So, I think that the whole asynchronous, online competency-based sort of

education is increasingly going to be a very important factor in higher education. I think that we need visionary leaders who are not afraid to challenge the traditions of higher education.

P6 asserted that those in higher education need to be much more concerned with the client base. She identified them as people who are going to have choices, often adults who are going back to school for multiple degrees. “They’re coming to us often for specific things.” In addition, P6 thought sensibly that tenure should be abolished and she explained why:

I think there’s enough protection now and what I see at least in my own institution here has been lots and lots of people who are doing very, very little for their salaries for the students that we supposedly teach. So that in institutions like this, tenure has become for many people a way of making a lot of money for 2 days of work.

P8 noted changes in higher education administration as well. “We have definitely more women in presidential positions and that’s been a change. We also see I think differences in terms of having more gay men in positions than we’ve had before; openly gay men in high level positions.”

**Question 10.** *From your perspective, would you consider women to be better presidents than men, or vice-versa? If so, why; if not, why not? For new female presidents, what do you think should they focus on more to maintain balance and sustainability of their position?*

Two of the eight participants maintained neutrality in this question, the other two

seemed unsure and were still watching as things unfold, and the remaining four participants differed in their opinions. P5 was also certain women possess the potential to be good leaders, and P8, remained a strong supporter of female presidents. In contrast, P6 completely disapproved and questioned the motive of her female president, who, to her appears self-aggrandizing. On the other hand, P3 was not attentive to gender at all. She considered a better president to be one who has the knowledge and the ability to lead.

The following specific statements from process notes support this notion.

P1: "I really don't think that one is better than the other; female or male. The leadership qualities have to be there to get the work done. There have been excellent men leading the institution and excellent women as well and some clunkers on both sides as well."

P1 was asked a probing question as to what she thinks female presidents should focus on to maintain balance and sustainability of their positions. She responded, "Anybody coming into a new position should take time to learn the institution and the culture of the institution since it is almost like a roadmap on what has happened and why it happens in a certain way." P1 added:

Unsuccessful people go in with something in their head about what they are going to accomplish and without taking into consideration the tools available to them: the culture, the leadership, the people there, and the leadership team. Not so much focusing on balance and sustainability but collecting the tools to assess how to moving forward. I would consider collaboration as an important part of that.

P2 clarified the first thing leadership executives should remember is they report to

the university's board. "If you don't keep your board happy, you're not going to keep your job. And that applies to both sexes." She also pointed out, "Women also have to remember if they alienate the faculty too many times the board is going to become unhappy, because the board recognizes that the core of any academy is its faculty."

They sometimes have the misguided sense of their role in that, and their importance in that. But if you don't have a strong, stable faculty, you do not have a strong, stable institution. The president really has to have two masters: the board and the faculty. You have got to remember that the board hires you and the board fires you."

Because P3 did not want to identify herself as a female leader, her reaction to the question was quite typical. "I think one of the reasons I have walked away is that I'm agnostic to male/female—I really am agnostic. I don't care either way." She said she believes men and women need to be qualified to lead. "They need experience and knowledge, the ability, the personality, the commitment to lead and I think it's open."

P4 shared, "Our current president just got here; she seems to be great. So, I don't know yet, I mean she hasn't been here long enough. I think our president has shown us hit the ground. I think the best lesson I learned early was don't sweat the small stuff."

P5 expressed she has seen wonderful male and female presidents, as well as terrible ones. She noted that she has seen effective female presidents.

I think women have the potential to create the kind of leadership that is more inclusive and that can produce some real change and a healthy environment, yes.

Are they all that way? No. So, I don't know; but I certainly think that there is

nothing to stop a woman from being a very effective president. So, it should be a factor in an appointee.

P6 said her institution has a female president. “She’s the first woman president at the college. I find her a trifle ambitious. I think her motive is more self-serving because she has been ambitious.” Interestingly, P6, who works together with P4 and P8, had a different perception as to their female president. P6 said,

I think this is not the last place she wants to go. So, I see her engaging in things that may be more credential-building for her. Again, I come back to they’re not harming the college, but I intuit that her motive for doing them may be as much to advance her own CV and prestige.

P8 said she is definitely biased in favor of female presidents. “Having been through three male presidents and one female, I think female presidents bring so much to the table.”

**Question 11.** *Would you consider gender to have an impact on the leadership development process? How do you believe gender has affected your career advancement? Has this been an impediment to your career advancement, and if it were, what did you do to overcome this difficult challenge? If this has been a positive factor, why do you think this is the case?*

Four of the eight participants in this study indicated that gender had a positive impact on their leadership paths. Meanwhile five of the eight participants sensed that women are treated differently as they experience a much higher, tougher, and tighter work standard and smaller salaries compared to men; a notion supported by Eagly (2009)

and *The White House Project Report* (2009).

P3 observed that for leadership positions, strong and powerful men with graying hair are thought to be better leaders. This idea of leadership reverberated from the great man and trait theories, suggesting that great leaders need to maintain dominance, power, control, and strength in leadership; contrary to being caring, visionary, supportive, compassionate, sensitive, and empowering (Dambe & Moorad, 2008; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Six of the eight participants still manifestly felt the impact of this theory and the existence of the so-called old boys' network in the workplace.

Three of the eight participants noticed that gender stereotyping and discrimination have a huge impact on their professional career and/or advancement. P5 lost the chair position to a preferred male leader for economic reasons. P6 shared her frustration due to sexism that apparently delayed her tenure approval. P8 was treated as a junior employee despite her previous experience and educational qualifications and suffered from a range of gender remarks in the workplace. Meanwhile, P7 said the motherhood aspect of being female definitely impinged the career she always wanted to have because of a late start. P2 considered her profession and gender to have something to do with the subtle gender bias she faced in a male-dominated environment. Women who complained about having gender issues noticed men tend to be somewhat aggressive. And those women's observation about men's aggressive behavior enabled them to develop strategies in overcoming the problem. Table 13 illustrates the details of this report.

Table 13

*Impact of Gender on Leadership Process*

Role of gender on leadership process	Number of responses
Great man and trait theories	6
Double standard	5
Positive effect	4
Negative effect –gender discrimination stereotypes	3
Professional jealousy	2
Queen bees	2

A full account of the impact of gender on the participants' leadership process is supported by the following exact quotes.

P1: "I don't think gender has had an impact on me during my development process. I have had both male and female leaders, supervisors who have given me the same opportunities they would have given to somebody else in my place."

P1: "I mean, going back to groups like HERS that was formed because women with PhD's were secretaries in the offices until Title IV came along and said you have to hire women in these jobs where they are just as qualified. They have won those wars for us." Below are P1's responses to probing questions regarding great man and trait theories:

P1: "Well, it's interesting, but the good part is that, that is not true where I work, and it hasn't been. I suppose the world has changed. For my staff I just had someone do a Myers-Briggs presentation because it's an old stand by. Even if someone hasn't done it in a long time, it's useful to revisit it."

Another probing question asked had to do with marginalization of women in both administrative and professorial ranks in higher education:

P1: Right, well, the men write about that garbage. I think she's a woman who is the CEO of eBay.com. It's one of those. If you ever get a chance to go on *Youtube.com* and see one of the presentations she has done about women leaders. She is absolutely fabulous. Tremendous! And I sent it to my staff. She was giving a speech about women leaders and just absolutely phenomenal. Can't remember her name but she was good. Was this eBay's former CEO Meg Whitman?"

P2 explained, "I don't think I've personally experienced a lot. I did before I went into academia. I did experience pretty overt gender discrimination because the legal community at the time was overwhelmingly male, but I wasn't in that part of that world for very long." P2 said she believes gender does have an impact on the leadership process. "Women tend to be more inclusive in their leadership styles than men do, at least that has been my experience. Women tend to be less authoritarian in the way in which they hand out pronouncements." P2 also mentioned she has seen more *queen bees* in higher education administration who don't care about other women.

P4: "So, I think that women are conscious that men try to put them in that position—that if they're just aware of it, it really helps them overcome it. I do not feel it has impeded me in any way, even going back to the Florida job."

P4: I find fun working with men in the higher ranks anyway. I would say that I actually probably work better with them sometimes. I find the women to be more competitive with each other. I find women sometimes are not able to support each

other out of jealousy or whatever, and so sometimes men are kind of easier to work with. I don't find men whiny. So in here, I actually feel that I get along better with men than women.

P5 felt gender had played a major role in her career as she lost a chair position to a male competitor. She said she was told to give the position to him because he has a family to support and he needs money more than she does. She was taken aback by this remark, and she thought it was interesting to hear such comments. P5 thought the chair position would have been a logical move up the career ladder for her. She perceived that others thought she should have been chosen for the position.

P6 substantiated that it was not bureaucracy or politics, but sexism that had somehow been an issue at the college where she works. She did not intend to be a full time administrator but became a dean, because of serendipity. She thought the position was set up for her so that she could not refuse when asked to apply for it permanently when their search for the new dean failed. However, she could not help but recall those days when she thought sexism might have been the issue why a number of her documented works remained unacknowledged and unpublished publicly relative to someone who did few manuscripts and right away appeared in the newsletter.

This was sexism, I'm absolutely certain. You know that's why I'm saying. I have seen it, and I think I'm sensitive to it. It could be very subtle; but I think after that what happened, I just realized I'm going to be myself. I'm going to do what I need to do. So, what happened after time was that I realized that the best revenge that I could take against these people who were still men in my

department who were in positions of authority, was to be as successful as I could be and get as much grant money as I could and get as many publications as I could get and to acquire enough personal, political—what’s the word I want—not power so much as status that there was no way that anybody was going to be able to do this to me again.

P8: “Well, gender, I think, maybe catapulted me forward because the fact that I was a girl always meant that I wasn’t as smart as the boy, right? And so, I think I did see that as a challenge.”

P8: “So, I think that moved me forward and whenever I hear people say things like, ‘Boy you got those big shoes to fill of that Vice President before you.’ I see that as a challenge and so, I do then want to fill those shoes and fill other shoes too.”

P8: “At one time, I was always characterized as a passionate person, in my workplace, in the School of Education, for example, ‘Oh, you are passionate.’ And that meant you were emotional and that was negative. But, I know that they impact me and I think they impact other women too.”

**Question 12.** *Based on your experience, can you describe the attitude of male educational leaders and other female leaders toward empowered female leaders? Being one of the top leaders, what strategies have you devised to win acceptance and respect in the inner circle from your male counterparts and other stakeholders?*

The participants in this study expressed varying perceptions as to why male educational leaders and other female leaders treat their female empowered colleagues the way they do. P1 and P4 strongly believed that as long as the leader (male or female) does

a good job she/he will be respected in the workplace. The quality of work matters in gaining respect. On the other hand, P2 affirmed that men tend to be dismissive of women's opinions as she had witnessed this behavior, simply because women's issues are distinct. Further, P2 argued that men's behavior generally reflects that of the society. Meanwhile, P3 explained historical discrimination against women exists due to women's upbringing and the males' thinking that they are the empowered group.

While marginalization, labyrinth, and double standard policy are still very much positioned as indicated by four of the eight participants, evidently, women's future still appears in peril. Regardless of the diligent strides female leaders had undertaken, it looked like their efforts are still inadequate, if not at all futile.

Six of the eight participants overtly expressed the high appreciation and respect awarded to them in the workplace. Four of these participants, however, noticed the impact of double standard policy on women overall. In areas dominated by women, three of the eight participants observed that some women display some types of attitude and other female leaders felt intimidated of other female empowered leaders' personalities. Moreover, three of the eight participants indicated that male's behavior appeared quite subdued where the presence of women is apparent. Professional jealousy creeps into and perpetually lingers due to the competitive nature of women. Table 14 shows the details of this report.

Table 14

*Attitude of Colleagues in the Workplace (males and females)*

Educational leader	Attitude toward empowered female leaders	# of responses
Male	Felt respected by male counterparts	6
	Women are treated differently	5
	Marginalization and underrepresentation	4
	Equitable relationship exists	2
	Males conscious of women's role	1
	Dismissive of women's opinions	1
	Generally men reflect societal behavior	1
	Males feel empowered and dominant	1
	Still felt the existence of old boys' network	1
Female	Females have attitude	3
	Professional jealousy exists	3
	Queen bees in the workplace	2
	Female colleagues intimidated by personality	1
	Female colleagues helpful and supportive of each other	1

According to P6, she developed professional jealousy with a colleague lately, due to the latter's higher political aspirations at the expense of her own hard work. P6 recalled doing a number of collaborative projects in which she (the other female leader) provided little funding, but then put all the projects in her portfolio and took responsibility of the scheme after attending HERS. In contrast, P7 could not be more grateful and gratified to her professional Continuing Education team composed of helpful, caring, supportive, and compassionate workers. P7 added that these workers not only embrace the mission of the department and respect each other but also succeed in eradicating professional jealousy in the workplace.

Furthermore, P2 and P5 described the pervasiveness of *queen bees* in institutions of higher learning. These *queen bees* had remained unsupportive, unsympathetic, and selfish; the opposite of P5's vision of a leader. P5 suggested female leaders should help and empower other women by opening doors and start training and/or developing their subordinates to be good leaders like themselves and watch the multiplying effect of their powerful job. This notion was supported by the empowerment-based/transformational leadership theory of Dambe and Moorad (2008). The following direct quotes from interviews and process notes hold up the attitude of both male and female educators toward other empowered female leaders.

P1 generalized her response to good leadership traits that apply to both female and male leaders as follows: "Regardless of gender when they do a good job, they will get the respect and the response they need from male leaders and female leaders alike."

P1: "What do I do to win respect from the men I work with? I do my job and I think I do it well. If one does her job and does it well, you will earn the respect."

P2: "I think the attitudes of men in higher education really mirror the attitudes of men in society in general, in other leadership environments, and in other business environments. I think you see the range from full acceptance to the male chauvinist pigs."

P2: People tend to be dismissive. I've worked with a couple of colleagues over the years that have been dismissive of matters that have been raised by women. Leaders must be nice. You have to be nice, if you want to be a successful administrator. It doesn't mean that you are a push over.

P3: “It’s everything that you read about leadership. Obtain the primary basis where respect is to be garnered. I think women have to do exactly what males do. They have to have excellent leadership and communication skills. They need a decisive and motivating personality.”

On the other hand, P4 viewed this question based on her campus setting, and she shared, “I think men especially in leadership positions right now are very conscious that women have become more and more in the upper ranks of leadership on our campuses.”

P4: “We have a lot of women leaders here, so the men really have to live in peace and harmony with us. But every once in awhile we have to speak up, like if there is committee or something.”

P5 espoused the following leadership traits she considered are empowering and respectable of a female leader:

Success is the best method. I will be honest with you; I don’t walk into a situation thinking how I can win them over. But there is an issue of being heard and that’s a problem in a certain environment. They are not getting it. What I have to do is to make sure they get it. I consider it their problem and not mine. And what can I do to make sure they get it. I think it’s complicated on one hand. I am respected tremendously, because I have deduced it.

P6 shared, “I think I’m respected by everyone that I’ve worked with, because they know how hard I work and they know that I produce results. My role is to do the best job that I can do.”

Part of Question 12 asked, “*What strategies have you devised to win acceptance and respect in the inner circle from your male counterparts and other stakeholders?*”

All the participants agreed that by developing and demonstrating empowering leadership qualities, female leaders are responding to what leadership success demands. They felt empowering leadership qualities are not only invaluable to sustain leadership positions, but are as well the foremost mechanism in reducing gender gap in higher education. Table 15 illustrates this report.

Table 15

*Strategies to Reduce Gender Gap in Higher Education*

Suggested strategies to reduce gender gap in higher education	# of responses
Develop leadership skills and values needed	8
Politically savvy [awareness of institution's culture]	8
Hardworking	8
Collaborative [sense of teamwork]	7
Patient	5
Courageous, tough, and strong	5
Open, fair, and honest	5
Responsible and accountable	4
Innovative and creative	4
Visionary	4
Competent	4
Be nice, polite, and respectful	3
Empowering and supportive	3
Productive	2
Good communicator	2
Keen observer and active listener	2
Having a good sense of oneself	2
Awareness of institution's culture, structure, politics	5
Global and community awareness	3
Inclusivity	3
Leadership development training	3
Professional persona and reputation	4
Participation – external programs	1

Quotes and specific statements from the formal, face-to-face interviews supported these views. Five of the eight participants agreed that awareness of higher education's structure and culture both locally and globally is central to becoming a successful female leader. Along with global and local awareness of higher education's culture comes the development of professional persona and reputation that pose as fundamental factors in winning acceptance and respect in the inner circle and feeling empowered.

Concerning the empowering traits female leaders need to develop, P2 said a leader has to be friendly, polite, patient, and respectful in the workplace. P2 expressed, "You have to be friendly; you have to be respectful of people. You have to be patient with people. I mean you know everybody has a role to play and it doesn't mean that you have to be their best friend. You also have to be respectful of the culture of higher education. Now most people who stay in higher education are respectful of that culture. At least in terms of what I talked about before the deliberativeness and the inclusiveness of making decisions, you also have to be a good communicator."

P3 pointed out, "For leadership traits, I think women have to do exactly what males do. They have to have excellent leadership and communication skills. They need a decisive and motivating personality."

P3's perception of a good leader by duplicating their male counterparts' performances, although supported by Madden (2005), did not align with P5 and P8's notions of a good leader. P8 said leadership qualities include being oneself as a leader and delivering as much as possible. As leaders, males are agentic, contrary to women

who are communal and empowering. So for women to imitate what men do in terms of leading may seem (to some individuals) not only impractical, but also unrealistic.

On the other hand, P4 viewed this question based on the setting on her campus and this is what she indicated. “Know your priorities and don’t get distracted. And the biggest job you have is trying to convince people that you are the best candidate for a top-level executive position. That, you do believe this is my vision, but if it’s not shared, we’re not going anywhere.”

Meanwhile, P5 described her experience as she manifests the following leadership traits at a male-dominated institution. “Success is the best method. But, that’s a problem in a certain environment. They are not getting it. And what can I do to make sure they get it? I think it’s complicated on one hand. I am respected tremendously, because I have deduced it.”

P5: “I can open doors for other people, which I do a lot to make sure the right people are at the table who should be for some topic. And this is my big complaint with some women leaders who are not supportive of other women.”

P5: “You have a responsibility to use the platform that you have to do good; okay, and to create opportunity for others, because you are in that position. So then you can create opportunities for other people who then can go on and do other things somewhere else and it can become a multiplying effect.”

P6 concluded by saying, “I think you need to be a strong professional. I think you need to have a good sense of yourself. You need a strong ego. Fundamentally, I think you need to produce and be steady in crises.”

Meanwhile, P7 said because her job is similar to that of a CEO, she does not have an issue with negative attitudes from her male counterparts. “My job requires me to be entrepreneurial and somewhat aggressive; I mean there are traits that are not frowned on by the President.”

P7: They have to either write or participate in programs beyond the borders of their schools. They have to write. They have to sort of may be noticed if they're Presidents. They have to work very, very hard. Do a lot of special programs, and must have the ear of the president. I think you have to be good. You have to have a good reputation, competent, and must kind of pushing (assertive) if you want to move on.

P8 asserted that she was not sure what direction she wanted to go with leadership qualities, but she had a very useful suggestion.

Being informed and current as possible—I want to be able to bring to the table something that others don't have (being inclusive). I want to also be an active listener. I really want to pay attention; not just to what people are saying, but what they're not saying. And, that means, watching your gesture and facial expressions. I think being a good people watcher is, is very important.

### **Discrepant and Nonconfirming Data**

In lengthy interviews it is typical to touch on topics from several perspectives and on some occasions obtain nonconfirming comments. These are the comments that do not conform and form rival interpretations to place boundaries around confirmed findings

(Patton, 2002). These anomalous comments are recorded and organized here accordingly by the theme.

The first subquestion related to career path and the recipes for success the participants used while climbing the ladder. P7 had been the dean of continuing education for 11 successive years and became very successful in that position with very little mentoring obtained from her superiors, but by being a hard worker and by having an excellent and highly supportive staff. Additionally, she indicated some other factors that contributed to her success. These are her exact words:

Energy, the ability to write well, the ability to be a people person, the ability I guess, to go outside my normal, rather introverted self, and become somewhat extraverted in a professional setting. Supportive family and the fact that I really waited to get started until my children were a little bit older, so that, you know, they were already in school when I, I developed a larger sense of larger responsibilities as my children grew older.

Nonetheless, when a probing question relating to strategies in balancing career over family was asked, P7 indicated that, “Always, always, always, and I had a very nonsupportive husband, originally who was a physician and who just was not around that much. So, he was not terribly supportive so that was, you know, negative.” Clearly, P7 had a nonsupportive husband, who does not make a supportive family per se to contribute to leadership success.

P5 suggested in order to overcome professional and personal barriers; “You have to have a life where that makes you happy outside of work. Again, it could be any kind of

life that makes you happy, because you have to have a way to balance the two.” She elaborated by saying, “If you’re looking for your love at the office, you’re going to do a lot of things that are not necessarily the right thing to do. You’re going to make mistakes and when you start making mistakes you start having to work harder and it screws it all up.”

P5 said she favors development of empowering traits as a tool for success. She mentioned setting goals to earn acceptance in the inner circle can seem contradictory to striking a balance between career and family and it could raise personal conflict for women. In a related situation, the same participant explicitly admitted she perceived a number of implicit barriers, but did not admit to herself early on because she did not care. She said this attitude was part of her personality, but she somehow wondered how and where it originated. Having been raised together basically with her brothers in a traditional community, she used to play basketball with boys and would not stop because she did not care. To some people, this no care attitude could have a negative impact on becoming a leader. Nevertheless, she realized in higher education leadership the institution’s structures and culture have to be cared about and respected. These exact quotes support the notion above.

P5 said:

But I do think that as I’ve risen up the hierarchy, if you will what I’m finding is that there are more implicit barriers than I admitted to myself early on. Part of the reason I didn't admit early on is that I always had the personality that didn’t care. Why should I be stopped? I had three brothers, and I did more than they did. And

it wasn't an issue. I used to play basketball with boys. I didn't care. So I don't know where that part of my personality came by the way.

P5: "I really don't. I mean you're born however you're born, and you're raised however you're raised. It's what you are. It happens to be part of who I am. I saw those barriers but I didn't care about them."

P5: They didn't affect me, but you reach a certain point when suddenly you realize that despite anything you might do, you can't go right through them, because of the structures and the attitudes and the stereotypes and the assumptions are there, you know, despite anything you have done. And that's the experience, I've had very recently.

In response to the eighth subquestion on political savvy, P3 indicated she had chosen to take a pacifist attitude regarding politics because she saw it as a waste of time. She said she is not politically savvy. The following specific statements from interview transcripts support this notion.

P3: "I think it reached a point in my life where it [politics] absolutely holds no interest for me and, so I've taken a much more passive role, which I think I am more comfortable with."

P3: "It really is a matter of interest—one does not understand the time and resources it takes to do politics. And it is just wasteful for me. I have no time for this."

P3: "I didn't quite sense it; now I realize you have to find someone to protect you, someone in power to root for you, and to know you. That's my strategy, it really is. You need to find someone else to protect you."

Subquestion number 12 was about the male educational leaders' treatment of empowered female leaders, and three participants (P1, P4, and P6) felt their male counterparts were respectful, and gender was not an issue. P6 indicated she had been thinking about the attitudes of male educational leaders toward empowered women since she responded to the four screening questions early on. P6 said:

I don't think I'm being naïve in thinking. I don't know how much of any of these kinds of issues was related to gender. It's impossible to know for sure, but I've certainly felt that from faculty that some of the men in the sciences speak in ways that are totally inappropriate, given my experience and my background, but they're jerks; so what can you do? The question is, 'Am I being naïve?' it's just what I'm asking myself as I speak.

P6 affirmed she is certain the behavior she found inappropriate was sexism; however, she was unaware at the outset. It could be her naivety or the implicitness of the behavior that made it difficult to identify it was sexism. Nonetheless, I think it is important for any woman who was experiencing any type of discrimination to understand why it was happening to know "which aspects of her identities are responsible for others' reactions" (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 173). "You know that's why I'm saying I have seen it, and I think I'm sensitive to it. It could be very subtle, but I think after that, what happened was I just realized okay, I'm going to be myself; I'm going to do what I need to do."

### **Patterns, Relationships, and Themes**

Van Manen's (1997, 2002) hermeneutic, phenomenological research entails rewriting the stories examined repetitiously by researchers to understand the meanings of the themes revealed. As the aim of this study was to construct an animated, evocative description of human actions, behaviors, intentions, and experiences, its product was simple and clear-cut (Swanson-Kauffman & Schonwald, 1988). As van Manen (1997) described, phenomenological themes may be understood as structures of experience and therefore offer a thick description of phenomena.

A systematic method of thematic data analysis was adopted in this research. This method was modeled after Titchen and colleagues' work (Edward & Titchen, 2003; Titchen, 2000; Titchen & McIntyre, 1993), which allowed for systematic identification of participants' interpretations and constructs (first order constructs). These interpretations, in turn, were layered with the second order constructs or the researcher's own understandings, interpretations, and constructs (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

### **Overview of the Research Findings**

Four major categories emerged from the in-depth interviews and 10 themes surfaced from the four main categories. The presentation of each theme was followed by some participants' quotes to demonstrate grounding in the data. The lived experiences and significant events were different for each female senior leader; the underlying theme remained constant. If female leaders became politically empowered, they could introduce and implement changes in higher education leadership.

Interview questions from Number 6 to 12 had been rearranged to coincide with the emergence of themes. All the participants responded to all the subquestions, with two exceptions. Two participants skipped one question that each perceived as irrelevant based on her lived experiences.

### **Category 1: Career Path**

Key words from interview transcripts were coded using NVivo 9 software as a tool. A key finding germane to all the participants was that their career paths had been drawn traditionally even if two of the eight participants had non-academic backgrounds. Initially, they climbed the ladder from being instructors, assistant chairs, interim/acting deans, associate deans, deans, and assistant provost to their current positions.

**Theme 1: Professional and personal barriers and strategies to overcome challenges.** Question 2 addressed stumbling blocks that obstructed female senior leaders' career mobility. The question aimed to uncover the meaning ascribed by these participants to those experiences conveyed to the researcher from their own perspective and in their own words.

Five of the eight participants experienced professional barriers ranging from colleagues and gender issues, marginalization and time overload, lack of support, skills and knowledge, bureaucracy, and finding a budget. A common personal barrier among three participants was difficulty with balancing career over family issues, which concerns time as a factor. Naivety and other implicit barriers were other personal issues recorded. Although P3 considered lack of time to accomplish the assigned administrative

responsibilities and duties a barrier, P2 thought lack of time would contribute to the risk of favoring her family over her career.

Despite these stumbling blocks, all the participants chose to move forward in their work. Table 8 showed how each one strategically devised solutions and moved on in her leadership path. P1, who found a college bully as a barrier, managed not to attack back, but addressed the issue professionally and diplomatically by exercising intolerance and rigidity. P2 strategized by prioritizing family over career. She said, “I made my children my first priority, and that means they come first.”

**Theme 2: Role of intentionality and serendipity in success.** The role of intentionality in one’s career advancement was evident, as seven of the eight participants considered intentionality to have played a role in their career success. P6 could be an exception to the rule because she did not want to be an administrator or a senior level administrator. P4 shared, “So I think the idea of leadership was always there, and it’s not that I was forced into it. I think in my career—I mean it goes all the way back to high school. I’ve always been a leader.”

As far as serendipity goes, all the participants considered their serendipitous career journey in distinct and sophisticated ways. Either the opportunity had been set up for them, or they have been at the right place in the right time. P4, who entered into higher education administration intentionally, said she firmly believed in serendipity, (being at the right place at the right time), having experienced several instances of it in her career.

P3 said she believed a conversation about a book she had with the president of her university after a meeting in which he had discussed it may have been a serendipitous event for her.

The president was addressing the faculty at one time, and he mentioned a book, *A Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. That casual conversation about the book after the meeting could have left an impression on him. That could be serendipity.

P5 shared a similar opinion, but she also considered the participant's role vital when those opportunities presented themselves. "You create those opportunities also by allowing serendipity to happen by putting yourself in those situations where they can, whether something does is another matter."

## **Category 2: Career Mobility Resources**

**Theme 3: Mentoring strategies.** All the participants concurred that mentoring is enormously important for top leaders. Even if mentoring was not available in most public city universities, some of these senior leaders were encouraged to attend formal mentoring leadership institutions such as HERS, Harvard Management, and ACE. The three participants who attended HERS emphasized the notable mentoring and networking benefits afforded to them by HERS. P2 chose Harvard over HERS, and P8, who developed a different impression about HERS, being a gendered organization, preferred attending Harvard as well. In addition to formal mentoring, these five participants likewise obtained informal mentoring from their bosses, close friends, dean's group, husbands, community members, and other connections.

P6 received neither formal nor informal mentoring, but she had a firm understanding of her own institution's culture and politics, as well as its structure and its governing politics. She affirmed, "I don't think I ever had a mentor administratively. I didn't. I don't take that personally because one of the deficiencies of our institution is that it does almost no professional development at all." Meanwhile, P3 considered "being left alone" as a great resource if not the best form of mentoring because it allowed her to focus on doing her work productively.

Four of the eight participants also received bad mentoring. These participants identified lack of mentors' understanding of their needs as an issue. Three of the eight participants emphasized the importance of assessing one's needs before talking to a mentor to assure getting the right type of mentoring.

**Theme 4: Preparing aspiring female leaders.** To prepare other female leaders for top leadership positions, the participants were asked to give at least one important mentoring suggestion. Six participants suggested knowing the institution's culture, structure, and politics. These leaders perceived the inability to understand the institutional processes as an impediment to successful leadership, because everything is governed by politics and every institution operates distinctly. Being politically savvy of the institution's culture and structure encompassed building relationships, connecting with people, trusting those relationships, and sharing one's vision with others.

P2 expressed, "If you don't buy into that culture, you are not going to succeed as an administrator in higher education." P1 stated the knowledge of institution's culture and structure serves as a roadmap in one's career journey. Although P6 was unfortunate

to get quality formal and informal mentoring, she provided helpful suggestions to aspiring administrators. P6 advised, “Well, I think knowing something formal about the structure of higher education and the kind of ins and outs of the differences between community colleges are very important. I think it helps if people have at least had [university name] experience.”

**Theme 5: Support groups needed and improvement.** HERS topped the list for female support groups. According to study participants, HERS delivers what it promises, and satisfies their needs. Harvard’s program was more appealing to some female leaders because of its more open approach, as P8 indicated.

All the participants offered mentoring suggestions to aspiring female leaders. Four of the eight participants strongly recommended HERS to female leaders, and three participants were supportive of making connections outside. As P6 stated, “I think as women advance in higher education they are creating networks independent of these formal kinds of programs, and I think that’s terrific, I think that’s important.”

### **Category 3: Political Empowerment in Higher Education**

**Theme 6: Female leadership qualities and impact.** Again, I did not use any ready-made categories, but welcomed new and unexpected insights (Kvale, 1996). Six of the eight participants said they felt they are politically empowered based on the definition attached to the term. P3 was unsure and P6 thought she was not politically empowered because most of her valuable works were not recognized publicly. P4 was assertive to emphasize not only building relationships, but also developing trust in those relationships.

Meanwhile, P8, who projected a different ethnic background, viewed herself politically empowered because of her country of origin and the community she represents. She said if she did not perceive herself in that prism, she was not sure that she would perceive herself as politically empowered.

**Theme 7: Political savviness.** Being politically savvy could be a remarkable leadership trait for helping female leaders to become politically empowered. In this study, six of the eight participants thought they were politically savvy. Politically savvy women in organizations have mastered being tough enough to lead, but have not crossed the line to aggressiveness. P7 recognized her responsibilities and duties as a continuing education dean as enormously entrepreneurial in nature; therefore, her approach was more business than political. P3 had dealt passively with politics, because she perceived the concept as a time-consuming activity. She said she preferred to follow the golden rule—simply saying something pleasant about people or not to saying anything at all.

Although most of the participants acknowledged the presence of politics in their work place and recognized the vital role it played in hiring and promotion, only four of the eight participants championed this system. P5 said she could see how politics could provide an opportunity to thwart bad people to the advantage of good ones. P4 pointed out being politically savvy allows her to identify her enemies and how to deal with them without the use of punishment.

**Theme 8: Major transformations in 21st century leadership in higher education.** One of the emerging themes that captured female senior leaders' perceptions for this study was the crucial change imminent in 21st century higher education

leadership. Seven of the eight participants expressed varying opinions on what those transformations would be. Female dominance in both administrative and professorial levels may be palpable; as a result, the turn of events could become positive for everyone both nationally and globally, because of the grand nationwide relationships women created (Tar-Wheelan, 2009). For instance, P3 indicated, “I think the first thing that higher education industry needs to realize is that it’s global—the convergence of globalization and technology. These institutions cannot survive the way they are in isolation unless they have something really distinctive to offer.” P5, being both an optimist and a pragmatist, thought changes could occur, but they will take for some time.

A related question as to who is the ideal president was addressed to each of the participants. For P3, better leaders are those who possess leadership personalities and skills that are impressively important to be able to lead; however, P8 vehemently asserted female leaders are better presidents. Other participants were uncertain and remained neutral.

#### **Category 4: Gender Equality Inclusion**

It was indicated for the first time that gender gap size in higher education may have been stabilized as detailed in the follow-up report to ACE’s original 2000 study and 2006 update, titled *Gender Equity in Higher Education: 2010*. This was great to hear; otherwise, Hur’s (2006) suggestion to continuously research on ways to empower female senior leaders was appropriate.

**Theme 9: Role of gender in career path.** For the most part, in male-dominated work environments, gender was found to impact the professional lives of four

participants in this study either in the form of gender bias or sexism. In female-dominated workplaces, gender bias appeared subdued; however, queen bees and professional jealousy were rampant.

Five female educational leaders expressed appreciation for the respect and acceptance they received in their workplaces, in contrast to three participants, who were disappointed in the manner in which their male colleagues treated other empowered female leaders. In fact, they thought marginalization and the labyrinth still exist, and some women display unpleasant attitudes toward other empowered female leaders.

**Theme 10: Strategies to reduce gender gap.** For female leaders to obtain empowerment and create change in higher education, they have to be included in the inner circle, participating in major decision making, and having their voices heard. With four of the eight participants having been negatively impacted by gender, effective strategies have to be adopted to reduce, if not completely eliminate, gender gap in higher education. As mentioned earlier, the awareness of the structure, culture, and politics of higher education played a major role here. Unless these leaders make an effort to understand that aspect of higher education, they will not succeed and their sincere efforts will be in vain.

Resonating with this strategy, are the leadership traits to be developed by upper echelon leaders. Prominent leadership traits include political savviness, collaboration, and being a hard worker. An image of toughness and courage, fairness and transparency are encouraged, along with being responsible, accountable, innovative, visionary, and empowering.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 provided results and findings for the study. Four major categories were identified in the data. Within these categories, a total of 10 themes emerged and were identified as well. In chapter 5, these themes will be analyzed. Additionally recommendations for action and further study will be provided.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Overview

This phenomenological study featured analysis of the lived experiences of women in executive leadership positions in colleges and universities. The research topic was chosen because there is a gap between the number of women qualified to hold such positions, and the number of sitting university executives. Additionally, the number of men greatly exceeds the number of women in higher education executive posts. In this chapter I will provide interpretation of the study's findings, recommendations for action, recommendations for future study, reflections of the researcher, and implications for social change.

All the participants were able to strategically devise solutions to overcome professional, personal, and competitive barriers to holding executive positions in higher education. Mentoring and networking were identified as examples of career mobility resources that make a successful and excellent leader. Lack of intentionality did not discourage female leaders from aspiring for the top position. The participants said they believed serendipity plays a vital role in their career mobility. Being politically savvy, hard working, patient, visionary, and empowered were identified as qualities that build success in females.

Major transformations in higher education leadership have been projected for the 21st century, such as domination of female leaders and changes in the job requirements. Gender issues have affected the participants' leadership experiences in two different ways. In female domains, gender had a positive affect on the participants; and most of the

participants thought their male peers treated them with respect. In male-dominated areas, however, gender had a negative effect as a result of gender discrimination and stereotyping. Some participants noticed different treatments exist in their workplaces such as lower salaries coupled with higher and tougher standards for female leaders. Participants reported professional jealousy was unbridled among some female leaders. Moreover, some female leaders remained uncaring and unsupportive of their followers.

Because gender inequity and gender gap persist in academia, research in leadership continues to focus on those issues. The only effective way to solve gender inequality is by empowering female leaders to participate in major decision making and have a voice that will not only be heard but also considered. Once a greater representation of women is achieved (critical mass), gender equity may evolve and the overall atmosphere could change.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The interpretation of the findings is presented based on the three research questions that guided this study. Research Question 1 addressed the perceived barriers female senior leaders face while trying to advance their careers as well as maintain their leadership roles in higher education. Research Question 2 highlighted mentoring and support strategies used by women leaders. Research Question 3 identified actions taken by participants to establish gender equity.

#### **Perceived Barriers**

All the respondents drew a traditional career path (Gonzalez, 2010)—department chair, then dean, then provost, and eventually president. Two of the eight participants

have nonacademic backgrounds. P2 shared, “I started out through a traditional pathway in academia. I started out as a full-time faculty member tenure-track position as an assistant professor, and after several years in the position, I took my turn as a department chair.”

P5 noted, “My trajectory is fairly traditional. Actually, there are many more nontraditional ways to get to the same place, but I chose a traditional one.”

The traditional path of participants in this study was consistent with Eddy’s (2008) work as well, which recognized the career trajectory of presidents who followed a traditional academic pathway of promotion through the hierarchy. Twenty-two percent of the current community college presidents came from within the institution, and 56% of the participants had mentors. Women leaders who do not maintain a traditional career route may suffer in terms of career advancement, career satisfaction, and salary growth (Carter & Silva, 2010). Women who aspire to top positions should carefully choose their career paths to prevent such consequences, even though their male counterparts do not face these same impediments (Carter & Silva, 2010).

The apparent need to adhere to a linear, traditional path seems in conflict with women’s family roles. “These characteristics theoretically become the major rationale explaining the relationship between family and traditional career path factors as women’s career success” (Valcoour & Ladge, 2008, p. 301). It appears the traditional path allows women to make a more favorable impression; thus, it is important for women who wish to pursue leadership roles in higher education to attain early-career progress following the traditional track. Because the so-called career velocity serves as a strong indicator of a person’s career potential, if women have a languid career start, the resulting negative

image and stigmatizing effect could limit future career possibilities (Rosenbaum, 1984). While extensive commitment is crucial to career progress overall, the early career years often overlap with strenuous family roles such as raising children, impeding women's capability to follow the norms of the organization (Bailyn, 2004). Further complicating matters, employers may be less interested in investing in any training and/or development for employed mothers and employees on nontraditional career paths, because these investments do not pay off for the firms (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005).

Some women leaders have to pursue a nontraditional course as much as they desire to follow the traditional path. One reason for following an informal or nontraditional path may be that these leaders did not intentionally aspire to be in top leadership positions (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003; Waring, 2003). As P1 in this study pointed out, "I am a firm believer that if you make the right relationships and people get to recognize the good work you do, then you don't have to self-promote. They will promote you instead." What leaders chiefly exhibited is the spirit of industry, good work ethic, and a broad and powerful vision that enabled their employers to promote them (Santovec, 2008). Furthermore, these female leaders aimed for positions not only to broaden their powerful trajectories (Santovec, 2008), but more so to enhance their passion to effect changes for the greater global good.

**Professional and personal barriers.** One of the negative perceptions that affects female leaders is the belief they lack the personality type and experience to face the challenges of leadership (Mathipa & Tsoka, 2001). This perception leads them to believe they lack the potential for leadership (Gonzalez, 2010). In this study, gender issues and

indifferent attitudes of colleagues topped the list for professional barriers; family issues for personal barriers, and politics for competitive barriers. These barriers are representative of the male supremacy hooks (2000) noted must be overcome. Hooks said although great strides have been made toward achieving gender equity, women must continue to work hard toward personal empowerment and to have their vision seen. This vision appears to hold true for women in leadership positions in higher education.

Barriers female leaders face in higher education need to be thoroughly investigated to clarify why women are marginalized at all levels, especially in the top leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Creswell (2003) argued feminist theories are appropriate for “marginalized cases” (p. 10), where participants may very well articulate their marginalized situations either verbally or nonverbally, and through their tone and inflection of voices. I observed such expressions from P6 and P8, who articulated anger and indignation as they described the experiences of being marginalized and stereotyped in the workplace. Their raised voices, furrowed eyebrows, frowning faces, steady nose and lip movement, and firm hand movements appeared to reflect their fury.

In support with Creswell’s (2003) relevant views with feminist theories regarding marginalized issues, P6 had memorable experiences to share:

I have accomplished a lot in a documented way, and I don’t think that it’s ever really been publicly acknowledged. It’s not widely publicized. I don’t know how to describe it. Somebody gets a small grant and they get an article in the newsletter.

Another barrier for women in academia is the double standard policy manifested as a salary gap. Female leaders say they receive lower salaries relative to their male

counterparts, and at the same time, they are expected to follow a more rigid set of standards. P1 pointed out, “The only issue I have as it pertains to race and gender is that men still tend to make higher salaries than women.” P3 also thought bias exists in salary and remuneration for males versus females.

In support to the above assertions, *The White House Project Report* (2009) affirmed:

Women’s salaries not only lag behind those of their male counterparts in academia, but they have actually lost ground since the seventies. The salary gap between men and women exists at every level, and widens as women move up the ladder to the highest faculty ranks. (p. 24)

Underrepresentation of women is beginning to diminish due to an increased number of female presidents in higher education (ACE, 2007). There are more women with doctorates than men, yet women’s underrepresentation in academic leadership is still discernible considering the labor pool (Broad, 2009; Catalyst, 2008; Gonzalez, 2010). Female leaders’ efforts to improve academic representation, achieve higher positions, and obtain competitive salaries may have turned futile. The recurring underrepresentation of women in both administrative and professorial levels continues to cripple women’s future (August, 2006). Women have continued to be unfairly utilized regardless of their status, and salary gaps may proportionately increase as their positions elevate (*The White House Project Report*, 2009). Even if they stay employed, their advancement may remain sluggish (AAUP, 2006; ACE, 2007; Catalyst, 2008, 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007, 2009; Gonzalez, 2010; June, 2008; *The White House Project Report*, 2009). These difficult and

challenging situations demand female leaders to make unwavering decisions and actions. In doing so, they not only to halt negativities but also prove to the other leaders in the world that women are capable of doing what male leaders can do and may even do it better.

As P4 indicated, the stumbling block she had encountered is bureaucracy. For quite a long time she served as a dean with no chairs serving below her and leaving her with a perpetually overburdened workload. In city colleges and universities, akin to what P6 explained, faculty members are powerful and demanding. They can also be disobling to the point of causing grave obstructions to one's career advancement. Successfully advancing some agenda items requires full support of the faculty members, but garnering may require abundant patience.

Three participants in this study willingly chose to sacrifice their professional careers over their families to the point of delaying career advancement. Based on the online discussion launched by Segesten, (2011), women have to face the impossible choice of either having a child, or going for tenure; men do not. The strategic question that arises is what devices have women leaders employed to overcome personal obstacles. P7 stated she managed to work around the schedule of her children and went to work on flexible hours, as she did not have a supportive spouse to help her during those years. P2 had a similar personal issue concerning time in balancing family over career to the extent of missing workshops and seminars, but this was the choice she made because she valued her family more than her career. The striking difference between P7 and P2

was that P2 had a very supportive husband who gave her more time than what she would have expected him to offer.

Bornstein's (2007) findings supported the notion that women presidents were unable to reconcile an ideal portrait of performance with flawless management of their family responsibilities. As a consequence, most women delayed their advancement and gave their families top priority. For professional career women who are simultaneously family caregivers, hiring and supervising domestic helpers and making arrangements for child-care have been openly discussed. In contrast with male leadership, these issues are not points of discussion, and it is presumed someone besides the male executive is addressing them (Cheung & Halpern, 2010).

**Strategies to overcome barriers.** What is remarkable about female leaders, as the data from this study showed, is their ability to remain strong, persistent, patient, and focused despite those unsettling professional, personal, and competitive barriers that obstructed their career journey. The lack of support from their families had no serious impact on their success, except some delay in the advancement process in exchange for putting their families first.

**Role of intentionality and serendipity.** Seven of the eight participants expressed intentionality to advance in their careers by drawing career paths early on, except P6, who did not ever intend to become an administrator. Two participants in this study thought some female leaders lacked intentionality for fear of rejection. Although seven of the eight participants in this study expressed intentionality for higher positions, Madsen's (2010) study of 10 university presidents found that those presidents did not intentionally

aim for top-level leadership positions. The similarity between the participants in the two studies was both sets were driven with enthusiasm and energy to pursue new responsibilities and diverse opportunities. Both participant sets were also equipped with the proper credentials to sustain their positions.

The interview responses yielded unanimous perceptions among the eight participants regarding the pervasive role of serendipity. The participants spoke of opportunities that arose unexpectedly. It was clear that what made these opportunities course-setting for the women was the fact that they were watchful and attentive, flexible and opportunistic risk-takers. If a shadow of opportunity presented itself these women grasped it.

### **Mentoring and Support Strategies**

Vroom (1964) said that motivation comes when expectations are set, and people will pursue what they believe will produce the greatest reward. Mentoring and networking appear to support female executives in higher education in having high expectations for themselves and experiencing the reward of fulfilling those expectations. Vroom said expectancy derives from individuals' belief in their ability to attain a particular job performance. Mentoring and networking help female leaders develop confidence in their abilities by providing them with opportunities to gain tools for job success.

**Mentoring.** Claims of unavailability of mentoring in both public and private colleges and universities are supported by Gonzalez (2010). Gonzalez (2010) argued even though mentoring had become one of the hottest topics in higher education, it was not

happening in universities and there was very little training for executives at the institutional level. As a result, leaders were encouraged to attend formal mentoring leadership institutions like HERS, ACE, and Harvard Management Institutes where benefits appeared invaluable (Gonzalez, 2010; Jenifer, 2005). All the participants' satisfying, fruitful, and dynamic experiences from HERS' training seemed to coincide with Jenifer's (2005) report about HERS' success in providing women with an intensive training program to enhance management skills and help them to become successful leaders.

**Networking.** Networking goes hand-in-hand with mentoring and is a significant strategy in career advancement. Networking is the method by which relationships with individuals are developed and maintained in the process of career development (Forret & Dougherty, 2001). Employers have noted the importance of networking to institutional success and consequently, its use has increased (Giovagnoli & Stover, 2004). As industry enters the stage of interconnectedness, building relationships really matters because it provides career information while it also serves a social function (Giovagnoli & Stover, 2004).

In this study, exposure to networking was favorably supported by all participants. P6 and P5 were advocates for network creation. Traditionally, men have more favorable career growth opportunities, because they have more informal networking opportunities (Finlay, 1986; Thompson, 1990). It is essential for women leaders to engage in networking to support accessing information and finding social support (Moore & Webb, 1998).

Relationships appear to be built around reciprocity as an outcome of effective networking (Kaplan, 1984). Positive relationships between career success and networking and relationships developed through networking, foster career advancement and greater recognition from colleagues (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). In this age of globalization, as P3 shared, networking is vitally important because globalization and technology may dominate 21st century higher education leadership.

P2 pointed out, “If you don’t buy into that culture, you are not going to succeed as an administrator in higher education.” Based on study results, female aspirants for success in leadership positions should understand and embrace institutional culture, structure, and politics. Leaders’ success equates with the institution’s success and vice-versa. By working collaboratively toward a certain goal, female leaders would be able to build connections and develop relationships, resulting in trust. Trust serves as the backbone of any type of relationship, and Tschannen-Moran (2004) described it as glue that binds the leader and the followers (p. 583).

### **Gender Equity in Higher Education**

The majority of the participants in this study were politically empowered. They were allowed to participate in major decision making, air their concerns, exercise some forms of authority, and have their voices heard and considered. P4 explained that politics is about building and trusting relationships so as to create an opportunity for voicing concerns. Bronznick and Goldenhar (2008) supported this notion: When women bring their voices, vision, and leadership to the table alongside men, the debate turned stronger and the policy seemed more inclusive and sustainable. P2 had experienced working in the

upper echelon and enjoyed watching how all the pieces of the puzzle are assembled together. She considered herself empowered based on the definition attached to the term political empowerment. It may be concluded that the route to political empowerment is through political savviness and an effort to develop other distinctive leadership qualities inherent for effective and excellent leadership. Politically empowered female leaders earn the respect of their colleagues in the workplace, gain recognition from their peers, and win acceptance through their acknowledged voices. It is by empowering female leaders politically that gender inequity may be reduced in higher education.

**Empowering female leadership traits and impact.** This study revealed the critical mass of women creates a huge effect in policy-making and governance issues. The greater the representation of women, the quicker the action generated from the policy makers. This notion was supported by Wollack (2010) who argued women's presence in politics is critical especially in representing females' and marginalized citizens' issues and in creating a more expeditious response.

As observed by P2 and P5, women were perceived to be weak in making negotiations and representation. On the contrary, men were perceived as leaders who would inspire, delegate, use intellectual stimulation, and solve problems. This perception was supported by Madden (2005) whose study revealed the same deficiencies of female leaders. Gonzalez (2010) reported that even if women have traditional administrative credentials, they are not likely to bring the same status to an institution as white males because women are not labelled excellent leaders. Because women seem not as trusted as

male leaders, and promotions are based wholly on trust, women are not as likely to be promoted (Judith-Glazer-Raymo, 1999).

Ironically, Dambe and Moorad's (2008) empowerment-based/transformational leadership theory, which encompasses cultural leadership, trust, and vision, seems to indicate feminine leadership traits are desirable. It is the ability to be vulnerable or to accept criticism knowing that the other person is honest, open, reliable, and competent that makes women good leaders (Tschannen-Moran, 2004, p. 17). Because higher education focuses on excellence, which can be interpreted in different ways, assessing an administrator in higher education would be difficult without a clear-end outcome in mind.

In this study, some participants were perceived to be high achievers as evidenced by their frequent promotions as in the case of P1. "I was here 8 months in a job just to be closer to home, and within 8 months they moved me up to chief operating officer and from there, associate provost, and later, assistant vice president." What P1 experienced seemed to contradict Gonzalez's (2010) findings about women and minorities being disadvantaged because they are not perceived as high achievers. Female leaders exhibited excellence in developing relationships because they possess the referent power and were assumed to be more effective leaders for education and government due to their self-efficacious nature (Madden, 2005).

Women may be disadvantaged because in the academe their meaningful political engagement rarely happens. In this study, as supported by Maxwell (2007), political empowerment means equitable representation of women in decision-structures where they can voice their concerns in the formulation of policies. Nevertheless, their negligible

appearance in governance structures unavoidably signifies that national, regional, and local priorities may be finalized without the meaningful feedback from women.

It may be concluded that inasmuch as in higher education “the main problem is power and not gender per se” (Assie-Lumumba, 2006, p. 5), it is imperative that the institutions’ democratization be attained to remedy gender issues. Also, in this study, the participants noted the importance of developing critical mass and the benefits attached to women’s political involvement. Greater representation and engagement contributed to an accelerated rate of collaboration across party and ethnic lines that may promote a more sustainable peace (Wollack, 2010). Building sustainable peace, which necessitates transforming power relationships, is crucial for female leaders to achieve political empowerment and gender equality.

In this vein, succession planning plays a tremendous role. It is the only hope to elevate female leaders from the institution’s political fringe toward the gravitational center (Gonzalez, 2010). Female leaders’ absence could create a paralyzing effect in policy-making decisions, because women can win any of their propositions only if they have a greater representation. Thus, as women gain a greater presence, they gain stronger impact altering rules during the decision-making processes.

**Political savviness.** Compatible with political empowerment is the concept of political savviness. In this study, the term refers to awareness or knowledge of the institution’s culture, structure, and politics to become a successful leader. In short, political savviness is a main ingredient to political empowerment.

Apparently, understanding the institution's politics and culture is extremely important to be able to function efficiently in the workplace that includes interaction with others and making decisions. As was pointed out by six of the eight participants in this study, knowledge of politics would have an impact in hiring workers, overall job performance, and in promotion. Political savviness is central to attaining leadership success in higher education. A female leader may succeed without being politically savvy, but that could mean a marked sluggish promotion pattern and/or enormous career leadership struggles.

**Changes needed in 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership.** Regarding changes needed in the 21st century higher education leadership, seven of the eight participants in this study vigorously thought that female domination in higher education leadership is visible and feasible. As P4 described this era, "Women are going to transform higher education in the 21st century. As Broad (2009) pointed out, the presence of more women in senior policy-making decisions in higher education, particularly the presidency, may have a significant impact on diversity. A participant in this study observed that not only were there more women in presidential positions but there were also more gay men in top level ranks, which was also a new trend. Presidents in 2006 were described to be older than their counterparts 20 years ago. This age difference may forecast a high turnover rate in the academic presidency because of impending retirements and potential for greater diversity in the presidency (June, 2008a).

Other anticipated changes needed in the 21st century higher education leadership are detailed in Table 12 in chapter 4 that constitute: (a) changes in job requirement and

higher education, (b) leadership development and succession planning, (c) global vision, (d) family medical act, (e) racial and ethnic inclusiveness, (f) creation of a huge pipeline, and (g) the possibility of more external hires to join higher education.

As the 21st century progresses, women are going to be the carriers of the next generation as they excel in building relationships. Visionary and empowered women will be the movers and shakers of the 21st century leadership. Some work environments that were previously male-dominated have become progressively more feminised (Smyth, 2007) as observed by seven participants in this study. Leadership qualities, far-reaching experience, and developed skills of a leader have a lot to do with effective and competent leadership. The differences among females' leadership attributes as observed by these participants seemed to support a striking balance between masculine and feminine leadership traits. It may be timely and necessary to have a valid and professional set of criteria for leadership evaluation to obtain a reliable and credible evaluation.

### **Gender Equality Inclusion**

Gender remains an impediment to female leaders in securing a leadership position even if effective leadership is based on individual behaviors. One of the reasons female leaders were underutilized in higher education administrative ranks is due to gender gap. Chliwniak (1997) posited that gender gap might represent an obstacle to possible institutional improvements. Only when female senior leaders in higher education become empowered will gender equality be achievable. Until gender equality is attained in senior level leadership positions, more studies are needed on the means to empower women senior leaders (Hur, 2006).

**Role of gender in career path.** In this study, the impact of gender in the career paths of female senior leaders largely depends upon the gender domination in the workplace. Typically, for female domains, gender had a positive effect on female leaders, relative to male-dominated and sexist environments where gender had a negative impact on women. In academic institutions where student populations were more diverse, noticeably, the impact of gender was also minimal. The advantages of being white and male in the academic world have become less prominent. Even if there was significantly more equity now than in the past, women remained at a disadvantage. In workplaces controlled by women, gender discrimination and stereotyping may have been reduced; however, as reported by the participants, professional jealousy and the number of queen bees may be on the rise due to women's competitive nature. Santovec (2008) noted some female leaders were envious and unappreciative of their colleagues climbing the ladder, while others became remorseful working with female bosses. Those findings seemed to align with the views of some participants in this study who observed that women might have a negative attitude toward female empowered leaders. While professional jealousy dies in a busy, supportive, helpful, and compassionate environment, other male educators remained dismissive of women's ideas just because their perceptions were different.

The elimination of the negative perceptions and stereotypes about women's leadership styles and abilities that incessantly jeopardizes women's reputation and integrity as professionals (Catalyst Organization, 2005) would promote women's empowerment, while simultaneously reducing gender inequity. By unevenly employing females in jobs where regular promotion procedures are not available, employers

successfully discouraged females' aspirations while the old boy's network effectively managed immobilizing women's success (Richardson & Loubier, 2008). Unconscious gender bias was apt to methodically inconvenience women, and the increasing impacts remained considerable. For female leaders to feel respected and accepted in the workplace would be a door-opener to becoming politically empowered.

**Strategies to reduce gender gap in higher education leadership.** The most appealing part of this study constituted the strategies the participants found critical to reducing gender inequity and gender gap in higher education. As detailed in the previous chapter, awareness of higher education's structure and culture is the most important ingredient to leadership success. In higher education one has to welcome the culture of the institution; otherwise, one cannot move forward. Any decisions a leader makes are reflective of the institution's culture, structure, and politics.

It is opportune for women to develop the necessary leadership skills and values to acquire and maintain the job they want. To be both politically savvy and hard working is dominant in leadership. Collaboration is foremost in attaining leadership success as it maintains balance and sustainability of one's position.

#### **Interpretation of the Findings and Empowerment-based Leadership Theory**

Empowerment-based leadership, as described by Dambe and Moorad (2008), is equated with transformational leadership that focused on characteristics such as empowerment, collaboration, shared power, and a visionary commitment to forging new pathways. Collaborative leadership allows people to convene and work together with a foresight of achieving similar goals. As Dambe and Moorad (2008) explained,

“Collaboration creates a context and decides where one prefers to work with another toward a shared goal” (p. 584). P7 demonstrated this concept of collaboration and hard work by asserting that she can choose to work with anyone whom she prefers. She thought she had that flexibility as department dean, although she never had any problem with the supportiveness and helpfulness of staff. She claimed that they all collaboratively work very hard to generate revenues.

Regardless of the degree of collaboration demonstrated by female leaders, women relative to men, more frequently have to face legality issues due to their subordinates’ opposition or resistance to do what they are supposed to undertake, besides being judgmental of female’s behavior as leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007). As P2 observed, most men appear dismissive of women’s views just because these views are different from their own. For participants in this study, experiencing transformation leadership was important from two unique perspectives. Being in an environment in which those above them on the career ladder exercised a transformational approach, gave these women the opportunity to feel empowered enough to pursue the goal of becoming an administrative leader in higher education. Subsequently, these women appear to be forging new pathways in higher education leadership because of their ability to build relationships.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The social change implications of this study are three-fold. First, empowering female senior leaders may improve gender equity, which will in turn boost the morale, dignity, self-esteem, respect, and confidence of women and reduce the gender gap in academia. Second, empowering female senior leaders might enable women leaders’

parity if not dominance in senior level positions, which might lead to major transformations in higher education leadership. Third, the upshot of female leaders becoming empowered as a result of “participative decision making tradition” (Dambe & Moorad, 2008, p. 580) might translate to an increased engagement of women with other peoples of the world, wherein the leaders gain more power by giving it away and by watching the multiplying effect as the cycle continues (Dambe & Moorad, 2008).

With female leaders’ collaborative attitude and global vision, higher education in the 21st century has the potential to be transformed. Leaders with such a vision could articulate a realistic, credible, and attractive future that is more responsive to the needs of higher education. For instance, the convergence of globalization and technology as cited by P3 in this study could make higher education more serviceable, more meaningful, and more relevant; thus, enabling American education to continue in a manner that is germane to the whole world. Furthermore, preparing female aspirants for top positions through proper mentoring and networking will help them develop essential skills, strong values, and updated knowledge, and will increase their confidence and commitment to contribute to the greater good.

### **Recommendation for Actions**

The outcomes of this research led to some general recommendations. It appears there is a need for academic leaders to reexamine, redefine, and restructure their approach to closing the gender gap since this is central to female leaders’ underrepresentation. Thus, I recommend the following:

1. Colleges and universities should create and maintain formal mentoring programs not only for aspiring leaders but also mostly for those in dire need of leadership training such as women and minorities who appear disproportionately underrepresented in senior administrative and professorial ranks.
2. Colleges and universities should participate in succession planning for executive positions with the intention of fostering diversity and shared governance.
3. Higher education should establish a healthy and robust academic pipeline of female academic leaders for filling executive openings.
4. Higher education should develop a critical mass of women of varying ethnicity in top leadership posts to serve as role models for both men and women and to insure that all concerns are heard and considered.
5. Higher education should continuously monitor the number of women in top-level positions where commitment and accountability are needed.
6. Colleges and universities should consider greater flexibility and support for women leaders/employees who have tight work schedules, but are determined.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the research findings and conclusions drawn from the study, I recommend the following threads of inquiry for further examination:

1. There is a need to investigate the age group gap of women prepared for academic leadership opportunities to consider how top leaders should groom younger leaders succeed them in a seamless manner.
2. Other qualitative researchers may find interest in exploring the relationship between the tenure system and the performance of faculty. One of the participants in this study observed tenured faculty perform little service to students, given their salaries.
3. Quantitative researchers who may find this topic interesting may approach it differently. It would be interesting to determine, for instance, the relationship among effective leadership, work performance, and empowered female leaders with added variables such as age and ethnicity. To determine the impact of empowered female leaders on academic administration would as well be an appealing topic.
4. There is a need to continue to pursue similar qualitative studies to identify both overt and subtle impediments women leaders encountered in higher education. Focusing on female leaders with particular challenges and issues in their career advancement would be interesting and might be employed to highlight effective strategies for overcoming those barriers.
5. Researchers could conduct a qualitative study on the similarities and differences between women's perceptions about gender gaps and gender inequities between those who hail from male-dominated disciplines and those from the female domains. Such a study may aim to find out the influencing

factors for female leaders' consciousness, advocacy, and commitment and compare it to their needs, and determine the possible consequences of their actions.

### **Researcher Reflections**

Because this is a hermeneutic phenomenological study, self-reflection is strongly recommended to elucidate how research outcomes have been constructed and the origin of such construction such as the different preferences and choices of the researcher during the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). I needed to be critically aware of my own preconceptions, personal assumptions, and goals, and most importantly, I had to be conscious of the effects of all these both on the research process and findings (Finlay, 2008). As espoused by Gadamer (1975), "The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against our own fore-meanings" (pp. 268-269). I have always been a dedicated educator. Having worked on three different continents (Asia, Africa, and North America) as an instructor and a senior administrator enabled me to gain knowledge and information that guided me in this study. On two instances, during the interview process, I became deeply engaged in asking probing questions to generate more information-rich responses; thus, a back and forth dialogue prevailed, and I became less mindful of gestural observation. The last interview turned out to be the most emotional with the participant's candid expression of how she allowed herself to participate in this study despite numerous rejections of similar invitations.

The longest and most intriguing interview was with the sixth participant because of her far-reaching professional experience, outstanding educational background, and overall, her intelligence. She had much to offer, and so her responses were detailed and thick to the point of forgetting the question. She was a gifted woman, but for some reason she lacked intentionality to be an administrator, not to mention a top-level administrator. It was her internal standards that caused her some issues that she has regretted upon reflecting on her career path. When she indicated that she did not have any professional barrier and argued that this question does not apply to her; amazingly, at the middle of the interview, she revealed she had some gender issues. I was skeptical why she did not consider sexism as an impediment to her profession at that college at the very start; this issue was cited in discrepant cases and nonconfirming data in chapter 4.

Although I had a little difficulty obtaining my sample, my data collection process was exceedingly smooth. It was an unbelievable experience to be meeting with those distinguished and reputable female leaders who had been very supportive, understanding, and cooperative to take part in my study. For the most part, I have uncovered the answers to the lingering questions I had before my research began, and most importantly, I have obtained clarity regarding women's lack of empowerment and gender inequity issues in the workplace.

### **Conclusion**

After a thorough analysis of the data presented by the eight participants in this study, it is clear gender inequity is still firmly positioned in higher education and establishing systemic gender equality will be a costly investment. Gender equality and

women's empowerment is a universal dilemma; therefore, solving this issue entails the global cooperation of educational leaders. People should not misconstrue gender equality. Gender equality does not literally mean for women leaders to strip power from men; rather, women must work with men and receive equal opportunities for advancement and wages.

Women leaders have shown great strides and immense aptitude for performing multiskill duties and comfort in multitasking scenarios and have proven their ability to serve as remarkable leaders. For women to remain discriminated against based on untested grounds and perceptions is indubitably unfair (Mathipa & Tsoka, 2001). Appreciating their contributions to society and changing misconceptions about women leaders by providing them equal and diverse opportunities must happen now.

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## Appendix A: Permission from the Institutional Review Board

**Permission from the Institutional Review Board****IRB Materials Approved-Mila  
Cselenszky**

Date : Mon, Jul 11, 2011 01:18 PM CDT  
From : IRB <IRB@waldenu.edu>  
To : Mila Cselenszky <mila.cselenszky@waldenu.edu>  
CC : Gary Lacy <gary.lacy@waldenu.edu>... [more](#)  
Attachment :  [Cselenszky\\_Consent\\_Form.pdf](#) [Save to My Files](#)

Dear Ms. Cselenszky,

This email is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the study entitled, "Phenomenological Study of Empowering Women Senior Leaders in Higher Education."

Your approval # is 07-11-11-0113407. You will need to reference this number in your dissertation and in any future funding or publication submissions. Also attached to this e-mail is the IRB approved consent form. Please note, if this is already in an on-line format, you will need to update that consent document to include the IRB approval number and expiration date.

Your IRB approval expires on July 10, 2012. One month before this expiration date, you will be sent a Continuing Review Form, which must be submitted if you wish to collect data beyond the approval expiration date.

Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application document that has been submitted as of this date. If you need to make any changes to your research staff or procedures, you must obtain IRB approval by submitting the IRB Request for Change in Procedures Form. You will receive confirmation with a status update of the request within 1 week of submitting the change request form and are not permitted to implement changes prior to receiving approval. Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB's approval, and the University will not accept or grant credit for student work that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

When you submitted your IRB application, you made a commitment to communicate both discrete adverse events and general problems to the IRB within 1 week of their occurrence/realization. Failure to do so may result in invalidation of data, loss of academic credit, and/or loss of legal protections otherwise available to the researcher.

Both the Adverse Event Reporting form and Request for Change in Procedures form can be obtained at the IRB section of the Walden web site or by emailing [irb@waldenu.edu](mailto:irb@waldenu.edu):

[http://inside.waldenu.edu/c/Student\\_Faculty/StudentFaculty\\_4274.htm](http://inside.waldenu.edu/c/Student_Faculty/StudentFaculty_4274.htm)

Researchers are expected to keep detailed records of their research activities (i.e., participant log sheets, completed consent forms, etc.) for the same period of time they retain the original data. If, in the future, you require copies of the originally submitted IRB materials, you may request them from Institutional Review Board.

Please note that this letter indicates that the IRB has approved your research. You may not begin the research phase of your dissertation, however, until you have received the **Notification of Approval to Conduct Research** (which indicates that your committee and Program Chair have also approved your research proposal). Once you have received this notification by email, you may begin your data collection.

Both students and faculty are invited to provide feedback on this IRB experience at the link below:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ_3d_3d)

Sincerely,

Jenny Sherer, M.Ed., CIP  
Operations Manger  
Office of Research Integrity and Compliance  
Email: [irb@waldenu.edu](mailto:irb@waldenu.edu)  
Fax: 626-605-0472  
Tollfree: 800-925-3368 ext. 1341  
Office address for Walden University:  
155 5th Avenue South, Suite 100  
Minneapolis, MN 55401

## Appendix B: Invitation Letter

## Invitation Letter to Interviewing Partners

Dear (Participant):

As (current position) of (name of College or University), you have made immeasurable contributions to higher education institutions in the United States. Your important story may be unknown about your experiences and the lessons you have learned as you have inspired other women to pursue senior leadership roles and become successful in their chosen endeavors.

I am Mila P. Cselenszky and currently am a Ph.D. candidate at The Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership, Walden University. The purpose of my dissertation research is two-fold: to describe the significant events and lived experiences that surround the lives of female senior leaders in higher education, and to understand how these significant events and lived experiences may have helped define or shape their careers along with the impact of the influences that some individuals may have on their professional lives

This letter is to request your voluntary participation in my dissertation research. As stated in the consent form, you have been invited to participate in this study because your experiences could contribute to and further our knowledge about how female leaders become empowered in higher education. After reading the consent form, if you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to sign the consent form and email it to mila.cselenszky@waldenu.edu within five (5) days of receipt. Only then, may you start to respond to the four screening questions in approximately 45 minutes and to email the typed responses to mila.cselenszky@waldenu.edu. And while everyone will complete the initial four questions, *only eight* participants will be invited for the in-depth interviews.

The Sample Interview Guide with open-ended questions about career paths and professional barriers will serve as a tentative outline for you to follow in collecting information that only you can provide based on your experiences, insights, and observations.

I understand that your time is extremely valuable, and I will make sure that it will be utilized judiciously. I will protect and safeguard your identity through the use of pseudonyms. Should you decide to take part in the study, your participation would constitute a valuable contribution to the knowledge base relevant to women's empowerment and leadership in higher education.

The plan is to conduct the interviews at a time, date, and place suitable for you, and I will work with you if changes need to be made. Please email me at your earliest convenience *when* (date, day, and time) I can contact you to further arrange the interview. After

transcribing the interview, a copy of the transcribed data will be sent to you for your review and feedback. If you find the transcripts do not reflect accurately on what you perceive, I will work with you to resolve those inaccuracies.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Gary Lacy, my dissertation chair and mentor, and faculty at The Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership, Walden University at [gary.lacy@waldenu.edu](mailto:gary.lacy@waldenu.edu) or you can call him at 413-351-5329. You can as well email me at [mila.cselenszky@waldenu.edu](mailto:mila.cselenszky@waldenu.edu), or call me at 646-925-7939. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott, Director, Research Center, and Walden University at 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210.

Sincerely,

*Mila P. Cselenszky*

Mila P. Cselenszky, MA ED  
Ph.D. Candidate-Higher Education Leadership  
The Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership  
Walden University  
[mila.cselenszky@waldenu.edu](mailto:mila.cselenszky@waldenu.edu)  
Cell: 646-925-7939

cc: Dr. Gary Lacy  
Dissertation Chair and Faculty Mentor  
The Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership  
Division of Graduate Studies, Walden University  
[Gary.lacy@waldenu.edu](mailto:Gary.lacy@waldenu.edu)  
Cell: 413-351-5329

### Appendix C: Sample Interview Guide

I sincerely appreciate your effort for making this dissertation study possible. As you are aware, this research aims to achieve a deeper understanding of the pathways that women senior leaders undergo in order to advance in their careers and become empowered to create a change in higher education. You will be invited to reflect on various career paths that guided, inspired, and led you to the position you were having now. You will think deeper to recall those overt and implicit phenomena and lived experiences; even those individuals that have obstructed, delayed, and/or influenced your professional advancement over the years. These lived experiences and significant events may be extremely reflective, fulfilling, and meaningful.

Before the interview starts, again, please be assured that your confidentiality will be protected at all times. While the interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for accuracy purposes, any references, names, organizational affiliations that may expose your identity will be replaced by pseudonyms during the entire data collection and analysis processes. For security purposes, all taped and recorded data along with the field notes will be properly kept and securely locked in the researcher's home. Upon the completion of the study, all pertinent data and documents including the taped recorded interviews will be destroyed.

The following 12 *sample guide questions* are based on lived experiences of female leaders and may seem broader than the final interview questions; however they are very much related to the final interview questions. The sample guide questions will be sent to the final eight participants *before* the formal 90 minute in-depth, open-ended

interview not only to provide them an adequate time, but also to help and guide the participants to reflect on the possible responses to the final interview questions that appear *immediately after* the sample guide questions.

#### **A. Career Paths and Professional Barriers**

1. While you are advancing in your career, can you describe in detail the career paths you have trailed before you landed to where you are now? To what would you ascribe your success in obtaining your current position? Would you consider yourself *successful* as you envision you would be? If yes, why; if not, why not?

2. As a senior leader, what professional struggles, if any, have you encountered while advancing in your professional career? What strategies have you used to effectively deal with those challenging issues and/or to overcome them? How effective have they been?

3. Why do you think some female leaders were successful in obtaining top leadership positions? To what would you attribute their success? How would you explain the role of *serendipity* (chance events) in women's career success especially in becoming a president? Please elaborate.

#### **B. Mentoring Strategies**

4. While moving up in your present executive leadership position, what Career mobility resources would you consider necessary and important? Why? How would you describe the resources available to you on your leadership journey? How do you think *inadequate* mentoring would impact future female leaders in higher education?

5. What steps or strategies do you think should aspiring female leaders take to better prepare themselves for top leadership positions like the presidency? If mentoring is inadequate or not available, what other helpful resources would you consider and why? Please elaborate.

6. As we advanced to the 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education leadership, colleges and universities may need more women as presidents. What do you think should those women's institutional and professional support groups emphasize or focus more to help female candidates succeed in their presidential aspirations? Have you ever been involved in any of the support groups? If yes, please explain your role. If not, please explain why you chose not to get involved.

### **C. Empowerment, Politics, and Gender Inequity**

7. How well do you think are those politically empowered female top leaders being treated by their male peers and by their other female colleagues? What techniques would you consider they should have done to gain acceptance and inclusion with major male and female stakeholders? By "political empowerment" is meant the equitable representation of women in decision-making structures both formal and informal and having women's voices heard in the formulation of policies affecting their societies (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi, 2006, p. 4). Would you consider yourself as politically empowered? If yes, why; if not, why not?

8. What changes do you anticipate could emerge in higher education leadership if female senior leaders would become empowered and would nationally dominate the presidency of colleges and universities? What important leadership

qualities do you think women leaders should possess more than male leaders and why?

9. What role did *gender* play in the pursuit of your career path to administrative senior leadership position? Would you consider a woman leader to carry more disadvantages than advantages? If yes, why; if not, why not?

10. What strategies or actions do you think should be undertaken to reduce gender gap to affect status quo in higher education? Please elaborate.

11. If changes need to be carried out in higher education leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as a female senior leader, what form should these changes take and why? What would you advise those female presidential aspirants to focus at, especially in their initial years in the position? Please elaborate.

12. How has being *politically erudite* helped aspiring female presidential candidates to succeed in their ambition? Would you consider politically savvy leaders to be more effective and competent leaders than politically empowered leaders? If yes, why; if not, why not?

## Appendix D: Consent Form

### Consent Form

**Dear Participant/Respondent:**

I am Mila P. Cselenszky, and am a Ph.D. Candidate at The Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership, Walden University. I am conducting a research study entitled, "Phenomenological Study of Empowering Women Senior Leaders in Higher Education." You have been invited to take part in this dissertation research project because; I believe you can help facilitate the expansion of a developing theory that if women senior leaders become empowered, changes may likely emerge in higher education. This study will include female senior leaders in four-year public and private colleges and/or universities in a selected state within United States who meet the established inclusion criteria set forth by the researcher.

Please carefully read this consent form, and feel free to ask me any questions that may seem unclear to you in this document before signing it. I will make myself available to answer any questions you might have regarding participation.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to describe the significant events and lived experiences of female senior leaders in higher education and to understand how these lived experiences may have helped define and shape their careers along with the impact of the influences that some individuals may have on their professional lives.

**Description of Procedures:**

You will be asked to carefully read and review this consent form that carries the approval number of 07-11-11-0113407 from Walden IRB along with its expiration date of July 10, 2012. If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign the consent form and email it to mila.cselenszky@waldenu.edu within five (5) days of receipt. You may keep a copy of this consent form. It is important that I receive the signed consent form as evidence of informed consent *prior* to answering the four screening questions attached. The four open-ended questions can be answered in approximately 45 minutes. And while everyone will complete the initial four questions, only some will be invited for the in-depth interviews. You will be asked to email the typed responses to mila.cselenszky@waldenu.edu. The richness of the responses you provide will determine the final eight participants to be included in the 90-minute in-depth interview.

Since document examination will be one of the sources of data collection in this study, each participant's curriculum vitae (CV) will be collected and reviewed. If CV is not available, for the convenience of the participants they will be asked to complete a brief and confidential demographic survey.

The interview, which will be arranged based on the convenience of the participants at a mutually agreed location, will be audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The Sample Interview Guide with open-ended questions about women leadership will be emailed to the final participants in order to help and guide them to reflect on the responses. Those who will not be chosen for the in-depth interviews will be notified through an email and/or a phone call. All data will be obtained *only* after the informed consent process. Furthermore, member checking will be employed in order to determine whether the interviewing partners say what they really intend to say or whether their words match what they actually mean to say. I will use a tape recorder to accurately capture all these articulations. To engage in a member check, I will need 30 minutes for each participant's engagement.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, you can do so without any penalty or loss of benefit to yourself. Everyone will be respectful of your decision and it will not in any manner affect your position or standing in the college or university. Moreover, if you feel stressed during the study, you may stop at any time. You may also skip any questions that make you feel uncomfortable or you think are too personal.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

There are minimal risks in this study. The participants are not exposed to risks greater than the gains they might derive. The estimated risks level to subjects including physical, psychological, social, and so forth, are minimal which means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. More importantly, your participation will constitute a valuable contribution to the knowledge base relevant to women's empowerment and leadership in higher education.

**Compensation:**

There is no monetary compensation to participants in this study. However, this study will provide you a voice that you would not have otherwise and will support women who are struggling to understand the pathway(s) to executive leadership at colleges and universities.

**Confidentiality:**

There are no known risks or discomforts to the respondents associated with this study, because any information that participants provide will be kept confidential and treated with respect. All participants' identifying information will be replaced by pseudonyms during the entire data collection and analysis processes to safeguard their confidentiality and ensure their safety. For any purposes outside of this research project, I will not use any participants' information that could identify them in any reports of the study.

**Contacts and Questions:** For any questions you may ask me or my faculty mentor and dissertation chair, Dr. Gary Lacy. You may contact me at 646-925-7939 and/or you can email me at mila.cselenszky@waldenu.edu. You may also contact my faculty mentor and dissertation chair, Dr. Gary Lacy at (413-351-5329) and/or email him @gary.lacy@waldenu.edu. If you want to privately talk about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Director of the Research Center at Walden University. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 07-11-11-0113407 and it expires on **July 10, 2012.**

**Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information presented to me regarding the study, and I fully understand the study; hence, my willingness to participate. By signing below I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date of consent \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Written or Electronic\* Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Written or Electronic\* Signature Mila P. Cselenszky

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other



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Attachment to the Consent Form (APPENDIX D)

The following four open-ended questions can be answered in approximately 45 minutes. Please *email* your typed responses to [mila.cselenszky@waldenu.edu](mailto:mila.cselenszky@waldenu.edu) as soon as you complete responding to them.

1. What factors, if any, have contributed to your success as an academic leader?
2. What academic support and/or influence, if any, have you obtained from your superiors? How have they supported you if in case?
3. As you reflect on your career in higher education administration, what factors, if any, do you perceive would influence your lived experiences?
4. What challenges, if any, would you consider are impediments to your success?

## Appendix E: Demographic Survey

## Confidential Demographic Survey

1. Age \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Highest Degree Earned: \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Work Hours per Week: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_
5. Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Number/Age of Children: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Occupation of Spouse if Any: \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Your Birth Order: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Parents' Highest Educational Levels: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_
- Father of Male Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_
- Mother of Female Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Number of Years in Current Position: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Previous Three Administrative Positions, Institution/Organization, & Yrs. of Service
- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_
12. Total Number of Years in Higher Education Administration: \_\_\_\_\_
13. Security of Current Position:
- Tenure Track: \_\_\_\_\_ Tenured: \_\_\_\_\_ At Will: \_\_\_\_\_
- One-Year, Renewable Contract: \_\_\_\_\_ Multi-Year Contract: \_\_\_\_\_
14. Critical Professional/Career Mentoring Experience:
- Position/Title of Mentor(s): \_\_\_\_\_
- Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_
- Gender of Mentor(s): Male: ( ) Female: ( )

## Appendix F: Confidentiality Agreement

## CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

**Name of Signer:** \_\_\_\_\_

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: Phenomenological Study of Empowering Women Senior Leaders in Higher Education,” I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

*By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:*

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge copy, release, sell and loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant’s name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I’m officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

By signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix G: Final Interview Questions

### Final Interview Questions

The following set of questions is the *final interview* questions that will address the three research questions and will be asked in the formal 90-minute in-depth interview. In the course of the interview, you can interrupt the interviewer if you need to clarify something or have a problem. For inquiries that may seem irrelevant or make you feel uncomfortable, you may decline to respond to those questions or simply ignore them.

You are encouraged to focus on questions you consider relevant, important, meaningful, and interesting. Your additional insights or comments are profoundly appreciated. Are there any questions that you would like to ask before we begin the formal interview?

#### A. Career Pathways and Professional Barriers

1. As a female senior leader, how did you advance and succeed in obtaining the leadership position that you have right now? What made you pursue a senior level position in higher education? While moving up, can you *fully* describe the different paths you have pursued and their impact to your professional career?

2. While obtaining your present leadership position, have you stumbled upon any professional barriers that may have hindered or delayed your mobility journey? If so, what stumbling blocks have you encountered? How did those barriers affect your professional career and what strategies have you employed to overcome them? If not, with what would you attribute this to?

3. As a female senior leader, do you think there is any *lack of intentionality* affecting women's desire in career advancement? Would you consider *serendipity* (chance events) to play a role in women's career paths by altogether altering their perspectives? Please elaborate.

#### **B. Mentoring Strategies**

4. What important career mobility resources did you obtain while climbing the ladder? Were these resources accessible at the time, or did you have difficulty attaining them? Would you consider inadequate mentoring strategies to critically affect those aspiring female leaders for top leadership positions? Please elaborate.

5. If there is one mentoring suggestion you can provide to ensure success for a female seeking top level leaders, what would it be? Please explain.

6. Do you know of any women's institutional and professional support groups that have helped prospective women aspirants acquire top executive positions like the presidency? Have you been involved with any of these groups? If so, how successful have they been? If not, why did you choose not to be involved?

#### **C. Empowerment, Politics and Gender Inequity**

7. How would you describe a politically empowered female leader? By "political empowerment" is meant the equitable representation of women in decision-making structures both formal and informal and having women's voices heard in the formulation of policies affecting their societies (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi, 2006, p. 4). Do you see yourself as politically empowered?

8. Do you see yourself as *politically savvy*? If so, how has this helped you reach your current position? How do you perceive the role of politics in the selection and appointment of top executive positions in higher education? Please explain.

9. Based on your own experience, can you envision changes to occur in higher education leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What major leadership transformations do you think are in the horizon if these happen? In what way would these changes be beneficial in the overall higher education leadership arena?

10. From your perspective, would you consider women to be better presidents than men, or vice-versa? If so, why; if not, why not? For new female presidents, what do you think should they focus on more to maintain balance and sustainability of their position?

11. Would you consider gender to have an impact on the leadership development process? How do you believe gender has affected your career advancement? Has this been an impediment to your career advancement, and if it were, what did you do to overcome this difficult challenge? If this has been a positive factor, why do you think this is the case?

12. Based on your experience, can you describe the attitude of male educational leaders and other female leaders toward *empowered* female leaders? Being one of the top leaders, what strategies have you devised to win acceptance and respect in the inner circle from your male counterparts and other stakeholders?

## Appendix H: Researcher's Curriculum Vitae

**MILA P. CSELENSZKY**

mila.cselenszky@waldenu.edu

646-925-7939

**PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY:**

- School Director
- Academic/Programs Director & ICTP Coordinator
- Site Director & Academic Dean
- Assistant Site Director & Academic Dean
- Assistant Academic Dean for Sites and Centers
- Chairperson, Math Department
- Lead Instructor, Evening Department
- Head, Secretarial Department
- Overseas Contract Worker
- Head, English Department
- College Instructor
- Classroom Teacher

**HIGHLIGHTS OF QUALIFICATIONS:**

- Has more than 30 years of top, diversified experience.
- Strong background in many areas including management, operations, strategic planning, program management, staff training and development, recruitment, curriculum development, academic compliance, regulatory compliance, conflict resolution, and student relations.
- Hard working, driven, and dedicated while highly-experienced in all aspects of the management process, and proven in running programs which provide the highest levels of academic training and services.
- Has led many school development programs and is proven in managing operations which consistently meet and exceed all program, student, and community expectations.
- Adept in the recruitment, training, supervision, and mentoring of all levels of personnel, and in seeing all personnel to their maximum potential.
- Possesses extensive experience within the mathematics area, and is thoroughly familiar with educational practices, standards, and protocols.
- Experienced in working with a large and diverse student population.
- Excellent organizational, communication, and people skills.
- Thrives in a busy, fast-paced working environment.

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:**

MANHATTAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT, New York, New York  
School Director (2009-2010)

Directly responsible for managing day to day school operations, training and supervision of support staff, evaluating educational program delivery, monitoring teacher performance, academic compliance coordination, coordinating teacher training programs, responding to inquiries from the State Education Department Staff, conducting key staff meetings, and student relations.

- Presided over the management and delivery of the highest levels of educational services to a large and diverse student community.
- Personally supervised admissions staff and certified agents to ensure that student recruitment practices met with all regulatory parameters.
- Prepared and submitted a complete package to Albany to obtain Bureau of Proprietary School Supervision License for the school.
- Managed the approval of six curricula applications with a six-month period, which followed six months of revamping, redesigning, and transforming existing business management programs.
- Personally wrote new catalog, prepared and revised enrollment forms, and designed many other forms required by regulatory agencies.
- Established a new three-month Intensive Business English Program, which catered to foreign students.

Academic Programs Director/ICTP Coordinator (2008-2010)

Responsible for managing academic programs, overseeing academic personnel, key staff recruitment, staff training and development, managing specialized training programs placement for students, revising and updating school policy regulations and forms, preparing instructor schedules, invoice preparation, facilitating reimbursements, and handling a wide variety of special projects.

- Involved in all areas of academic program management.
- Monitored programs to ensure that all program expectations were consistently met.
- Worked with staff members on all manner of academic issues.

INTERBORO INSTITUTE, New York, New York

Site Director/Academic Dean (2005-2007)

Responsible for managing site operations, staff training and supervision, workflow coordination, attending presidential cabinet meetings, conducting faculty and staff meetings, instructor evaluation, coordinating student orientations, overseeing faculty and student workshops, and student relations.

- Managed all aspects of daily campus operations, and ensured highest levels of educational services.
- During tenure, spearheaded math placement to 93%, which greatly enhanced retention and graduation rates, and also co-authored and published Basic Math and Algebra books for developmental students.
- Coordinated all manner of on-campus services and events.
- Resolved both faculty and student conflicts.

Assistant Site Director/Academic Dean for Sites & Centers (2004)

Responsible for assisting with daily school operations, orienting and mentoring new teachers, monitoring faculty member and class performance, mediating and resolving

instructor-related conflicts, conducting site visits, assisting students with academic issues, teacher evaluation, and participating in various workshops.

- Ensured that all sites conformed with all applicable academic standards.
- Managed academic and administrative areas in Site Director's absence.
- Worked extensively with high-level administrators at all facilities.

Chairperson – Math Department (2000-2004)

Responsible for coordinating day to day department operations, recruiting and hiring instructors, developing program curriculum, conducting departmental meetings, preparing placement and final exams, master schedule preparation, supervising tutorial schedules, and other administrative functions.

- Managed successful operations at all sites, and ensured that all instructors met compliance standards.
- Developed and implemented new programs to measure and evaluate student retention rates.
- Further presided over the increase of placement rates in developmental mathematics.

PROJECT SOCIAL CARE, New York, New York

Evening Lead Instructor (1998-2000)

Responsible for managing evening instructional activities, supervising and mentoring instructors, conducting facility and staff meetings, observing classes, staff recruitment, monitoring program attendance, resolving student and teacher complaints, and student relations.

- Managed both administrative and supervisory activities.
- Acclimated newly-hired instructors, and ensured a smooth transition to program teaching.
- Ensured program's compliance with all academic parameters.

JEFFERSON BUSINESS SCHOOL, Brooklyn, New York

Head – Secretarial Department (1986-1989)

Responsible for directing department, coordinating academic activities, developing program curriculum, supervising teaching personnel, department meetings coordination, monitoring lesson plans and final exams, observing classes, instructor evaluation, and all aspects of student relations.

- Ensured the highest levels of teaching, as well as support for all students.
- Established departmental projects to increase student retention, as well as building student keyboarding speed to ensure quality student placement.

GWADABAWA SECONDARY SCHOOL, Sokoto State, Nigeria

Head – English Department (1980-1985)

Responsible for managing departmental operations, staff training and supervision, conducting departmental meetings, curriculum development, observing classes, teacher

evaluation, representing district in preparation for regional certification exams, and creating developmental projects for department and mentored students.

- Led and managed the English Department smoothly and efficiently while consistently meeting the school parameters.
- Recruited, trained, and mentored teaching personnel and ensured that teachers met their potential.
- Interfaced with principal and other department heads.

**TEACHING EXPERIENCE:**

(Taught Developmental Math, Business English, Business College Math, Business Mgt.)

Interboro Institute, New York, NY Instructor (2000-2006)  
 Project Social Care, Rego Park Queens, NY Instructor (1997-2000)  
 Betty Owens Limited, New York, NY Instructor (1996-1998)  
 New York School for Medical and Dental Assistants, 1991-1994  
 Heffley & Browne Secretarial School, Brooklyn, New York, NY Instructor (1990-1992)  
 International Career Institute, New York, NY Instructor (1986-1992)  
 Advanced Career Training, New York, NY Instructor (1998-1990)  
 New York Institute of Computer Science and Technology, New York, NY Instructor (1986-1989)  
 Jefferson Business School, Brooklyn, NY Instructor (1986-1989)  
 Gwadabawa Secondary School, Sokoto State, Nigeria. English teacher/Department Head (1980-1985)  
 Batangas State University, Batangas City, Philippines. Instructor (1972-1980)  
 University of Batangas, Batangas City, Philippines. Instructor (1972-1980)  
 Batangas National High School, Classroom Teacher (1967-1972)

**EDUCATION:**

Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota (2006-Present)  
 Ph.D. Candidate-Higher Education Leadership, Anticipated graduation, July 2012.

University of Batangas, Batangas City, Philippines (1979)  
 Master of Arts in Education, Major in Administration and Supervision.

University of Batangas, Batangas City, Philippines (1967)  
 Bachelor of Science in Education. Major in English, Minor Spanish and Math

University of Batangas, Batangas City, Philippines (1965)  
 Elementary Teacher's Certificate.

**HONORS & AWARDS:**

- Outstanding Teacher (Teacher of the Year), International Career Institute
- Teacher of the Year, Jefferson Business School
- Cum Laude, University of Batangas

- Gold Medal Recipient (Consistent Scholar for Academic Achievement), University of Batangas
- Valedictorian (High School), University of Batangas

**PUBLICATIONS:**

- *A Practical Approach to Arithmetic and Algebra for College Students*, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> editions, Mila P. Cselenszky, Ed Green, Jerry Kornbluth, Thomson Publishing, Inc., 2006.
- *High School Mathematics Made Easy to Understand*, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> editions, Mila P. Cselenszky, Ed Green, and Jerry Kornbluth, Thomson Publishing, Inc., 2006 (Approved by the Board of Education, New York).
- *Basic Mathematics and Algebra for Success in our Daily Lives*. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> editions, Mila P. Cselenszky, Ed Green and Jerry Kornbluth, Thomson Publishing, Inc., 2004.
- *Mental Ability and Creativity Among College Freshman Boys and Girls in Batangas City*, A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Western Philippine Colleges, Batangas City. In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in Education, 1979.

**PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE:**

- Private School Director License
- Licensed Private School Teacher
- Registered Business School Teacher License

**COMMUNITY SERVICE:**

- Board of Director and Officer, Neo-Filipino Association (2000-2008)
- Secretary, Neo-Filipino Association (2000 – 2008)