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An Exploration of the Experiences of Mid-level Women Leaders in Academia

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by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of women leaders in mid-level positions in academia, particularly academic deans in four-year public institutions in the Beta System. This study focused on the barriers, risk factors, and protective and compensatory factors shaping the leadership journey for the participants and while holding the current leadership position. The results of this study may provide higher education institutions in potential strategies and approaches to increase women's representation in leadership positions and improve gender equity in leadership.

Women in leadership have been the focus of many research studies, which have identified some barriers women face to advance in their career. There have been a few studies about women in academic dean positions in community colleges, but not in four-year public institutions. This study affirmed some of the barriers and challenges reported by previous research studies, as well as identified barriers which turned to be subtle in nature and internalized by participants.

The participants in this study reported having experienced subtle barriers which were related to the way how higher education is structured, gender stereotypes and expectations, and internalized beliefs. While in the dean position, they perceived that the risk factors and challenges they experienced were not different than other deans in their institutions. Therefore, risk factors were distinguished from barriers in their career advancement since those risk factors were mostly related to the position rather than gender. In addition, the results of this study identified protective factors such as participants' leadership skill set, familiarity with role's responsibilities and expectations, and support systems which protected them from barriers they would have experienced otherwise. Among the most relevant compensatory factors, participants emphasized the significant impact of factors that promoted other protective factors, factors that kept them grounded in case of adversity, and means to reach a personal-work life balance.

This study is significant because it provides insights into the change in nature of the challenges and risks factors women still face in academia. It also provides women with potential strategies to maximize on their leadership potential while becoming aware of subtle barriers and working to minimize their (barriers') effect on their advancement. Finally, this study helps institutions in their efforts to increase women's representation in leadership as it indicates important factors at the institutional level that shape and promote women's advancement.

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Dedicated to my parents, who have been the greatest supporters and encouragement in all my endeavors; to my spouse and two sons who have taken more responsibilities at home so I could focus on my studies and never complained for the short time I was able to spend with them; to all aspiring women leaders, who can bring the change in leadership that higher education institutions and the society need.

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Chapter I: Introduction

> "Having a childhood filled with firsts–Golda Meir in Israel, Geraldine Ferraro on the Mondale ticket, Sandra Day O'Conor on the Supreme Court, Sally Ride in space and all the strides, I headed to college believing that the feminists of the sixties and seventies had done the hard work for achieving the equality for my generation." (Sandberg, 2013, p. 141)

Not too long ago, people believed that gender equity was reached and some suggested that there was no need to continue having gender and ethnic studies in academia (Cooper, 2011). In her news report, Cooper brought the case of an English professor, in the Introduction to Feminist Studies class, who was surprised by students' rejection and awkwardness to use the word "feminism" or call themselves "a feminist" (para. 1). Furthermore, the students explained that topics such as gender and race are very delicate topics, "a total killjoy in a polite society, to bring it up" (para. 2). Hence, Elam, the English professor, came to believe that gender and race are "unspeakable" topics; therefore, they are "unteachable" as well (para. 3). Based on these examples the question becomes whether these topics have become unspeakable, untouchable, and delicate because gender equity and equality have been reached, or because of the subtle, pervasive, and internalized sexism, which makes fighting against it impossible.

Women have made considerable progress in educational degree attainment and participation in the workforce in most fields. However, they still lag behind men in managerial positions (Christman & McClellan, 2007). Studies show that gender equality and equity have not yet been reached (Acker & Armenti, 2004). Fraser (1994) defined gender equality as treating women exactly like men. Fraser (1994) argued that gender equity be reconceptualized as a

complex idea and notion comprising a plurality of distinct normative principles including "equal respect for women and men, equal resources, equal capabilities, parity of participation in socially valued activities, and decentering the androcentric measures of social values" (p. 595). Regarding women's representation in leadership, Valian (2004) argued that there has certainly been progress in moving women up the leadership ladder, particularly about women in the academic settings, but the thought that they are moving up at tremendous speed is flawed.

The number of women students continues to increase throughout higher education (Gangone & Lennon, 2014). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2012), women earned 59% of all degrees conferred in 2009-2010. In regard to faculty positions, women continue to be strongly represented, but at disproportionate rates compared to men. Gangone and Lennon (2014) claim that women are more likely to be seen at entry-level positions such as lecturer and/or instructor, or assistant professor. They account for 43% of the full-time faculty at all degree granting institutions (Gangone & Lennon, 2014). Despite a substantial increase from 1991, when women held only 32% of full-time teaching positions in academia, a closer examination of the numbers shows a significant disparate representation of women by institution type and faculty rank (Gangone & Lennon, 2014). According to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) (2011), women comprise only 38% of faculty at doctoral institutions, 45% of faculty at master's and baccalaureate institutions, and 53% at associate degree-granting institutions. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2012), representation of women in all post-secondary degree-granting institutions is as follows: (a) they comprise 44% of the total number of faculty members; (b) women hold 30% of

Professor positions; (c) 43% of Associate Professors are women; (d) 50% of Assistant Professors are women; (e) 58% of Instructors are women; and (g) 54% of lecturers are women.

At Chief Academic Officer (CAO) and President level positions, women are represented at an even lower percentage than in teaching positions. According to Kellerman and Rhode (2014), women hold only 26% of college presidencies. Gangone and Lennon (2014) stated that universities tend to select CAOs from the Associate and full professor ranks. To be even more precise–from the ranks of deans. Women hold comparatively fewer positions at these levels than men. Hence, their chances of being selected for such positions are less even when all other factors are equal. Reaching the associate or full-rank professor rank means more struggles and energy spent for women compared to men, which makes the pipeline theory fail to explain these cases (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014). According to Kellerman and Rhode (2014), the pipeline theory "implies that the more women students, junior faculty, and the more women lower-level administrators, the more women will rise to the top," which is definitely not the case (p. 27). Women are still overrepresented at entry level positions only in some types of institutions and underrepresented at higher level positions. As Kellerman and Rhode (2014) put it, "the higher up one goes on any organizational ladder, the more likely it is to find men clustered at the top" (p. 25).

The pipeline in higher education. Gender disparity in higher education and leadership is not something new. For over 30 years the efforts to improve the representation of women in academia have focused on the "pipeline" theory (White, 2005). According to White (2005), the recruitment pool in academia would see greater numbers of women applying for faculty positions based on the fact that more women hold bachelor's and graduate degrees. As they get

hired, they would go up the ranks and get tenured positions. The pipeline theory suggests that the greater the number of women hired is at lower level, the more likely it is that women reach parity to men at all levels. However, the parity is far from being reached even though women comprise about 50% of the student population in graduate institutions. According to White (2005), women's gains in faculty ranks between 1974-1998 are low, only 8% increase at master's level and 7% at bachelor's degree granting institutions. White (2005) also notes that there has been no increase for women full professors in the last 5 years. Clearly, the pipeline theory does not apply to these cases.

> Kellerman and Rhode (2014) claim that four presumptions apply to the Pipeline theory: First, it presumes that women and men are more or less the same in qualifications, taking it for granted that once in the system, women will reach to the top at a rate similar to men. Second, it assumes that gender bias does not exist, and there is nothing to halt women from moving to the top at similar rates to men. Third, it assumes that organizational structures equally favor men and women, besides the housework load difference between men and women. Finally, it suggests that women need to be patient and gender parity in leadership is just a matter of time. (p. 23)

Despite this nice layout of the theory, the number of women hired and moving quickly the ranks has not increased to comparable rates within the last 40 years. While many researchers suggest that the pipeline may be leaking all along the way, there are others who suggest that the pipeline is blocked at specific points (White, 2005). Nan Keohane, President Emerita of Duke University, in a report she presented to the Steering Committee for Women's Initiative at Duke, noted that women at Duke were stuck at the assistant professor level and entrance level, and could not

move to full professorship (White, 2005, p. 2). The Steering Committee at Duke University agreed that one of the reasons for women's stagnation at certain points in the pipeline was the obstruction of the pipeline by challenges distinctive to their work or stage in life, including need for more advising and mentoring, lingering, subtle but nonetheless pervasive and debilitating stereotypes and prejudicial expectations about what they can accomplish (Keohane, 2003).

A study by the American Council on Education (ACE) (2013) showed that the pipeline to senior leadership positions in higher education changes very slowly. In this study, 149 four-year institutions were tracked over a 5-year time frame. The results showed slight increases in gender diversity of senior administrator positions. According to the same source, 45% of the college and university presidents in the study listed their immediate prior position to be Chief Academic Officer (CAO) or Senior Academic Officer (SAO). Hence, that academic position is the primary foundation for moving to the top of the leadership ladder. The results of this study show that the number of women in senior leadership positions increased from 40% to 43%. As of 2013, women comprised 49% of chief diversity officers, 41% of CAOs, 72% of chiefs of staff, 28% of deans of academic colleges, and 36% of vice presidents (ACE, 2013). Researchers in this study concluded that there has not been any great shift in demographics. Comparing the data from the same study over 20 years, they claimed that dramatic changes need time.

Despite the extended time that change needs to happen, it (change) will not come by itself. The obstacles clogging the pipeline all along the way need to be removed for more women and minority representatives to thrive up the academic hierarchy.

Statement of the Problem

Many researchers claim that there is a problem regarding the underrepresentation of women in senior managerial ranks (Christman & McClellan, 2007; Dominici, Fried, & Zeger, 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women comprise about 51% of the workforce in the United States, but they hold only 2.5% of the top offices (Catalyst, 2011). In higher education institutions, the number of women in senior leadership positions is even lower than in the business realm, where women's gains seem to be greater (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Bilen-Green, Froelich, & Jacobson, 2008; Catalyst, 2011; Wolfinger, Mason, & Goulden, 2008). According to Bilen-Green et al. (2008) and Philipsen (2008), women by 2008 earned more than half of the doctorate degrees awarded to U.S. citizens, but they comprised 45% of tenure-track faculty, 31% of tenured positions, and only 24% of full professorships. Still, the numbers vary based on the disciplines, with the social sciences having a greater percentage of women in tenure-track and tenured positions; whereas in the STEM fields, their numbers are lower than the social sciences (Gordon & Keyfitz, 2004). Eagly and Carli (2007) state that men ascend to leadership positions more quickly than women even in culturally feminine settings such as nursing and education.

Wolfinger et al. (2008) claim that women in academia get to the top leadership administrative positions of provosts or presidents by starting as faculty members. Even though the number of women in teaching positions in academia is increasing and some progress has been made toward gender equity in leadership, the increase has been mostly the result of more women applying for jobs and the high numbers of men faculty retiring (Curtis, 2011). However, the growing proportions are mostly noted at the lowest level of the academic profession (Philipsen, 2008), whereas their advancement through the ranks has not improved (Barnett,

2013). Understanding the roots of the underrepresentation of women in leadership becomes an imperative for all organizations to succeed in a global economy and diverse society.

Purpose of the Study

This interpretative qualitative study focused on exploring and understanding the experiences of women leaders through the professional pipeline and in achieving leadership positions. It also aimed to identify barriers and risk factors women leaders face in their career advancement. By exploring women's experiences, the researcher aimed to identify skills and character components women leaders developed and had deemed effective in helping them persist and succeed in their career advancement. Finally, this study identified protective and compensatory factors that women faculty found helpful in overcome the obstructions and effectively dealing with risk factors.

Research Questions

This interpretive qualitative research study addressed three main research questions and two sub-questions:

- What are the perceived experiences of women leaders in mid-level leadership positions in academia?
- What barriers and risk factors have women leaders encountered while advancing in their career?
- What factors are perceived as having a significant impact on shaping the leadership journey for women in higher education?

Delimitations

According to Simon (2011) and Leedy and Ormrod (2001), delimitations are those characteristics under a researcher's control that limit the scope of the study and define the boundaries of a study. Delimitations include multiple factors, such as: time, location, sample, choice of the problem itself, profession or organizations selected to conduct the study, and theoretical perspectives that the researcher chooses to adopt (Simon, 2011). Based on this definition, this study was conducted under the following delimitations:

- This study focused on the experiences of women leaders in academia holding mid-level administrative positions in Academic Affairs for at least three years.
- The particular focus of the study was on the barriers and risk factors that the participants had faced as they progressed in the leadership ladder and while holding the current leadership position.
- The study was conducted at four-year public universities part of the Beta System. Two-year colleges, and private universities were not be the focus of this study, since they display different features regarding women's experiences.
- Only women leaders at the mid-level positions participated in this study.

Assumptions of the Study

Roberts (2004) and Simon (2011) define assumptions as the aspects or criteria of the study, which are out of the researcher's control, which s/he takes for granted. Simon (2011) states that if the assumptions disappear, a study becomes irrelevant. According to this definition, the study was based on the following assumptions:

- The responses received from the participants accurately reflected their professional opinions and experiences.
- Participants were able to recall the barriers they had faced and effective coping strategies on a case-by-case basis.
- Participants were able to recall supportive factors that either reduced their challenges or increased their effective response to challenges.

Definitions of the Terms

Equality: the quality or state of being equal: the quality or state of having the same rights, social status, etc. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, nd.).

Equity: justice according to natural law or right; *specifically*, freedom from bias or favoritism (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, nd).

Mid-level administrator: A college or university administrator reporting to the president of an academic institution. For the purpose of this study, the Dean position will be considered a mid-level position.

Pipeline Theory: Implies that the more women students, faculty, and the more women in lower level administrator positions, the more women will rise to the top (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014), and the more women will flow out of the pipeline to swell the senior leadership ranks (White, 2005).

Resilience: Masten and Garmezy (1988) define resilience as the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances (as cited in Wolff, 1995, p. 566).

Significance of the Study

Finding the most appropriate solution for a problem requires a clear definition of the problem and identification of potential causes (Rivers & Barnett, 2013). In this case, identifying and acknowledging the barriers women face in various phases of their career, would provide insights for higher education institutions and administrators to focus their attention and resources toward actions and strategies to minimize the obstructions. Eagly and Carli (2007) suggest that by naming the obstacles as a "glass ceiling" (p. 2), it is suggested that such obstacles exist only at the top-level positions. Consequently, strategies proposed and resources allocated relate to that level rather to all of the ranks. The issue of women underrepresentation in the academy does not have its roots at the top, but it is a consistent struggle throughout the career journey (Rivers & Barnett, 2013).

Second, by identifying factors significantly impacting women's career advancement, a differentiation between negatively and positively impacting factors may be possible. Strategies to promote the positive factors, or reduce the presence of the negative factors, may become part of diversity plans at higher education institutions. Third, coping strategies women leaders have successfully used in facing the impediments may be effective models for other women aspiring to leadership positions. Finally, deeper insights about women advancing to leadership, the barriers they face, and individual and institutional strategies they deem effective would provide a current view of institutional cultures and climates towards women leaders. Institutions may design future goals and strategies to increase diversity among their employees and in top managerial positions.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Researchers have been involved in a plethora of studies about leadership, successful leadership styles, and effective leaders (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Avolio, 2007; Eagly & Carly, 2003; Kellerman & Rhode, 2014; Sandberg, 2013). However, women in leadership became the focus of research in the last two to three decades (Acker, 2003; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). According to Acker and Armenti (2004), at the beginning of the 21st century, a shortage in publications and research about women in leadership was noted, assuming that the gender gap in leadership had been addressed. But studies show that this is not the case since gender equality and equity are far from being achieved (Acker & Armenti, 2004). Valian (2004) argues that there has certainly been progress in moving women up on the leadership ladder, particularly women in academic settings, but the thought that they are moving up at a tremendous speed is flawed. As Sandberg (2013) puts it, "The blunt truth is that men still run the world. [...] A truly equal world would be one where women ran half of our countries and companies, and men ran half of our homes" (pp. 5-7).

Despite the high numbers of women in the workforce, they do not hold similarly comparable leadership positions. Women comprise about 51% of the workforce in the United States, but they hold only 2.5% of the top offices (Catalyst, 2011). Women constituted 50% of college graduates in the 1980s, but since then, they have slowly advanced in receiving college degrees and entry-level jobs (Sandberg, 2013). Despite the fact that women are entering fields previously dominated by men at a higher rate than before, they are still at entry levels (Sandberg, 2013). In higher education institutions the phenomena of "the higher, the fewer" has been noted

(Acker & Armenti, 2004; Bilen-Green et al., 2008; Catalyst, 2011; Wolfinger et al., 2008). Bilen-Green et al. (2008) state that women comprise 45% of tenure-track faculty, 31% of tenured positions, but only 24% of full professorships and the numbers vary based on discipline, with the social sciences having a greater percentage of women in tenure-track and tenured positions, whereas in the STEM fields the numbers are lower (Gordon & Keyfitz, 2004).

Even though the number of women in teaching positions in academia is increasing and some progress has been made toward gender equity in leadership, the increase has been mostly the result of more women applying for jobs and the high numbers of men faculty retiring (Curtis, 2011). Women students comprised 57% of the undergraduate enrollment and 59% of the graduate student body, but they (women students) cannot find enough women faculty mentors and role models on campuses to relate with, particularly in prestigious positions in academia where the representation of women has lagged far behind the advances experienced by women students (Curtis, 2011). Hence, greater representation of women in high-rank faculty and administrative positions is crucial for the impact it could have on the next generations, and particularly women students.

Sandberg (2013) elaborated on the frustration and the feeling of being lost that young women graduates experience due to the difficulty, and sometimes impossibility, of finding mentors and role models in their fields. All those women graduates had great aspirations of leadership, but they could not see themselves portrayed in any of the leading personalities surrounding them. They ended up asking strong, great, women leaders who were presenting in various conferences to become their mentors. Women of great leadership and mentoring potential are neither rare, nor the exception. However, the numbers do not show that. Sandberg

(2013) further explains that leaders prefer mentoring within the same gender, which means men prefer mentoring men and women prefer mentoring women. They also assess the potential of the mentee to lead and manage before starting a mentoring relationship. Hence, women graduates who experience a shortage of women leaders and role models both at higher education institutions and at their workplaces are left without choices and have to figure out the maze by themselves.

Looking at the numbers of women in top managerial positions, various organizations regardless of their type, understand that underrepresentation of women is an issue that needs to be addressed. Despite the good intentions and actions institutions have taken to address this issue, women's progress in leadership has been slow (Dominici et al., 2009; Philipsen, 2008; Rivers & Barnett, 2013). Rivers and Barnett (2013) align the stagnation and reverse movement to the roadblocks women face in their professional and personal life, roadblocks that have changed their appearance and have become subtler than before. Dominici et al. (2009) found in their study that: (a) leadership paths are slower and sometimes blocked for women; (b) leadership positions as currently defined are not as attractive to women as to men; (c) even when in leadership positions, women are not recognized and praised for their work the same as men; and (d) women are excluded from the informal network of leadership. The authors recommended further research in exploring "the factors in the slowed development of women; causes of women's decreased access to leadership and mentorship; reasons to the inadequate recognition of women's leadership contributions; women's job satisfaction; and current norms regarding valued leadership attributes and support for leadership roles" (p. 3).

Hence, exploring various aspects of leadership, women's characteristics, the barriers they face, and strategies they have used to cope with those roadblocks would provide insights into potential effective approaches to address the issue.

Defining Leadership

If there is one thing we have learned in the last twenty years, it is that no single way exists to be a "good" leader or that a universally "appropriate" leadership process exists (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006, p. 176).

Kezar et al. (2006) argue that leadership has been studied and written about for more than 2000 years. However, they claim that much of the leadership history is hierarchical in nature and emphasizes social control. Only in the last 20 years, has leadership been presented in more non-hierarchical and democratic forms (p. 2). Kezar and her colleagues see this change in leadership forms as a revolution. They argue that this revolution has happened for primarily two reasons: (a) "the context in which leadership takes place has changed; and (b) new perspectives and ideas about leadership have been introduced" (p. 3). The different views on leadership introduced by feminists emphasized the democratic, nonhierarchical, and collaborative trends in leadership. Also, the shifts in the world economy requiring more interdependence asked for a more collaborative, democratic, and diffused leadership processes (Kezar et al., 2006).

The traditional leadership theories viewed leadership as holding elected and appointed positions (Levitt, 2010, p. 68), and related leadership mostly to positional power (Northouse, 2013). These theories emphasized the necessary leadership traits to be a successful leader, which were thought to be innate traits rather than skills that may be developed through one's individual life (Stogdill, 1974 as cited in Northouse, 2013). An equal sign is put between leadership and the

leader, that is to say, only a list of universal, individual traits was associated with successful leaders (Kezar et al., 2006). These traits included self-confidence, integrity, sociability, determination, aggressiveness, goal-oriented, and intelligence (Kezar et al., 2006). According to Kezar (2014), earlier conceptualizations of leadership emphasized goal accomplishment and paid little attention to the process, relationships, and approaches implied in decision making.

Behavioral theories, which gained prominence in the mid-20th century, emphasized behaviors of effective leaders. Behavioral theory was also leader-centered and focused on a combination of task and relational behaviors which guide interactions between leaders and subordinates (Kezar et al., 2006, p. 7). Behavioral theory, for the first time, considered leadership as something that can be learned. Researchers of behavioral genetics suggest that genetic predispositions may account only for 30% of the variance in leadership style, while the rest can be attributed to the non-shared environmental influences such as varying opportunities for leadership (Avolio, 2007). Consequently, it would be argued that effective leaders are not born, but they could develop leadership skills and traits as long as the organizational and societal environment allowed them.

According to Powell (1999), leaders were "individuals who significantly influenced the thoughts, behaviors, and feelings of others" (p. 240), and leadership was seen as "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intended real changes […] reflecting mutual purposes" (Rost, 1991, p. 102 as cited in Powell, p. 240). Power and Influence theory saw leadership as a social exchange process "characterized by the acquisition and demonstration of power" (Kezar et al., 2006, p. 7). Recent research focused on the reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers. According to Kezar et al. (2006), Power and Influence theory emphasized

the needs and values of followers as well as leaders. Leaders draw on multiple sources of power to influence followers such as, “transformational leaders use charisma, visionary leadership, and authentic concern for others to motivate followers work toward a common goal” (p. 10). Judge and Piccolo (2004), in a meta-analysis study, showed that transformational and transactional leadership were associated with greater effectiveness than other leadership styles. They also concluded that the two previously mentioned leadership styles were closely related and not necessarily exclusive of one another (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Moreover, Eagly (2007) claimed that the researchers’ attention to transformational leadership reflects the cultural shift that has occurred in norms about leadership.

Referring to various types of power and authority and relating it to the shift in skills necessary for effective leadership, Northouse (2013) explained that one would suggest that the broader definition of leadership would be the most appropriate one including “referent power” (p. 10). According to Northouse (2013), referent power is based on the followers’ identification and preferences for the leader. Hence, it may be expected that women, who nurture relationships, reward followers, are collaborative and inspiring, and show authentic concern for followers will be rated higher than men as leaders (Avolio, 2007). However, that is not the case. Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani (1995), in their meta-analysis study, found that men’s effectiveness as leaders surpassed women’s effectiveness in roles that were men dominated or masculine in other ways (as cited in Eagly, 2007, p. 6). According to Rivers and Barret (2013), women’s performance is also rated lower by both men and women, not only in men dominated professions, but also in women dominated fields, such as nursing and education. Rivers and Barnett suggest that this

may be explained by the influence of gender stereotypes and bias, and incongruence in gender roles.

Contingency theory views leadership and leaders' behaviors related to situational variables, including but not limited to, task, followers' characteristics, and situational features (Kezar et al., 2006). Kezar et al. (2006) argued that there are the situational factors that determine potential leaders and potential effective leadership behaviors. However, this theory emphasizes the strong connection between style of the leader and situational factors. Consequently, a leader deemed effective in a hierarchical organization applying a top-down leadership style, would not be considered as effective in another organization with a flat organizational structure. Kezar et al. (2006) claim that based on the contingency theory, effective leadership models may be predicted through assessment of a match between leadership style and context. They noted that contingency theory expanded the views of leadership by including context as another relevant factor besides individual leaders and their traits. According to Rost (1991), leadership in the post-industrial paradigm is "process centered, collective, context bound, non-hierarchical, and focused on mutual power and influence processes" (as cited in Kezar et al. 2006, p. 33). Levitt (2010) stated that leaders are individuals who are change agents, social activists, and catalysts in their disciplines. Since the society is in an everlasting change process, it is very important that leaders endorse change and reflect open-mindedness and adaptability to change.

Kezar et al. (2006) noted that "In addition to acknowledging that leadership is context bound and organizationally determined, it is relevant to realize that leadership is a cultural process" (p. 161). The authors elaborated on the intrinsic ties between leadership and values,

beliefs, history, and other elements of culture. Culture leadership theory viewed leadership as a cultural process and socially constructed that differs across cultural contexts (Kezar et al., 2006, p. 8). Leaders use rituals, symbols, and stories, to influence followers and change.

According to Kezar et al. (2006), culture is a very important component of leadership. Through studying leadership from a cultural perspective, context received a new meaning including "history, traditions, and major assumptions of an institution that shape and frame how people make meaning" (p. 51). Through the cultural lenses, the research on leadership included other factors affecting leadership such as, gender, race, and cross-cultural issues (Kezar et al., 2006, p. 52). Kezar et al. also noted that similar to leadership, there are multiple definitions of culture and values, and values are manifested in various ways (p. 52). Deal and Peterson (1999) define values as "a number of central beliefs that construct the bedrock of organizational culture" (as cited in Kezar et al., 2006, p. 52).

Kezar et al (2006) argued that there is a process of influence between the culture of an organization and values and beliefs of the leader. Both affect each-other's values and beliefs, despite the difficulty in changing organizational cultures. The process of changing organizational cultures is much slower than changing a leader's values, particularly when a leader's values contradict the organization's culture and the leader does not share the same values and beliefs with a critical mass of the organization's members (Kezar et al, 2006).

Schein (1992) argued that when groups are created, initially, they adopt the values and beliefs of leaders. Kezar et al. (2006) relate this argument with the establishment of colleges and universities where their missions directly adopted the values and beliefs of key founding individuals. The authors also noted that such values have gone unchallenged for centuries. Since

traditionally, men have been the founders and leaders of most organizations, men dominated values, traditions, and beliefs have dominated in most organizations.

Regarding cultures in higher education institutions, Bergquist (1992) defines a theoretical framework of four cultures existing in higher education institutions: (a) collegial–constantly informal in nature, autonomous, and supportive of diversity, shared power, and decisions made democratically; (b) managerial–rigid and bureaucratic, strict and specific designated roles of authority; (c) developmental–emphasizing teaching and learning, and development, promoting collaborative decision making; and (d) negotiating–founded on individuality, valuing equity and egalitarism, and emphasizing conflict resolution through negotiations and compromises . Nevertheless, the existence of a dominant culture does not exclude the other three. Elements of other types of cultures may be present along with the dominant culture type (Bergquist, 1992). The degree to which a leader's values impact the institution's values depends on the type of dominant institutional culture.

Vinkenburg, Van Engen, Eagly, & Johannesen-Schmidt (2011) in their study about the role of descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes in the promotion of women to leadership positions, concluded that dimensions of leadership may be the same across cultures, but the behaviors within a dimension may be interpreted or assessed slightly different regarding promotion. The authors compared ratings of descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes from two groups of participants from the United States and the Netherlands. Participants from the United States rated higher the leadership behaviors related to rigorous high performance. Participants from the Netherlands appreciated more the individualized consideration, focusing on the development and mentoring of followers and attending to their individual needs (Vinkenburg

et al., 2011, p. 11). The authors attributed such differences to the differences in cultures between the two countries, the United States culture characterized as vertical individualist, emphasizing the individual achievement, and the Dutch culture, horizontal-individualist, emphasizing equality over achievement (p. 15). The authors recommended further study of cultural differences in the interpretation of leadership behaviors and dimensions.

Culture research on gender and leadership and on women leaders showed that women define leadership in different ways than men (Kezar et al., 2006). The authors argued that the cultural and social differences in perceiving and understanding leadership are not essentially related to being a woman or minority, but due to the specific experiences of being a woman or minority. However, it is not only gender that influences the leader's beliefs and approach to leadership. Kezar (2002c) suggested that leaders were influenced by their positionality in the approaches, concepts, and perceptions of leadership (as cited in Kezar et al., 2006, p. 128). Researchers suggest that people, consequently leaders, hold multiple, overlapping identities, that is to say, their positionality (Kezar et al., 2006, p. 128). The overlapping identities, such as race, ethnicity, socio-economical status, and nationality, among other identities may influence the leader's beliefs and values of leadership (Kezar et al., 2006). Other researchers have used the term intersectionality of identities to define the same phenomenon (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Kezar et al. (2006) suggested keeping in mind the faculty, students, and administrators' positionality and fluidity of identities when considering leadership on campuses. Due to this fluidity in identities, Kezar (2002) recommended for leaders in higher education to embrace a new approach to leadership, "the pluralistic leadership" keeping in mind three essential principals: "(a) awareness of identity, positionality, and power conditions; (b) acknowledgement

of multiple views of leadership; and (c) negotiation among multiple views of leadership" (as cited in Kezar et al., 2006, p. 129).

Multiple studies have demonstrated that women have been rated higher than men on measures of transformational leadership (Avolio 2007; Vinkenburg et al., 2011). They nurture interpersonal relationships; show care and compassion for others (Vinkenburg et al., 2011), resonate with creating 'rapport' rather than 'report' in their leadership model (Van Nostrand, 1993); and they show more concern for people (Pounder & Coleman, 2002). According to Kezar et al. (2006) and Vinkenburg et al. (2011), women have less hierarchical and more collective views of leadership. They found that women leaders exhibit communal behaviors which appear to have positive effects on followers. However, the authors recommended that, in a vertical-individualistic society as the U.S culture, women leaders need to combine the communal behaviors with aggressive behaviors exhibited by men leaders. Prescribed stereotypes, that is to say expected behaviors from leaders, such as inspirational and visionary behaviors and idealized influence, mostly related to men, play a relevant role in leaders' promotions particularly for senior positions (Vinkenburg et al., 2011). However, for middle and lower level positions, supportive and individualized consideration behaviors are ranked higher (Vinkenburg et al., 2011).

Glass and Cook (2016) claimed that "recent scholarship suggests that women leaders bring greater innovation and profitability, broader consumer outreach, and a positive contribution to organizations" (p. 51). However, Bilen-Green et al. (2008) claimed that there is a wide spread belief that women come second to men in competing for leadership positions. Glass and Cook (2016) found that women are not second to men in glass cliff situations, that is to say, when

organizations are experiencing a significant downturn, transformational changes, and/or serious crisis. Eagly and Carli (2003) and Eagly (2007) stated that women in contemporary U.S. culture, on the one hand, are lauded for having the right combination of skills for leadership, yielding superior leadership styles, and great effectiveness. On the other hand, they are not promoted to leadership positions at comparable rates to men (Eagly, 2007). Exploring the factors holding women back from advancement, as well as foundations and support they have experienced while moving up through their career, would provide insight from the perspective of women leaders themselves.

The next section elaborates the theoretical framework this study will use to explore the barriers women face in climbing the leadership ladder and the coping strategies they use to effectively perform in their positions and aspire to senior positions.

Theoretical Framework

The path to leadership positions is not an easy one for women (Allison, 2011). Instead, it is filled with barriers inhibiting them from moving forward, performing at their full potential, and/or pushing them toward burn out. Understanding the barriers that significantly infringe women's progress to senior positions, as well as the factors and coping strategies they employ to effectively perform in their roles, while taking care of themselves is at the heart of this study.

Leaders at all times have faced challenges and obstacles that impacted their performance (Allison, 2011). However, the impact of similar factors and challenges on different leaders varies due to differences in personal traits and skills (Allison, 2011), contexts, mediators (Wolff, 1995), and organizational culture and climate, among other factors (Allison, 2011). Furthermore, Allison (2011) claims that in a society where change and crisis are not the exception, the

resource that leaders need most is resilience (p. 79). The author describes resilience as "a personal quality that predisposes individuals to bounce back in the face of loss" (p. 79). She also states that resilient leaders do more than bouncing back–they bravely move forward while maintaining the essential performances of the organizations they lead (p. 80). Allison (2011) notes that resilient leaders (a) recognize both opportunities and disasters; (b) take care of business and themselves, and take action in ever changing realities; (c) are engaged in personal renewal; (d) stay optimistic; (e) quickly blunt the impact of setbacks; (f) build support networks before challenges hit; and (g) draw on diverse perspectives (pp. 80-82). The author further claims that resilience may be a personal characteristic, yet "it is a quality that individuals can choose to develop" (p. 82).

The term *resilience* was originally used in the fields of children's mental health and psychopathology whereby researchers tried to understand the factors causing high stress levels and adversity to kids, as well as the approaches followed by kids who thrived in such conditions (Wolff, 1995). Later researchers expanded the use of this term, elaborating and exploring the family, organizations, and nation's approach in response to adversities and crises. According to Wolff (1995), the "term resilience has been linked to biological self-righting tendencies in human development, and to buffering effects and protective mechanisms" (p. 566). However, the author suggests resilience be judged in terms of externalizing and internalizing difficulties. Thus, Wolff (1995) favors Masten, Best, and Garmezy's definition of resilience as "the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances" (p. 566). Internalized difficulties and stressors, particularly in girls, were found to have detrimental effect on managing interpersonal difficulties later in life (Wolff, 1995). Other

personal qualities such as curiosity, a zest for life, and high intelligence, as well as an encouraging social environment, were found to be critical in other studies of children facing serious adversities, but who grew up as successful adults (Wolff, 1995). Van Breda (2001), in a deep review of studies about resilience theory, reports the following characteristics to have been noted in resilient children:

> Resilient children, who were more likely to be girls, attended good schools with high standards, that provided teacher feedback to students, praised students for good work, gave students positions of trust and responsibility, and where teachers were good behavior models. These children had a high self-esteem, good positive coping skills, had an active, evocative approach towards solving life's problems, enabling them to negotiate successfully emotionally hazardous experiences. They had flexible coping skills, which enabled them to respond to the changing environment, and perceived themselves to be competent. They also had great interpersonal skills, an internal locus of control, good impulse control, high energy, and a strong ability to maintain a positive view of a meaningful life. They were autonomous and independent, and were able to ask for support when they needed it. (pp. 10-11)

All these skills and traits may be innate, but may also be developed and mastered, depending on the degree to which the environment is supportive, encouraging, and promoting (Allison, 2011; Wolff, 1995). Rosenbaum and Ben-Ari (1985) introduced the term *learned resourcefulness* to describe "the acquired repertoire of behaviors and skills by which a person self-regulates internal responses that interfere with the smooth execution of a desired behavior in cases of foundational challenges and change" (as cited in Van Breda, 2001, p. 46). Rosenbaum

and Ben-Ari (1985) also suggest that people with high level of learned resourcefulness see themselves as more efficient in dealing with emotional and task demands, compared to low resourceful people who do not perform effectively in stressful, challenging, and demanding situations (as cited in Van Breda, 2001, p. 47).

According to Steward (2012), leaders in current organizations, facing rapid and relentless change among other challenges, perform more effectively if they have high learned resourcefulness and high resilience compared to low resilience leaders. She explored the experiences of head teachers, who were able to manage successfully the pressure of long working hours, overload, and constant change in school environments, while other head teachers felt burnt out and quit. The focus of her study was to examine in depth the emotional resilience of the successful head teachers. According to Steward, people may have little control over the environment they work in, but the way they experience it and cope with or react to it is impacted by the way they interpret the environment (p. 53). Emotional resilience was significantly related to well-being, stress, burnout, self-management, self-awareness, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and values or moral purpose. Well-being is reached through a healthy work-life balance, networking with other head teachers, having time for reflection, a positive attitude of mind, appreciating the opportunity to make a difference, and having a positive sense of the significance of the role (Steward, 2012). Coping strategies which promote the leader's well-being, such as compassion for one's self, reduce the impact of the leadership stress.

Being aware of constituents and other leaders' expectations had a significant impact on the approach head teachers in this study took in adjusting their behaviors or responding to challenges in various environments. Head teacher 5 (HT5) learned to adjust her behavior and

response based on the contexts' expectations. She was supporting at one school, but that was seen as inappropriate by the inspectors and parents. Instead, becoming aware of the expectations of parents and community for a figure to project their anxieties, "at the end of the first day she put a smile on her face and asked them to express their anxieties" (Steward, 2012, p. 61). First-time head teachers were potentially the most vulnerable to the pressures associated with the leadership role compared to the ones who had more experience in the position. However, more than half of the participants identified the following emotional challenges regardless of time served in the position: (a) responding to public accountability; (b) dealing with personnel, safety, or child protection issues; (c) having responsibility without full control; and (d) experiencing isolation due to their role (p. 61). Steward (2012) concluded that beliefs that head teachers hold about themselves, and the demands and rewards of headship, as well as their own values and the school values influenced leaders' behaviors and approaches to challenges and change. Head teachers who had a belief that they were not good enough for the position picked up on the projections of others and confirmed their own self-image (p. 66). She strongly recommends a "change in the climate within which education operates from one which is fiercely judgmental to one which acknowledges the challenges of education as part of the challenges the society faces, and provides necessary resources to support head teachers in reaching education goals and mission" (p. 66). The majority of participants in this study were women, but she did not distinguish responses due to gender as that was not the focus of the study.

Zimmerman and Arunkumar (1994) described *resiliency* as a process, not as a universal construct that applies to all life domains. They explained that research on resiliency have concluded that resilient people may be resilient to specific risk conditions, but they may be

vulnerable to others. According to them, “the term ‘resiliency’ refers to those factors and processes that interrupt the trajectory from risk to problem behaviors and thereby result in adaptive outcomes even in the presence of adversity” (p. 4). They also distinguished between resiliency and invulnerability. Resilience is seen as the ability to bounce back, not as an ability to not get wounded (p. 4). They argued that resiliency is not a monolithic construct since the factors that influence it change over time. They suggested a strong connection of (a) environmental and individual factors and (b) context characteristics with the resilience development in individuals (p. 5). The authors proposed three models of resiliency. All the models focused on the relationships between individual characteristics, the nature of the context, the risk factors, the protective and compensatory factors of interest (p. 5).

In the Compensatory Model, according to Zimmerman and Arunkumar (1994), a compensatory variable “does not interact with the risk factor; rather it has a direct and independent influence on the outcome of interests” (p. 5). Both risk and compensatory variables influence the outcome additively not in collaboration with each other. They explain the example of stress as a risk factors and self-esteem as a compensatory factor which in an additive combination may predict one individual’s competence.

In the Challenge Model, the risk factor is “treated as a potential enhancer of successful adaptation, provided that it is not excessive. […] a moderate level of stress may provide the individual with a challenge, that when overcome, strengthens competence” (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994, p. 6). The Protective Factor Model suggests that a protective factor is “a process that interacts with a risk factor in reducing the probability of a negative outcome, by moderating the effect of the exposure to risk and modifying the response to a risk factor” (p. 6).

The authors further argued that the three models, despite their unique features, are not mutually exclusive.

In the same study noted above, there are some theoretical issues with the models such as defining whether a factor is a risk or a protective factor. Based on previous research, they defined protective and risk factors as ends of a single continuum. In the vignette presented at the beginning of their article, high religiosity may be considered a protective factor against drug use. On the other hand, low religiosity may be considered a risk factor increasing drug use (p. 8). It is also difficult to specify which protective factors go with which risk factors. In addition, resilience is domain specific, that is to say, people who have become resilient at a particular domain may not necessarily transfer it to another domain (p. 9). Another limitation of the theory is related to the level of analysis. Research on resiliency tends to focus mostly on the individual, focusing on the individual attributes and excluding contextual factors, relationships, and so on. Hence, the authors recommended research focused on multiple levels of analysis besides the individual level. They also recommended creating programs designed to enhance protective factors and encourage the development of compensatory factors (p. 11). Therefore, the focus should shift to explore how institutions may contribute to enhancing resilience and how they may hinder it.

The Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI), conducted a nationwide research study in 2008, about how young girls redefine leadership. Findings from that study showed that there are differences among girls of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (2011). In 2011 the GSRI conducted another study on the connections between self-confidence, resilience, and leadership in young girls. The researchers explored the role of protective factors, such as, positive self-

concepts, family, school, community, supportive environments, religion, racial socializations, supportive networks, and cultural factors which help girls and young women develop resiliency in the face of stressors. Protective factors were defined as "those factors which prevented or reduced vulnerability and promoted optimal development such as the availability of social support and healthy coping strategies" (p. 3). Resilience is defined as an emerging process where one's strengths, resources, and risk factors interact within contexts across space and time (p. 3). Risk factors, particularly for African-American and Hispanic youths, included exposure to poverty, discrimination, negative gender and ethnic stereotyping, low expectations, acculturative stress, educational and judicial inequities among others. Authors of this study insisted that risk and resilience construct should be applied to understand the development of oppressed or disadvantaged groups. They explained that members of non-oppressed or disadvantaged groups were less likely to experience the risk factors as persistent and compromising as members of the oppressed groups do (p. 4).

The study's findings revealed advocacy as a protective factor that enhances the perceptions of young women about their leadership efficiency and effectiveness (GSRI, 2011, p. 10). Engaging in advocacy had a positive impact on developing a positive sense of self, competency, and political efficacy. Youths participating in advocacy experiences feel empowered to speak for themselves and others (GSRI, 2011). Results showed that African-American and Hispanic girls, ages 13-17 years old, were more engaged in leadership experiences and activities that Caucasian girls. Seventy-three percent of the African-American and 62% of Hispanic girls were engaged in activities challenging themselves by trying new things compared to 56% of Caucasian girls. Both African-American and Hispanic girls came up with solutions to

problems and worked to implement the solutions more often than Caucasian girls, respectively 64%, 64%, and 51% (p. 10). In addition, 58% of African-American girls and 52% of Hispanic girls initiated and planned a project or activity, compared to 48% of Caucasian girls. The researchers related these percentages with the protective factors previously mentioned which increase the levels of self-confidence in African-American and Hispanic girls and consequently their resilience. Cultural and ethnic values were also considered relevant protective factors in this study. The authors found that in both African-American and Hispanic families the role of women was highly appreciated. Therefore, they concluded that supportive cultural and ethnic values encouraged young girls in both these cultures to aspire for leadership activities and initiate projects and leadership activities (GSRI, 2011). The role of supportive and promoting cultural values on the development of resilience was also noted in a study of Wei and Taormina (2014).

Wei and Taormina (2014) refined the concept of resilience and developed four valid and reliable subscales to measure resilience. The four subscales included: "Determination, endurance, adaptability, and recuperability" (p. 346). The study also focused on exploring a hypothesized relationship between antecedent variables, which may be considered risk and/or protective factors depending on the end of the continuum they may be landing (Newman, 2005; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994), including worry, physiological needs satisfaction, organizational socialization, conscientiousness, future orientation, and Chinese values and the only outcome variable, the nurses' career success (p. 346). Based on the previous research on resilience, the authors defined personal resilience through four major facets including adaptability, and recuperability. They also developed operational definitions for these terms based on previous research studies. Determination was defined as the willpower and firmness of

the purpose that a person has and the cognitive decision to persevere and succeed (Bandura 1989, as cited in Wei & Taormina, 2014, p. 347). Endurance was defined as the personal strength, fortitude, and capacity to last through or to withstand unpleasant or difficult situations without giving up (Rutter, 2000, as cited in Wei & Taormina, 2014, p. 347). Adaptability is the capacity to be flexible and resourceful as well as the capability to cope with severe or adverse environments and adjust oneself to fit into changing conditions (Masten, 2001). Recuperability was defined as the ability to recover, either mentally or physically from various kinds of setbacks and return to usual conditions despite the difficulties (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004, as cited in Wei & Taormina, 2014, p. 347). The four facets were the dependent variables and the previously mentioned antecedent variables were considered the independent variables. In addition, the researchers included 'Subjective Career Success' as an outcome variable. The authors included this variable in their study due to a significant relationship between resilience and career satisfaction they found in the literature. Gattiker and Larwood (1986) defined 'Subjective Career Success' as the individual evaluations of one's own career based on self-defined standards in an occupation and on perceptions of their career experience (as cited in Wei & Taormina, 2014, p. 349).

The researchers sent a questionnaire to nurses in two hospitals in China. From all the nurses who received it, 244 responded, 169 women and 75 men. The response rate is not stated. Results from this study showed that organizational socialization variables each had significant positive correlations with the four subscales of resilience. Conscientiousness was also positively correlated with all four personal facets of resilience $p < 0{,}001$. Worry was found to be positively correlated with determination and adaptability, but slightly significant for endurance and

recuperability (p. 352). Chinese values, such as adaptability, persistence, and endurance which are personal values passed transmitted from generation to generation, were found to be significantly correlated with all domains of personal resilience. In addition, participants who showed more personal resilience, scored high on subjective career success. Organizational socialization variables were significantly relevant regarding the resilience facets. Wei and Taormina (2014) found that "training was a significant predictor of determination and endurance; understanding was a powerful predictor of endurance; and Coworker support significantly predicted adaptability and recuperability" (p. 354). These findings revealed relevant actions hospital administrators may undertake to promote and strengthen nurses' resilience in times of high stress and/or stressful environments.

Sobers (2014) explored the experiences of four Black women holding senior administrative positions in Student Affairs in predominantly White, private institutions. The study was guided by resilience theory. It focused on risk factors which created the experiences to overcome and on the compensatory variables which provided participants with opportunities to sustain themselves in a stressful, challenging environment. Data from this study revealed the following risk factors which had the potential to impede the participants in their career advancement: (a) tokenism, mostly related to the unspoken expectations of representing race, proving oneself both to others and themselves, minimal representation of one's gender and race in similar positions, serving as a role model, heighten visibility, isolation, surveillance, integrating spaces, and being mistaken for another person (p. 85); (b) perceptions of appearance, mainly attire and hair; (c) perceptions of communication styles, including tone of voice,

mannerisms, and delivery of communication; and (d) inequitable compensation. All these factors were reported to cause high level of stress for the participants and impeding their advancement.

Sobers (2014) found three compensatory variables that the participants identified both as intrinsic and extrinsic motivators and which helped them overcome discrimination, barriers, and other risk factors and thrive in their positions. These compensatory variables included: (a) Mentors, both formal and informal, refereeing to anyone who affected their leadership path, who saw potential and transferring skills, provided opportunities and supported them, who sponsored their advancement, who provided wisdom, points of insights and/or advice; (b) Giving back including the impact their job had on students' life, particularly on students who needed additional attention and advocacy for them, giving back to the community not only students, nurturing motivation helped them be resilient in an environment where they were minority, and influencing students of similar race and ethnicity develop their identity; and (c) spirituality defined as "faith, belief, religion, vocation, values, altruism, humanitarism, and certain values participants were either raised with or developed later in life" (p. 142). Spirituality influenced participants' thoughts and actions and helped them overcome the adversity they were facing in their career. Participants reported faith in a higher power was helpful in ignoring and overcoming discouraging situations. In addition, keeping their thoughts positive and finding a safe space where help, guidance, and support from mentors were solicited were other coping strategies (pp. 130-145). These women leaders reported to have been successful in their advancement and were satisfied with their career not due to the lack of barriers and supportive environments, but due to the coping mechanisms they developed in various situations.

This study has its limitations, though. It focused on the experience of four Black women in Student Affairs at predominately White, private institutions. Hence, findings may not be generalizable to other institutions. In addition, it explored the experiences of senior women leaders in Student Affairs-experiences of women in other divisions may bring a different perspective. Finally, it focused mainly on the compensatory factors, mostly exploring strategies women need to apply at their own personal level.

Even though resilience theory was developed about three decades ago, researchers have not frequently applied it as a theoretical framework in the study of leadership and leadership skills development. Nevertheless, resilience is found to have a significant positive correlation with subjective career success and future leadership aspirations (Wei & Taormina, 2014).

Barriers Women Face in the Pipeline

Women have not been represented in high numbers in leadership positions due to multiple factors, including but not limited to, appraisal of innate masculine traits such as aggressiveness and assertiveness, and organizational and societal cultures which discourage women's involvement and advancement to senior positions. Previous research has shown that individual traits and skills may interact with environmental/organizational characteristics and may foster or impair the performance of leaders (Avolio, 2007). The barriers that impede women from taking leadership roles and positions lay not only in the women as individuals, but also in the culture of the organizations, institutions, and society.

Researchers have used different terms to define the barriers women face in their advancement as leaders, such as "glass ceiling," or, for thicker barriers posed by racism combined with sexism, as "concrete wall" or "sticky floor" (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Moreover, Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) and Eagly and Carly (2007) use the term "labyrinth" to describe the uneven path women go through in progressing up the ladder of an organization (p. 172). Women face various barriers not only through the ladder, but also when they are actually in top managerial positions (Powell, 1999, p. 338). That is why women decide to leave their prior organizations even when they are in leading positions (Powell, p. 139) and start their own business. Powell (1999) in his book provides the following reasons for such actions: (a) challenge; b) self-determination; c) family concerns and multiple roles; d) blocks to advancement; and e) organizational dynamics.

Sabharwal (2013) focused on exploring the factors shaping the "glass cliff." For the purpose of that study, "glass cliff" was defined as "the situations where women were preferentially placed in leadership roles that were associated with an increased risk of negative consequences (Rayan & Haslam, 2005 as cited by Sabharwal, p. 4) due to a combination of psychological and social constructs which resulted in failure to perform in the position and eventually led to the intention to leave" (p. 4). The metaphor of glass cliff is based on the assumption that the playing field for women is not leveled (Eagly & Carly, 2007). The study used the data from the 2010 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey with N = 177,586. All participants were Senior Executive Service employees in four types of federal agencies. The dependent variable was glass cliff-intention to leave, whereas the independent variables included: (a) influence over policies, (b) empowerment (defined as the practice of sharing power and enabling other organizational members to act on issues they feel are important and relevant (Kezar et al., 2006), (c) organizational justice/ fairness, and (d) work-life balance issues. Results of the study show that only 11.8% of employees in redistributive agencies, where women hold

more leadership positions than men compared to the other three types of agencies, and a typically women-friendly work environment predominates, express an intention to leave, compared to 27.2% of constituent agencies, and 18.1% of regulatory agencies. In both the last categories, women do not hold the majority or even an equal number of leadership positions. Sabharwal (2013) concludes that, "Overall, employees who were involved in policy and decision making, felt empowered, and experienced organizational justice were less likely to express their intent to leave or face the risk of falling off the cliff" (p. 18). However, satisfaction with family friendly policies such as childcare, telework, and alternative work schedules did not seem to be negatively correlated with the intent to leave in this study. Sabharwal (2013) also reported that women have more influence over decision and policy making, feel more empowered, and sense that are treated with greater fairness in organizations where a women-friendly climate prevails compared to women-unwelcoming cultures.

Moreover, climbing up the ladder is even more difficult for women of color, or women that do not have a high socio-economic status. This may be experienced because of the intersectionality of identities when other identities beside gender impact the progression of women through the hierarchy of an organization (Guido, 2011; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Guido (2011) explained that her Italian origin, the family and cultural traditions, her socio-economic status, and her gender impacted her journey through the pipeline, and she also had advantages and disadvantages in her career path. The review of literature suggested that the barriers lay at three different levels: (a) the individual level, (b) the organizational level, and (c) the societal level. Pattatucci (1998) and Eagly and Carli (2007) suggested a fourth level of barriers blocking the women's advancement–the interpersonal level. Reviewing these levels one

by one provides a whole picture of the actual situation of women in leadership. At the individual level, the barriers are related to the common role women are assumed to play in the family, in the kind of relationships they are presumed to settle, and the actual stereotypes about women's abilities. These roles and expectations from women are deeply ingrained in the culture of the American society. Valian (2004) suggested that the gender schemas which put women in certain roles and positions in the family and at the workplace have generated stereotypes which are even at the sub-conscience of people, and people are not usually aware they hold such stereotypes. Stereotypes affect self-perception as well as self-confidence, determination, and assertiveness in goal achievement (Valian, 2004; Whelan, 2013). Sader (2011) found that women who were comfortable with themselves were more positive and optimistic about their success in computer science field. They were particularly comfortable if they were more secure in themselves and not trying to fit into someone else's idea (as cited in Pasque & Nicholson, 2011. p. 128).

Many women think that accepting a leadership position will impact their daily job performance and they cannot complete their job-related tasks as well without the responsibilities of the leading position. The teachers who were participants in Smith's study (2011) considered a leading position as an over challenge or an obstacle in their job. Women also have to hold multiple roles, such as mothers caring for and rearing children, caring for elder parents when not married, doing most of the house work besides their job responsibilities (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Curtis, 2011; Eagly, 2007; Eisenkraft, 2004; Ransom, 2013; Whelan, 2013). Even in the cases when they are not married and have no children, they become victims of the 'Mommy tracking' particularly in academia where they are expected to behave like moms, support and help other colleagues, mentor and serve as role models for students, and perform many roles and

tasks which may be supportive for the academic institution and its operation, but which have a detrimental impact or do not count towards women's progress in leadership at higher education institutions (Cummis, 2005). Hence, reaching the family-work life balance is perceived to be tough.

Barriers at the organizational level are not the same at every institution. Despite the various levels of robustness of the barriers in varied organizations, there are common barriers that women face in all organizations. Organizations and institutions are also influenced by the gender stereotypes regarding women and their abilities to thrive in a managerial role. Powell (1999) found that it was harder for women to get promotion when the organization was led by a patriarchal men, who considered women as weak and lacking the men traits to lead successfully. On the other hand, women face barriers in their advancement not only in the predominately men fields or organizations, but also in other institutions that are dominated by women. Valenti (2007) and Ransom (2013) argued that women who had authority and could make the promotion of other women easier and more accessible, did not take the challenge, arguing that what have not been easy for them to achieve should not be offered easily to other women, particularly if they were younger than 40 years of age, or were women of color.

Other researchers have suggested the chilly climate and unwelcoming institutional/ organizational cultures as factors impeding women's advancement in leadership (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Ransom, 2013). Nevertheless, the institutional climate and culture is influenced by the society as a whole. Hence, it is hard to separate the three levels previously mentioned because they reciprocally influence each other.

There are cases when bias may be unconscious because of the common tendency to underestimate women's capacities and see them as inferior compared to men due to gender schemas and stereotypes (Valian, 2004; Whelan, 2013). Women's work is not assessed as valuable as men's work even though they may be about the same. This is proven by the fact that women still make 76 cents for a dollar men make for the same job even though the Equal Pay Act has been enforced since 1963 (Valenti, 2007). According to Newman (2014), the salary gap in academe is noticed as well. Newman claimed that at doctoral institutions, women across all faculty ranks made 78 cents on the dollar men made. Comparison of women and men salary at the same faculty rank, women full professors made 90% of their men colleagues salary; women associate professors made 93 cents for a dollar men made; women assistant professors made 91% of the salary of their men colleagues; women lecturers made 88 cents and women instructors 96 cents for a dollar their men colleagues made (Newman, 2014). Moreover, Valenti (2007) claimed that women with one child are paid 2-8% less than women without children, and women with two children make 4-16% less money than women without children. Having children does not have the same effect on men's work evaluations, salaries, let alone promotions. Instead having children and well managing a full-time job is considered a strength for men and a disadvantage for women (Rivers & Barnett, 2013; Sandberg, 2013). Sandberg (2013) notes that when her husband and she were expecting their first child and were both in leadership positions respectively at Yahoo and Google, all congratulated her husband for the baby, but congratulated and questioned the possibility of her holding the same position. They clearly thought that the baby was going to interfere with her work dedication, commitment, and performance.

There are other opinions that neither such a difference in payment nor the glass ceiling exists (Pynes, 2009), but that is not true. Tacit sexism is even harder to identify and confront, especially when it lies at the subconscious level. Women still experience a difference in their pay, and a lack of support from their peers, partners, and sometimes parents and families, who still expect women to play the traditional gender roles assigned to them in typical patriarchal societies. Even women leaders collude with one gender, mostly men, and it is hard to avoid it. During the Question and Answer session after a presentation, Sheryl Sandberg announced that she was going to accept only two more questions. Even though many hands were raised, she called two men. After the conference, a lady approached her and noted that on that day she had learned a very important lesson–to hold her hand up (Sandberg, 2013). Speaking up and being vocal do not seem to fall under the roles expected of women, even in the sub-conscience of women leaders.

Assessment of leader's effectiveness is also moderated by gender and the socially assigned gender roles both for the leaders and raters of leaders' effectiveness. Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, and Woehr (2014), in a meta-analysis of contextual moderators on perceptions of leadership effectiveness, concluded that leader and rater's gender moderated the assessment of leader's effectiveness. They reviewed 99 studies about the relationship between gender and leadership effectiveness conducted between 1962 and 2011. Employing the Role Congruence Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002, as cited in Paustian-Uderdahl et al., 2014, p. 1) and Foschi's (2000) Double Standards of Competence model (Foschi, 2000, as cited in Paustian-Uderdahl et al., p. 10), the authors explained the effect of gender on perceptions of leadership effectiveness. They concluded that various factors moderate the relationship between gender and

leadership effectiveness. Role Congruency Theory (RCT), developed by Eagly in 1987, argues that, “individuals develop descriptive and prescriptive gender role expectations of others’ behavior based on an evolutionary sex-based division of labor (as cited in Paustian-Uderdahl et al, 2014, p. 2). Consistent with RCT, they concluded that, “the extent to which the organizations were men or women dominated significantly moderated gender differences in effectiveness. Men dominated organizations perceived men leaders as more effective, and women dominated organizations perceived women leaders as more effective” (p. 10). The authors argue that these findings are consistent with a similar study conducted by Eagly et al. in 1995, but the magnitude of effects is lower in Paustian-Uderdahl’s study.

Paustian-Uderdahl et al. (2014) also examined the relationship between gender and leadership effectiveness by rating source, that’s to say, whether self-rating or other-ratings were applied. They concluded that for other-ratings, women were rated as significantly more effective leaders than men in business and education organizations (p. 10). However, on self-rating, men rated themselves higher than women.

Finding a model to empower women as well as a way to achieve gender equity has recently been the focus of the researchers. However, the success and efficiency of a model depends on the context, the stakeholders, and the openness to accept and implement change.

Understanding the Challenges Women Face in Academia

Women in academia who aspire to leadership positions experience other challenges, in addition to those experienced by women in the business world. The challenges they face are determined by the nature of higher education institutions. In her review of various studies in 2005, Judith White noted that family formation has a disproportionate pressure on women

compared to men. Most women with children had considered leaving academia and women with one child in their household within five years of their PhDs were less likely than men to get a tenured position in the same timeframe (White, 2005).

Attrition is an issue that needs particular attention (White, 2005). Judith Robin, president of the Rockfeller Foundation in a speech she gave to an audience of women noted:

> "My generation fought so hard to give all of you choices. But choosing to leave the workforce was not the choice we thought so many of you would make." (as cited in Sandberg, 2013, p. 14)

While talking about a greater number of women who should be climbing the leadership ladder, women leave the workforce maybe to return later, again, at the starting level (Eagly, 2007). White (2005) suggests a grasp of the problem from a different viewpoint. She recommends considering attrition not as a personal choice of women who freely decide to exit academe and sometimes the workforce altogether. White (2005) and Sandberg (2013) argue that attrition needs to be considered from the perspective of an institutional and workplace structure, environment, and culture that are encouraging instead of discouraging it.

The tenure process, which is considered the corner stone of assuring high quality education, with the requirements it requires be met, puts women at disadvantage. Such promotion and tenure policies as "publish or perish" negatively impact women more than men (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation [AAUWEF], 2004). Authors of an AAUW (2004) report also suggest that other tenure procedures and policies also affect women more negatively compared to men. Such processes as articles, when published in Women/Gender Issues Journals, are not considered as serious as men's article's published in

other journals, which put women faculty at disadvantage to men. In addition, since the tenure review process is performed by department members, who may be influenced by their individual gender biases, may result in a subjective and biased evaluation, particularly in the men dominated departments (AAUW, 2004).

Lepkowski (2009) found that women's aspirations for leadership positions, their leadership styles, career commitments, and other personal attributes did not differ from the ones men showed. However, other studies have shown the opposite. Acker and Armenti (2004) concluded that women had to sacrifice not only their time, balance, and social life, but they had to sacrifice their sleep and health to comply with the requirements of promotion processes, and to be successful in academia. Such sacrifices cost them their health, and resulted in more stress for women compared to men. Other researchers also have underlined the dual career in academia as a barrier for women to move up in these institutions since women as wives of academic husbands have to tolerate and address the needs of their husbands as well (Curtis, 2011). In addition, women academics may be marginalized in their capabilities for re-location, particularly when their husbands/partners are academics.

Cummis (2005) suggested that women have to meet gender expectations and demonstrate gender accepted behaviors of compassion, nurturing, support, caring for students and colleagues, when they are not married and do not have to take care of their family and kids. Hence, they have to face other barriers even though they have chosen a way which is supposed to minimize the barriers. Cummis (2005), Curtis (2011), and Eagly, (2007) claimed that women academics are more often overloaded in their teaching workload compared to men. Furthermore, they are

often assigned to teach introductory courses, compared to men faculty who teach advanced courses and are more apt to be engaged in advanced research.

Researchers have also shown that almost 75% of all jobs are attained through networking (Lepkowski, 2009). Nevertheless, women in many cases are assigned in various positions which do not reinforce or encourage networking, and keep them isolated. Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) studied the role of gender in academic networking and the impact of gendered networking in the professorial appointments in Dutch academia. They found that current networking practices produce gender inequalities through gendered practices, such as, identifying with the similar, reproducing the proven success model, and scouting women (p. 474). Authors suggested that when men are in majority, they tend to have more *homophilous* (sic) network relationships than women. Consequently, in academia where the gatekeepers are mainly men, men in the gatekeepers' social networks would have more access to recruiting pools than women. Hence, the chances that a men candidate would be invited, nominated, and selected are higher compared to women's (p. 475). One of the participants in this study, claimed that sometimes the exclusion of women may be neither intentional nor conscious. While in the case of mobilizing masculinities, that is to say, identifying with and fully supporting men (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014, p. 470), the act of mobilizing may be conscientious, in affiliating with masculinities the process is more liminal and not conscientious (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014, p. 475). Van den Brink and Benschop further argued that the historical overrepresentation of men professors has contributed to creating a model of a successful academic full professor linked to men and masculine characteristics (p. 476). Both men and women, in their study, referred to the image/ideal of full professor as "he" or "him". Such reference was considered as a

"strong connection with the ideal of 'unencumbered' White man who is flexible, mobile, committed, and available" (p. 476). Participants in their study reported that acquiring positions in a men bastion such as academia was hard for women, particularly because of the masculine proven model of success and due to the men being in charge of tasks division, candidates' appointment, and determining relevant and/or irrelevant skills and human capital in a colleague. Van den Brink and her colleague argued that women did not mobilize masculinity at the same level as men, but they participated in such activity when they took for granted the masculine model of success (p. 476).

Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) admitted that there are cases when women are scouted due to enforcement of equality policies and the responsibility of colleges and universities to comply with them. However, the authors argued that in order to comply with diversity and equality policies, new, personal chair positions were created for women, which did not have the same relevance and influence as chair positions hold by men. The authors further explained that these complying strategies created new inequalities in addition to the systemic old ones.

Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) noted that the majority of the universities included in their study were in the denial stage of the problem regarding the underrepresentation of women in senior positions. When administrators of many universities were asked about the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and the factors that may have had influenced it, they denied it completely as an issue at their institution. Denial of the issue puts on halt initiatives which may try to address the issue. Even though this study was conducted in the Netherlands, some findings from it may apply to the colleges and universities in the United States, such as regarding the hiring and promotion processes of women in academia. In addition,

Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) stated that tasks assigned to academic women put them in disadvantage compared to their men counterparts in regard to promotions and impact their opportunities for networking.

In addition, overload and too many responsibilities isolate women academics. With the paucity of women in leadership positions in academia, particularly in certain departments and at high rank research universities, women are faced with the shortage of women mentors, which makes their future picture seem hard and blurry. Marquez (2014) explored the experiences of 15 women holding senior leadership positions in Student Affairs in public, 4-year institutions. Results showed that encouragement for college education attainment since a young age from parents had a significant impact on their career success. Participants also stated that their involvement in student organizations and student government leadership position as well as the mentorships they established at that time encouraged their aspirations for graduate education and leadership positions in Student Affairs. Most of their promotions were internal in the departments they were working, and the majority of participants stated that they were promoted particularly for their attitude and availability to continuously add responsibilities to their plate, even though they were beyond their position descriptions. This is in alignment with previous research findings where women have to prove themselves twice as men, and that women are promoted based on performance, whereas men based on potential (Sandberg, 2013; Whelan, 2013).

Marquez (2014) found that women in senior positions in Student Affairs faced road blocks and challenges both when working towards those positions and while serving in senior positions. They emphasized the following challenges: (a) work-life balance; (b) geographical

mobility; and (c) challenges beyond gender in regard to multi-layered marginalized identities (p. 114). Maintaining work-life balance was reported challenging for 13 of the 15 participants. Holding a senior leadership position and the time requirements for the position, which was never a nine to five position, clashed quite often with their family responsibilities. Depending on their age and seniority in their positions, some of the participants claimed that they considered their job and worked 24/7. Seven of the 15 participants stated that geographical mobility was a challenge that created particular hardship for them. It was not only because they were mothers, but they had to relocate the whole family to pursue career advancement. That would jeopardize not only their stability, but their families, too. Besides challenges related to and/or due to participants' gender, participants reported other challenges beyond gender. A few believed that their age was an obstacle they had to overcome. Being "too young" for the job, was a challenge they had to prove wrong through their experience. Also being part of another minority group, made the participants feel they were hired to fill a quota, or they were required to present the whole minority group they belonged to. Participants reported they believed they were hired because of requirements to comply with diversity policies, and their experience and intelligence were not respected (p. 123).

All these factors put women in academia, regardless of the department they are working in, at a disadvantage compared to men regarding academic and administrative leadership positions.

Life of Women Leaders in Mid-level Positions

According to the pipeline theory, the more women start at the entry level, the more will reach the senior level (White, 2005). Despite the great numbers of women entering the

workforce, the number of them holding top positions does not reflect similar rates. Kellerman and Rhode (2014) suggest that the pipeline is leaking all over. Philipsen (2008) claims that a scarcity of research about women in mid-level positions is noted.

Renn and Hughes (2004) in their book *Roads Taken,* included essays from women in mid-level positions in Student Affairs. Authors of the essays elaborated on the issues women in these positions faced, such as, difficulties faced in making the decision to pursue doctoral degrees and move up the ladder (Guiterrez, 2004; Jones, 2004; Paine, 2004), family responsibilities, dual-career and relocation issues (McDaniels & Renn, 2004; Ruel, 2004), being a single mother or even in a marriage, the woman has the primary responsibilities for child rearing (Joyce-Brady, 2004). Women in these positions faced similar barriers and issues to women in other leadership positions. Women leaders in Student Affairs found it difficult to pursue a 40-hour week schedule, struggled to maintain a balance between professional and personal lives, and take care of the family responsibilities at the same time (Renn & Hughes, 2004).

Philipsen (2008) described the life of women faculty at mid-level career. Women faculty at this level still struggled to find a healthy balance between professional and personal life. Dr. Seidman claimed that, even though she had three grown children, the flagship university where she worked had neither formal nor informal practices to help her balance her life (Philipsen, 2008). However, they have developed certain coping strategies that make their work and life much easier compared to entry level faculty (Philipsen, 2008). The author claims that women faculty at this level, like early-career faculty, find it hard to say “no” to various tasks and duties assigned to them. Lack of time to take care of themselves and other personal needs is also

reported. Dr. Sikka argued that she had to sacrifice her life for the sake of everything else in her job (Philipsen, 2008, p. 84). Other women faculty reported lots of stressors and high expectations that made it too hard to keep a healthy balance between personal and professional life. While most of these women faculty at mid-level had tenure and were released to some degree from the pressures of the tenure process and requirements, they still admitted to facing many time demands. They emphasized that "demands on faculty member's time did not end with tenure" (Philipsen, 2008, p. 85). Such demands are similar to the demands men faculty face, but women faculty have to fulfill additional responsibilities in their personal and professional lives, simply due to assigned gender roles (Philipsen, 2008). Philipsen argued that unless women faculty at this stage had supportive partners, encouraging family members, relatives, friends, and/or supportive colleagues, they faced a lot of pressures, dealt with imbalance issues, and/or experienced barriers sufficient to infringe or halt their advancement in Academic Affairs. Dual-career and relocation were other factors these women mentioned to have a huge impact on establishing a long-term career at one institution (Philipsen, 2008). The hardest case reported was when both partners worked in Academic Affairs, and time demands and expectations were high for both of them (Philipsen, 2008). Renn and Hughes (2004) claimed that in dual-career couples, usually the women either quit their jobs, or moved to less time demanding positions.

Nguyen (2014) explored the experiences of academic deans in community colleges in California. She focused particularly on challenges and risk factors mid-level administrators faced during the transition and while serving in the dean role. She concluded that deans face leadership transitioning challenges and ongoing, managerial challenges. It needs to be emphasized that gender was not the focus of this study, but the dean position and respective challenges and risk

factors increasing burnout rate among deans. Some of the participants in this study came to the dean position through a traditional pathway from faculty, to department chair, to dean position, and others from classified class. Their experiences varied based on the respective pathway.

Nguyen (2014) found that mid-level administrators faced the following leadership transition challenges: (a) understanding the institutional culture; (b) navigating politics; (c) establishing a rapport with faculty; and (d) changing current practices. Participants reported that they experienced these challenges, particularly during the first year in these positions, when they anticipated to learn about the institution and respective culture and climate, and position's roles and responsibilities, but were "expected to hit the ground running" (p. 78). Participants coming from the classified staff reported to have experienced more challenges than the ones coming from the faculty ranks.

Nguyen (2014) reported that deans faced the following ongoing, management challenges: (a) increasing job demand/overload; (b) managing personnel issues; and (c) adding responsibilities for which they lacked knowledge, and which did not have any positive impact on their professional growth. However, they reported that they had developed leadership and managerial skills which helped them overcome such challenges. Factors such as mentors and leadership training programs, either formal or informal, played a significant role in helping them develop skills and coping strategies to overcome challenges. Nguyen (2014) did not distinguish between the experiences of women and men deans, since that was not the focus of her study.

Philipsen (2008) argued that issues women in mid-level positions face vary due to the institutional support, climate, cultures, and institutional type. Women found more support in departments and colleges where gender friendly policies and culture were reinforced, than in

other institutions lacking such policies and climate (Philipsen, 2008). Hence, leadership of the universities may undertake various steps to establish gender supportive policies, a gender friendly culture, and to make women's leadership journey smoother. Researchers have provided recommendations for organizations in general and for higher education institutions in particular. Such recommendations are discussed in the following section.

Potential Strategies, Protective and/or Compensatory Factors

Reviewing the literature on possible models for women empowerment, the "strategies for change" suggested by Kellerman and Rhode (2007), may be helpful and relevant in providing support for aspiring women leaders. Kellerman and Rhode recommended strategies that would empower women at the personal, organizational, and societal level (p. 20). They also claimed that most efforts to implement the change focus on the individual level, and by doing so, the organizational culture, or the society's culture is not taken into consideration.

First, Kellerman and Rhode (2007) recommended that women become aware of their values, capacities, goals, and potential to lead and further develop their leadership skills and potential (p. 21). Self-reflection and self-assessment are important to all leaders. Nevertheless, women tend to rate themselves lower than men in regard to leadership effectiveness.

Second, women should try to find mentors of both genders, because only women mentors are almost impossible to find when needed (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). Third, Ramson (2013) recommended that women participate in leadership capacities starting at a young age. This would increase the women's self-confidence that they can be successful leaders despite their age.

Organizations can also help in promoting women in leadership by showing commitment to empower women through developing and implementing practices, procedures and policies that

facilitate and support women's advancement (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007, p. 27). Creating flexible or reduced schedules, maternal leave policies, and child care assistance (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007, p. 28) would provide opportunities for women to perform at their full potential in all aspects of their work positions. It may also provide women with opportunities to develop the necessary skills to fully participate in the future workforce (Powell, 1999).

Providing mentors for women at the organizational level may also help women in finding those desired models and patterns (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). Formalized and institutionalized mentoring programs have proven to be a successful strategy in empowering women (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007. p. 29).

Eisenkraft (2004), and Acker and Armenti (2004) recommend the following strategies particularly for higher education institutions:

- Stop the tenure clock for childbirth and caring for young child;
- Consider spousal hiring for couples in academia;
- Help spouses of new faculty members with their job search;
- Offer part-time tenure-track positions with re-entry rights;
- Offer childcare to tenure track professors, especially the newly hired;
- Supplement the federal employment insurance benefits for family leave;
- Consider leaves for the care of an elderly relative;
- Establish and communicate formal policies on family care;
- Provide funding for student mothers and keep scholarships for part-time studies;
- Allow fellowship funding to resume after a substantial break for child rearing.

Sobers (2014) reported that compensatory factors such as having mentors, both formal and informal, giving back to the community and the impact their job had on students' life, and spirituality had increased women leaders' resilience and helped them overcome challenges and roadblocks (p. 142).

Participants in a study conducted by Marquez (2014) emphasized the significant impact supportive, collaborative, and equally involved partners in home responsibilities had on overcoming challenges and not feeling burnt out. They also advised that women aspiring for senior position in Student Affairs (a) create a network, (b) find role models to assist them overcoming challenges that are unique to women, and (c) strive for equality and eradicate inequitable environments (p. 126).

Although strategies and models at individual level may be unique to the individual women, higher education institutions may promote women advancement by establishing gender friendly policies, equitable hiring and promotion processes, and practices that would take into consideration gender roles the society has assigned to women.

Summary

This chapter focused on reviewing the status of women in leadership position, the barriers they face in various organizations and particularly in higher education institutions. It also presented a review of the strategies and relevant factors that researchers have found to have a positive impact in women's advancement.

The review of the literature presented barriers at the personal, organizational, and societal level. Most of the barriers were influenced by gender stereotypes, both descriptive and prescriptive gender role stereotypes, and women's roles as individuals, in their families, and in

society. A review of the statistics about women in leadership showed that progress has been made towards empowering women particularly as positional leaders, who support and inspire the leader who actually holds the authority. However, the number of women in leading managerial positions is still low. Kellerman and Rhode (2007) proposed various strategies to promote women's advancement in leadership.

Furthermore, Eisenkraft (2004) and Acker and Armenti (2004) recommend strategies in particular for promoting women in academia. Even though progress is noted, more efforts are needed to reach gender equity in the workforce, leadership, and higher education institutions.

This study focused on further exploring factors that can potentially reduce challenges and/or support women leaders overcome them in their career advancement. The next chapter will further elaborate on the research approach followed for this study, the method used, sampling and site selection, data collection instruments, and data analysis.

Chapter III: Method

This interpretative qualitative study focused on exploring and understanding the experiences of women leaders in mid-level positions in Academic Affairs. It also focused on identifying barriers women leaders have faced while advancing in their careers. By exploring the women's experiences, the researcher aimed to identify skills and character components women leaders developed and have deemed effective in helping them persist and succeed. This study also identified some coping strategies and protective factors that women leaders found helpful to overcome perceived obstructions and risk factors.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the perceived experiences of women leaders in mid-level leadership positions in academia?
- What barriers and/or risk factors have women leaders encountered while advancing in their career?
- What factors have a significant impact on helping women leaders overcome risk factors?

This chapter includes (a) a brief introduction to the current situation of women leaders in higher education; (b) a discussion of research design that explains why an interpretative qualitative approach better serves the focus of this study; (c) a description of sampling techniques that pinpoint the methods used in the selection of participants; (d) a description of the data collection procedures; (e) and a description of data analysis process which explains in detail the procedures for organizing and analyzing the data. A brief summary concludes this chapter.

Research Design

An interpretative qualitative approach was used to explore the experiences of women leaders in higher education, the factors that shaped their journey to leadership positions, and how the meanings that women leaders give to their past and present experiences have impacted their aspirations to leadership. Elliot and Timulak (2005) defined qualitative research methods as "methods which relied on linguistic rather than numerical data, and use meaning-based rather than statistical forms of data analysis" (p. 147). They explained that qualitative research methods "emphasize understanding of the phenomenon on its own right, by using open, exploratory research questions, and following a frame of unlimited, emergent description options in the data analysis process" (p. 147), which may be guided by the researcher's prior knowledge about the phenomenon under study, but are not predetermined by that knowledge (Shwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

In addition, Elliot and Timulak (2005) suggested that an interpretative, qualitative design is used to explore complex phenomena that change and unfold over time. According to Shwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012), interpretative, qualitative research follows abductive reasoning, which "begins with a puzzle, a problem, or tension and seeks to make sense of it, by understanding the conditions which would make it less perplexing, and more of a natural, normal event" (p. 27). Shwartz-Shea and Yanow defined abductive reasoning as a process where the researcher's thinking is led and/or actively directed in an inferential process from making sense of the puzzle or problem to interpreting its possible explanations (p. 28). They emphasized the circular-spiral pattern of logic in abductive reasoning, which "requires the researcher to be engaged with

multiple pieces of the puzzle at once," and reiterate the process in order to identify possible explanations to the situation (p. 28).

I chose an interpretative qualitative research approach based on five reasons. First, the nature of the research problem and research questions required and could have been better answered by an in-depth descriptive exploration of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Hence, a qualitative design was found appropriate for this study. Second, this study sought to explore the women' leadership journey and what factors had a significant impact in shaping their experiences and aspirations for future leadership positions. Such exploration needed to be done with the participants in their natural setting, and not in an experimental way as this could distort the findings (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Stake, 2010). Third, an interpretative, qualitative approach would make it easier to get a deep understanding of the meanings of those experiences and participants' perceptions about their path to leadership and I could infer potential explanations about the connection(s) between barriers and risk factors, and protective and compensatory factors. Fourth, numerical data might provide superficial information about lived experiences and human behaviors (Roberts, 2004). Finally, this qualitative study focused on people's experience from their own perspectives, and the researcher interpreted the meanings that participants gave to their experiences (Roberts, 2004). The next subsection explains the site and sample selection procedures.

Site and Sample Selection

According to Tracy (2013), five factors need to be considered in the selection of the participating research sites, in this case higher education institutions, including feasibility, accessibility, budget, time, and travelling constraints. Consequently, public, four-year institutions

in the Beta System, a unionized system of colleges and universities, located in the mid-western part of the United States, were considered viable sites for this study.

Participants in this research study needed to satisfy the following three criteria: (a) be a woman; (b) currently serving in a mid-level leadership position in Academic Affairs at a higher education institution; and (c)they should have been serving in those positions for at least three years. For the purpose of this study, the dean position was considered mid-level leadership position.

To identify cases of interest, I used the purposeful sampling technique. According to Tracy (2013) purposeful sampling allows the researcher to "purposefully choose data that fit the parameters of the project's research questions" (p. 134). In order for the data to reach saturation, Elliot and Timulak (2005) suggest purposeful sampling, in all the cases in which the central and decisive aspects of a phenomenon are the focus of a study. They recommend that researchers assure that the sample covers all the aimed aspects of the phenomenon under study. While Creswell (2008) suggest a sample size of 20 to 30 interviews to capture a broad picture of the phenomenon under study, Tracy (2013) recommends to start with five and to keep adding participants until the data reaches theoretical saturation, that is to say, information becomes redundant and repetitive, and the added participants do not add to the richness and/or depth of understanding the phenomenon. Thus, the criterion for selecting the sample in a qualitative study is saturation, i.e., stop collecting data when the results start to become redundant.

Given the goal of the study, for sampling purposes, I started by reviewing the organizational charts of all 4-year-public institutions in the Beta System. I created a list of all women Academic Deans in those institutions. I checked their biographies on the websites of

respective institutions, to make sure they had been serving in the Dean position for at least 3 years. I also included the criteria for participation in the letter of invitation I sent to each potential participant. I received contact information including email addresses from respective websites. I sent the letter of invitation by email to all potential participants, 16 in this case. Six of them agreed to participate in the study. After I conducted the first six interviews, transcribed and organized the data into the first meaning groups, I realized that not all schools or colleges were represented in the given group of interviews. I was wondering whether deans at different schools or colleges would have had different experiences because of that element, so I re-contacted the deans of the colleges which were not represented in the data. Data reached saturation at the eighth interview.

Participants came from six institutions, leading colleges or schools of various disciplines, including Education, Health and Human Services, Vocational-Program School, Arts and Sciences, Social and Behavioral Sciences, Science and Engineering, and Library. Seven of the participants were in the 50-60 age group. One of the participants was in the 60-70 age group. All participants identified themselves as Caucasians. Seven of the participants had been in their institutions since they joined academia as faculty members. Only one of the participants had experience in various institutions. All participants had a doctoral degree in various majors. Their leadership experience in formal positions in academia ranged between 10-20 years. They were all married or reported living with a significant other. To protect the identity of participants and maintain confidentiality, the researcher created pseudonyms for all participants and the respective institutions.

Some of the participants reported having followed a traditional pathway to deanship position, transitioning from a non-tenured faculty to tenured, to department chair, to a dean position, while others reported to have assumed either department chair roles, or other leadership positions on campus even before being tenured. One of the participants did not start her career in academia as a faculty member. She progressed to a director level and then to a dean position.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

The primary instrument that I used to collect data in order to answer the research questions were semi-structured interviews. Interviews provide in depth information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic (Turner, 2010). I conducted semi-structured, either face-to-face or phone interviews with the participants, digitally recorded seven out of eight interviews, and took notes of my observations and clarifications about any ambiguous information during the interviews. One participant did not agree for the interview to be recorded, so I took detailed notes on her answers to each question.

Interviews included two sets of questions: (a) demographic questions, and (b) questions exploring perceptions of women leaders about their experiences in the leadership journey, barriers and risk factors they had faced through the journey and in the positions they were holding, as well as their perceptions of the protective and compensatory factors they had found in the respective institutions and their interpretations of such perceptions.

An interview guide was developed in order to gather information related to the three main guiding research questions (Appendix A). Three faculty members of the Higher Education Administration doctoral program reviewed the initial draft of the interview guide questions. I used their feedback and, particularly the feedback of my academic advisor to refine the interview

guide questions aiming to ensure clarity and validity of this instrument prior to conducting the study.

After I received the IRB approval for the study, I conducted the interviews between December of 2016 and April of 2017. I approached the potential participants by email and invited them to participate in this study. Focus and purpose of the study was elaborated in the email. I ensured participants that participation in this study was completely voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants requested that I should use a pseudonym for the system of colleges and universities that their institutions are part of. Consequently, I named it the Beta System.

Participants were asked open-ended questions related to the focus of this study. Open-ended questions allow the participants to give as much detailed information as they are willing to and they also allow the researcher to ask follow-up questions to clarify and get the most accurate interpretation of the participants' perceptions (Turner, 2010, p. 756). The semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions allow the researcher to be flexible with the participants, and have them guide the research rather than the researcher guiding the answers (Glass & Cook, 2016).

Leedy and Ormrod (2001) noted that qualitative researchers depend on lengthy interviews with a carefully selected sample of participants and the study implementation depends on the participants' hands as much as in the hands of the researcher (p. 153). Consequently, I was open to meet with participants in places where they would feel most comfortable, and provided them with all necessary information to make sure to have gained their trust before the interviewing process starts. Matters of confidentiality and anonymity were discussed and

participants were provided with a research consent form that elaborated details about the study, confidentiality, anonymity, and contact information. Participants were also provided opportunities to ask questions, and withdraw at any time.

In order for me to develop a deep understanding of the meanings and interpretations that the participants gave to certain experiences and events, I spent one to one hour and a half time with the participants during interviews (Christensen & Burke-Johnson, 2008, p. 393) and clarified any part of their stories that seemed ambiguous. I also re-contacted them later after the interviews were transcribed and analyzed to cross validate the interpretations.

Researcher's ethnicity, race, culture, firsthand experience of the phenomena, as well as personal bias may influence interpretations of the findings (Roberts, 2004). Hence, suspending one's self from the study would provide more reliable interpretations of the participants' experience and truthful findings. I tried to avoid and refrain myself from expressing any judgments, opinions, or thoughts about the topic and concepts under discussion while interviewing participants, so participants were not influenced by my thoughts and biases. In order to be as objective as possible in data collection and interpretation, I kept detailed memos of the observations and my perceptions of the aspects of the study under inquiry during the interviews, while transcribing the interviews, and during data analysis process.

Interviews were digitally recorded, except one. I transcribed the interviews as they occur and consequently organized them and other notes from the observations in individual categories for each participant.

Methods of Data Analysis

Elliot and Timulak (2005) recommend a general structure for data analysis, which allows the researcher to have flexibility in the process. However, they suggest the researcher to check and audit all steps of the analysis process and carefully archive them for later checking (p. 152). They also recommend the analysis process be systematic and organized, so the researcher can easily locate the information in the data set and be able to refer back to it when tracing results. They recommend the following steps for data analysis process: (a) data preparation, which includes transcribing the interviews, interweaving researchers' notes with the transcripts, usually in a different font/ color, and a pre-analysis of the data; (b) divide the data into distinctive meaning units; (c) determining the domains, which usually derive from the research questions, and organizing the meaning units in each domain; (d) coding or categorizing meaning units within each domain into emerging categories; and (e) categorizing the categories into emerging themes.

While following the steps Elliot and Timulak (2005), first, I transcribed the digitally recorded interviews and interwove my notes and memos in a different color to distinguish my voice from that of the participants. I also read the whole data set and eliminated redundant phrases and information, and saved a second copy of the transcription for each interview.

Second, I divided the data into distinctive meaning units. According to Elliot and Timulak (2005), meaning units are "parts of the data that even when standing out of the context, would communicate sufficient information to provide a piece of meaning to the reader" (p. 153). I re-read the data set and individual meaning units and eliminated redundancies which did not affect and/or change the meaning of the unit.

Third, I determined the main domains, which resulted from the research questions. I assigned a letter and a color to each domain. The domains included: (a) women leaders' perceptions (P) about their experiences; (b) barriers (B) and risk factors (R); (c) protective factors (PF); and (d) compensatory factors (CF). During this stage, I noticed that some data would fit in more than one domain, so I kept them in multiple domains for the moment. I color coded the meaning units and assigned a unique letter and number for each participant, domain, and meaning unit, so I could easily trace the information back to the original data set and consider the fit of the meaning unit into various categories or domains. For instance, P-Stewart8 (light green) color, meant the data was highlighted in a light green color, it was placed under the domain of perceptions, and it could be found on p. 8 of the transcript from the interview with Dr. Stewart.

Fourth, I coded or categorized the meaning units within each of the domains. Elliot and Timulak (2005) suggest using the meaning of the meaning units in organizing them into categories or codes. They recommend coding meaning units based on similarities or regularities in the data (p. 154). They explain that the process of categorizing is an interpretative process on the part of the researcher, who is trying to interpret the data and the meanings participants give to the them, and using a language as close as possible to the one participants used, while labelling each category. Hence, I compared and discerned similarities and regularities among all meaning units and coded them into categories. I compared them to each other and against emerging categories, until all data was sorted. I even included meaning units stated by only one participant, due to its relevance in understanding the phenomena. For instance, only one participant reported relocating multiple times. The impact that this element had on her perception and experience was

unique and significant enough to be included in the barriers and risk factors domain. Elliot and Timulak suggest not discarding meaning units due to their infrequency.

Finally, I categorized the categories into emerging themes and reported them based on their frequency of occurrence. I used the emerging themes to rebuild the whole picture of the experiences of women leaders' mid-level positions in Academic Affairs, as represented by the participants' accounts.

An independent reviewer developed another list of categories of the meaning units. This process of analyzing the data and categorizing them into categories from the perspectives of more than one researcher reduces the bias from the personal experiences and thoughts of the main researcher (Patton, 2002). The researcher and the reviewer used the same research questions in analyzing the data. Meaning units, categories, and domains were compared between the two lists and one common list was developed. I reported the findings based on the common list of categories, domains, and meaning units.

Findings were compared against the existing body of literature to check whether findings were supported or not by the literature.

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the methodological approach that was used in collecting and analyzing data in exploring the experiences of women leaders through their leadership journey to mid-level positions in Academic Affairs in higher education institutions. Semi-structured interviews with participants in a purposeful sample were conducted in order to collect data to address the three research questions of the study. An interview guide with open-ended questions was developed based on the main guiding research questions. Through face-to

face and/or on the phone, semi-structured interviews, I aimed to provide a thorough description of the experiences of the participants as women leaders in higher education institutions. Findings of this study were considered through the lenses of Resilience Theory. Involvement of Higher Education program faculty in reviewing research and interview guide questions, an independent reviewer, keeping notes and memos to myself through data collection and data analysis process, and re-contacting the participants to review data interpretation and analysis ensured the validity and reliability of the data collection from December 2016 until April 2017 and the data analysis process.

The next chapter reveals the findings of this study supported by quotes from participants.

Chapter IV: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of women leaders holding mid-level positions at 4-year public institutions of higher education that are part of the Beta State System located in the Mid-West region of the United States. The study particularly focused on exploring the barriers and challenges that the participants experienced in their career progression and while holding leadership positions. In addition, the study aimed to identify factors that the participants deemed relevant in minimizing their barriers and challenges, or which helped them overcome such barriers and challenges and built resilience.

The data for this study were derived from eight semi-structured interviews with women mid-level administrators who were working in 4-year public institutions that were part of a highly unionized system of colleges and universities. In addition, demographic data from the participants were collected through a questionnaire to provide a better understanding of participants' career progression. Three interviews were conducted in person and five were conducted on the phone due to schedule conflicts and weather constraints. All interviews were audio recorded except for one. One of the participants agreed to allow the researcher to take notes and type them. The typed notes were shared with this participant per her request. All the audio recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The data analysis was guided by the Resilience Theory framework to answer the three research questions and two sub-questions as indicated below:

1. What are the perceived experiences of women leaders in mid-level leadership positions in academia?

2. What barriers and/or risk factors have women leaders encountered while advancing in their career?
3. What factors have a significant impact on helping women leaders overcome risk factors?

This chapter is organized in five sections. The first section describes the participants and their perceptions about their experiences through their career advancement. The second section reports findings about participants' perceived barriers and/or risk factors. The third section elaborates on the factors that protected participants from the barriers and/or risk factors. Section four elaborates on the factors that helped participants overcome risk factors and increase their resilience. A summary of the findings concludes this chapter.

Perceptions About Leadership Experiences

The study's first research question stated, "What are the perceived experiences of women leaders in mid-level leadership positions in academia?" Due to overlapping themes in the findings between research question one and the other two research question, findings for research question two and three are more detailed in order to avoid redundancy.

Participants elaborated on various factors influencing their experiences and the perceptions they had during those experiences. Such factors and experiences impacted not only their current careers, but also their future aspirations for senior leadership positions. Three main themes emerged from the data analysis. The emerging themes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Perceptions About Their Experiences as Leaders

- Motives for Leadership Aspirations
- Perceptions of Academic and Leadership Experiences
- Future Leadership Aspirations

Motives for Leadership Aspirations

All participants elaborated and emphasized relevant factors that had influenced their choices of initially joining academia and later aspiring and applying for leadership positions. These factors were guided by: (a) Career Progression, and (b) Reasons for Stepping up. Participants explained that all these factors, in concert with one another had shaped their experiences in academia, determined their career choices and their leadership ambitions.

Career progression. All participants elaborated on their career progression since the time they entered academia, focusing on the factors that had facilitated their advancement and/or the hiring processes and procedures. Two of the participants talked about their career before joining academia because of the significant impact they perceived such experiences to have had on their progression and their later experience in academia. Dr. Merkel elaborated on her successful experience in a men dominated area since the early '70s. She joined academia after 18 years of experience in a different profession. She stated:

> I came to academia a bit later in life than a lot of people do. Prior to going into higher education, I was then in the radio profession. When I started in the radio, a woman full time on the air, …. That was pretty radical at the time. I didn't really realize it at the time, but I was very prominent in the radio area, in my community, and it was very very

> unusual. So right away my first professional venture, or my first career was actually in a men dominated field.

Dr. Harnold also elaborated on her previous experience and the influence it had particularly on her approach to restructuring the Teacher Preparation program at her institution. Her previous experience as a principal in a high school and also as a teacher in various schools informed her choices of the school cultures that may be effective in addressing all students' needs. Such experience also informed her choices in developing the curriculum, practices and skills that future teachers need to master. Dr. Harnold stated:

> Loved my internship as a principal and what unfolded at the time I was going back to get my administration master's degree, which was in the 80s. It was something called instructional leadership. And that resonated with me because that was looking at learning and instruction and then how do you lead in that environment. … I thought I could be a principal and that was the kind of school culture and environment that I could step into. So I finished hmm, with a strong interest in being a principal.

Dr. Harnold joined academia first as a graduate assistant and later as a faculty member in the same department. However, she noticed that it was not she who took the first step for such movements, but her professors. Her professor from her undergraduate studies nudged her into pursuing graduate studies in administration, into joining the Teaching Program as a graduate assistant, and later into other positions in academia.

Dr. Stewart also noted that becoming an Assistant Vice President of Undergraduate Education at her institution was not her intention. She was invited to apply for that position right

after she received tenure, but had never had another official leadership position on campus, although she was successfully leading other initiatives.

All the participants but one had stayed with their institution through their entire career in academia. Participants who stayed with their institution emphasized the positive impact of taking risks and responsibilities, excelling in their work, and having the trust of their colleagues on their career progression. Dr. Samuel, due to her husband's profession, had to travel a lot and had worked for multiple institutions throughout her career. Her first leadership position was a program director and she was later promoted to a dean position. The economic recession of 2008 also had a negative impact on her career, when her position was discontinued due to restructuring. Even though, she had always intended to serve in higher leadership positions and applied for them, particularly in the institutions where she believed she had the support and credibility, she was not even invited for an interview. While Dr. Samuel was intentional in her leadership progression, other participants did not express an intention to move to those leadership positions. They all stated that they intended to be faculty members, but not to occupy a dean's position.

Three of the participants reported that their career progression to deanship did not follow a traditional pathway. They assumed the role of department chair or other leadership roles before being tenured. These participants reported that other faculty members considered taking such responsibilities risky, particularly in the absence of tenure to protect them. Dr. Nelson commented that none of her faculty colleagues were willing to undertake the department chair position due to the stages in their careers. She was the only one willing to step into that position at the time.

Therefore, three participants explained that the stage in their academic career seemed to play a significant role in their career decisions. Dr. Nelson and Dr. Stewart noted that timing was crucial in accepting or rejecting an invitation to a promotion. For instance, Dr. Nelson elaborating on the circumstances that brought her to the department chair position stated:

> I was a chair for three years right after I got tenured and was promoted. My department wanted me to serve as chair. Truthfully nobody wanted to serve as chair at that point, and I was like, 'OK.' I think part of it was timing; the places where various people were in their career, or with their families. There were a couple of more senior women faculty, who could have been very good chairs and would have done that, but their kids were at a certain time in their lives and they just said: 'you know, I cannot do it right now.'

Dr. Merkel and Dr. Samuel talked about other external timing factors that influenced their career progression, such as the financial and economic recession of 2008, or the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (EEOA). Dr. Samuel's position was cut due to the economic recession and she had to move to a different institution. Whereas, Dr. Merkel considered herself fortunate to be at the right time and in the right place when certain opportunities came up. She stated:

> I went on the air full time in 1972. And I would say, I definitely am a product of the EEO. The EEO went into effect in 1972. So there is the case where being a women, that's probably when they thought, because of the EEO, we don't want to be in trouble, we need some women announcers. So I am in the right place in the right time. That was good fortune for me. When I applied for that fixed term position over here, I don't think for the first year fixed term they were thinking, 'there is all men in the department and we better

> go and get a woman. We need to hire a woman.' I think I got the job the first time because I got that radio experience.

In conclusion, experiences prior to joining academia, experiences as faculty members and leaders in their departments, the encouragement from other faculty members to step to leadership positions, the pathway either traditional or non-traditional, and the time and stage in their careers had shaped the participants' experiences in and intentions for leadership positions.

Reasons for stepping up. Seven participants elaborated on the reasons for stepping to leadership positions in general and particularly to the dean position they were holding. Even though, for some of them, moving to this position was not initiated by them, they accepted the invitations due to various factors, and were doing their best to serve in those positions. For instance, Dr. Harnold explained that initially there were other faculty, people on campus, and advisors who nudged her leadership interest. Later in her career, she chose to be part of the group that made things happen and that meant holding an official leadership position.

Dr. Kodheli, on the other hand, considered being a leader in other areas besides administrative roles, such as in the classroom as a faculty member, or as a department chair leading the department. She noticed that there are opportunities to step up and lead in every position.

Dr. Kodheli considered her primary role to empower faculty and communities to better support students and help them be successful. She applied for the dean position for four reasons: (a) the right thing for the students; (b) a good fit for the institution at the time; (c) a good opportunity to bring people from different disciplines together; and (d) a challenge to be accomplished. This was how she explained this happening:

> The reason why I applied for the position was because when the institution restructured our school was created new. I thought it was the right thing to do for the institution. I thought it was the right thing to do for our students. And I thought I could pull these very different departments and faculty together. I think I come out of a discipline that is interdisciplinary. And so, to me it is like I am used to working with different disciplines, and I just thought that that would be a fun challenge to see how I could bring these very different and geographically distant and even culturally different departments together. I thought that would be a challenge, and I really thought that I would like it. So that is why I think I threw myself into this position.

Other participants agreed with Dr. Kodheli, that they stepped into leadership positions because they cared about the students, the faculty, the institution, and education. Dr. Stewart stated that she really cared for students, loved the academic profession and appreciated education. These were the reasons that encouraged her to step into leadership positions where she could have a positive impact on people's life.

Dr. Gerald and Dr. Nelson explained that they jumped into leadership positions because they believed that they might bring solutions to the problems with their diverse perspectives and approaches to issues. Dr. Gerald's intentions were to move the institution forward. She stated, "I have always been interested in having institutions move forward and I like to think about structure and culture, and how to make things better. That's why I was interested". Dr. Nelson believed she had a solution to the issues the college was facing at the time, so she decided to step forward. She explained, "I thought that there were some issues around relationships in the

college I could contribute solving. There were problems about bullying and just long-term issues and problems, and I thought I could do something about that."

Dr. Nelson recalled one of her dissertation's findings was about women leaders taking different routes to leadership, but they all stepped in, because they thought they had a solution to the problems. It seemed like she took the same approach. She stated:

> One of the things that they said and really stuck with me was that they had very different routes to their leadership. And what they talked about is they had never really thought that they would be inspired or that they would aspire to leadership positions, but they found themselves in situations, where it wasn't about the status of the position that they were moving up to, but they were trying to solve a problem. They recognized something that wasn't working and they knew they had a better way of doing it.

Another reason that participants mentioned for stepping up was their desire to be challenged. Dr. Merkel loved challenges and believed that leadership came naturally for her. While she aspired and actively took every leadership opportunity presented to her, she never aspired to be a dean.

Dr. Nelson elaborated on finding an appropriate time to look for new challenges. She explained that some people in academia may keep their interest high through various approaches. Some may start a new research project, a new course, or look for a new role. She noted:

> At one point in time I finally kind of thought, 'I love teaching. I love the work. I love interacting with students, but I had at least another 15 years to work, and I kind of wondered if I wouldn't become bored. Kind of looking for new challenges once you, I wouldn't say mastered, but once you feel really comfortable and like doing really well in

a certain position. I think for people in academia particularly, you start looking for new challenges.

Another factor that participants reported to be critical in their decision to move into a leadership position was their familiarity with the position's expectations and roles. Six participants elaborated about their familiarity with such roles and expectations. They all agreed that being familiar with the expectations was helpful, particularly in their day-to-day job.

Participants shared that the weight of the familiarity with the position's roles, expectations, and responsibilities in their decision to move in the dean positions varied, due to their various levels of familiarity with the position and in conjunction with other factors. Such factors included: (a) self-reported initiative, (b) encouragement from supervisors and/or professors, (c) timing and stages in their personal and professional life, (d) willingness to take risks, (e) the ability to have a significant impact on people and institution's lives, and (f) willingness to challenge themselves. These factors, all in concert with one another, even though at various levels of intensity for different individuals, seemed to have had a relevant impact on shaping the career progression of the participants. These factors are elaborated further in the findings for research question two and three due to their strong connection with barriers and risk factors, as well as protective and compensatory factors.

Perceptions of Academic and Leadership Experiences

Academic and leadership experiences of participants varied regardless of their own gender and/or the dominating gender of their colleges or departments. Their experiences in administrative roles also varied, particularly depending on the stage of their administrative

career. Two subthemes emerged from the data analysis: (a) One Gender-Dominated Departments, and (b) Faculty Perceptions About Administrators.

One gender-dominated departments. Participants' experiences varied even though they had been in the same gender dominated department or college. For instance, although in a men-dominated department, Dr. Merkel did not experience many barriers and challenges throughout her academic career. Unlike Dr. Merkel, Dr. Samuel reported that, despite the fact that her experience was in a women-dominated department, she had experienced plenty of barriers and challenges. Six of the participants talked about the department and/or college composition, and its impact on their lives as academics and their career progressions.

Dr. Merkel started as the only woman in her department at the time. She also came from a predominately men field. However, she never felt discriminated or as a token woman. She reported having the same experience in her department regardless of the fact that she was the only woman and initially hired in a one-year non-tenure track position. Dr. Merkel explained:

> At that time, I was in a department with all men, and I was the only woman. A really small department. There were only seven of us, and I have a natural tendency to emerge as someone willing to take on leadership roles, but I also had the reputation. It's just my natural tendency to…give me a task and I will get it done. […] So I really do not think that the men in my department thought: 'ehe, let's take advantage of Merkel. Let's let the woman do all these tutsy stuff, and let her take just all these tasks that we just don't want to be bothered with.

Dr. Merkel also elaborated on the support and encouragement of her men colleagues to pursue leadership opportunities. Although, she emphasized the excellence in her work as a reason for such support. She stated:

> But I want to emphasize that I really don't think that the men in my department did that to me because they thought, 'Well, let's just send her to the front line and we can sacrifice her if things don't go well. Let the woman be the department chair, because department chairs have to do all this stuff, that we don't want to do. So, let's just let her do it.' No, they really thought I was the best person for the job. They really did think I was the right person to be a department chair.

Dr. Bardhi elaborated on the mixture of gender numbers in some of the science departments. She confirmed that women are still a majority in Biology and Chemistry majors, but not in the other STEM fields. However, she admitted that being a minority was the norm, and she never questioned it. Albeit, she hoped that decisions were made based on merit rather than gender. In addition, she did not believe that women in the STEM departments were antagonized for being a minority. She explained:

> As far as progression throughout my career, I personally don't feel that any decisions based on my gender have affected it. I guess in the sciences, I always used to be in the minority, because there were more men in the sciences. But that was just the norm to me. And so I don't feel that I was ever impeded, or decisions were made for or against me based on my gender. Frankly I hope that they weren't. I wanted to stay on my own accomplishments, not because of something else.

On the other hand, Dr. Samuel served as the dean of a predominately women discipline. She elaborated on the challenges in leading the library while there had been only two men faculty members, but the dean and the department chair had always been a man. She perceived a lot of resistance to her approach and changes she wanted to implement. Her leadership approach was different from previous men deans' approaches that the faculty and staff were used to in their administrative practice. She explained:

> One thing that was brought to my attention by someone already that the two deans before me were both men. When I came on board, as a woman, and you know, I make decisions, and I will listen and take things into consideration. I will shoot down a recommendation if I don't agree with it. And that's something that has not been well received. So I don't know if that is something because I am a women and past deans were men, or whether it's just that they don't like their leader's making that decision, unless every single person agrees with it. It's very hard to say.

Dr. Stewart started as a faculty member and progressed through the ranks to the dean's position. She noted that even though vocationally-oriented schools are mostly men dominated, she did not experience road blocks from men colleagues. Instead, she admitted having faced more disapproval and impediments in her career progression from women rather than men.

Participants shared mixed experiences regardless of the gender dominating the department or college. The dominating gender did not seem to affect the experiences of participants as much as when their own (participant's) gender was different from the norm gender in various positions. However, being the first women dean, either in a women, or men dominated field, spurred contradictions.

Faculty perceptions about administrators. Some participants talked about the perceptions that faculty had about them when they switched from faculty members into administrative positions. Such perceptions were not considered to be influenced by gender as much as their general perceptions about administrators. However, participants reported that such perceptions had a significant impact on shaping their experiences as administrators, particularly in their early stages in administrative positions.

Four participants elaborated on the perceptions that faculty had about administrators in general, not only women administrators. They explained that such perceptions made them think about their new role, particularly at the initial stage in their administrative career. Three of them, who had been at the same institution during all their academic career, reported an easier transition to the administrative role, believing that they had the support of their faculty due to the relations already established between them. In such cases, faculty members trusted that the new deans would keep their best interest in mind. Dr. Merkel, who talked about strong trust relations between her faculty and herself, elaborated on her thoughts and experience when she started in the dean position. She explained that the comments she heard were influenced by the general judgments and stereotypes in place about administrators, not gender. She stated:

> When you leave faculty and go into dean positions or administrators, and all the faculty would tell you … They do this; You get teased for crossing over to the dark side. You are kind of seen as a traitor or someone that is selling out, because you crossed over to the dark side. Our culture of the dark side is like evil. It implies bad. It implies someone who is going to hurt you. And I just said; You just need to stop saying that to me, because I am respectfully asking all you to stop that. And they did.

Dr. Merkel, however, had been a colleague faculty member for more than 20 years before she moved to the dean's position. She had built strong trust among her colleagues.

Dr. Bardhi also reflected on how the relationships with faculty changed after being assigned in an administrative role. She explained that being moved out of the department isolated her more than when she was a department chair. The relations with the faculty may have changed externally, such as in committee meetings, where she participated as the dean of the college. However, she hoped that such relations did not change internally, in their essence, since they were based on established trust for a long time.

Dr. Samuel did not share similar thoughts and experiences though. She had worked at various institutions, so she did not have the long-time, established relations with the faculty at her institution. However, she believed that the resistance she was experiencing was not related to her personally. Rather it was a common attitude and mistrust in administration in general. Changes in administration at her institution were common, so faculty and staff were not given the time necessary to establish trust relationships with administrators. In addition, both previous deans had different leadership styles than hers, and from each other as well. So faculty and staff might still be exploring which approach works best. Dr. Samuel explained:

> I think that many of the faculty and staff saw the previous dean as a father figure. And I think they questioned him sometimes. But what I have heard from other people is that, if he got angry at them, he would pound his fists on the table and they would all shut up. That's not my style, right. And the interim dean before me was the exact opposite. He was very mild mannered, kind gentle person. He never made waves with the faculty. So I would say, it's the transformational changes they have gone through and they still don't

know which one they like. Also, I don't think it's just me. I think it's just the resistance to change.

From the participants' experiences, it was obvious that the time they had spent at their institutions before being promoted to the dean position had a significant impact on their experiences and perceptions of such experiences. Trust relationships between faculty and the dean seemed to have facilitated the transition of the participants to administration. At one institution, continuous changes in administrators allowed no time for trust relationships among faculty and the dean. She reported to have experienced more adversity than all the other participants. However, she could not tell whether opposition sprang because of her gender, or because of an overall resistance to changes in administration.

Future Leadership Aspirations

The next theme related to participants' future leadership aspirations. Regardless of the lack of overt barriers they all reported, only two of them were optimistic about and willing to move to a senior position. The other six participants shared various thoughts about their future in administration in higher education and/or out of the higher education realm.

While they knew that they could not be in a dean position through all their academic careers, some of them did not see senior positions as an attractive alternative. Senior positions did not appeal to these participants for various reasons, such as lack of internal drive, isolation because of such positions, and unsatisfactory experience within the institution. Two participants, for example, explained that senior leadership positions require an internal drive, and they perceived themselves as lacking that. Dr. Bardhi also emphasized that she would not prefer the

isolation of a senior position, losing contact with the students and faculty and missing an opportunity to have an impact on their lives. She stated:

> At this point in my career, I would decline. After working directly with our provost, that is a job that I would not want to have. I think the provost is even more isolated than a dean. I still enjoy almost daily contacts with one or more of my faculty. Don't get to see students too much, but I guess I really like this position where I can still make more of an impact in the college. Whereas, moving up to a provost level, I am just not interested at this point.

Dr. Samuel, on the other hand, had tried multiple times to move out of her field into senior positions, but would not consider applying for such a position at her own institution. She explained that, frequent changes in leadership, imbalanced power between faculty and staff, micro-managing from the upper administration, a climate of resistance to changes, and extended bureaucracy have made her feel like nothing could be reached at her institution. When asked whether she would consider applying for a senior position in the future, she responded:

> At my present institution? No! At a different institution, absolutely yes!
>
> I would say that, by far, this institution has been the most challenging of all the institutions that I have been at. And I don't think I am alone in saying that. Hmm, because I had been at other institutions in the Beta State System, and I have experienced both public education and private education, but the politics and the culture at this particular institution are definitely the most challenging.

Dr. Stewart would also consider leaving higher education due to its highly bureaucratic nature, which is discouraging for business people and investors. She also agreed that it is hard to get things done in such an environment.

On the other hand, Dr. Nelson would be happy to serve in senior positions, because she believed that she could make a contribution to higher education, to the institution, and to students. Dr. Merkel, who was optimistic and confident by nature, would consider rejoining academia if need be, after her retirement. She explained:

> So right now I would say, I don't know. I don't know. But something will come along and is just going to be the right thing. And I will have the opportunity to go: Yes, I can do that. I have got the time and I have the opportunity. So I am not even worried about things. Something is going to come along.

Dr. Nelson shared similar aspirations with Dr. Merkel. They were the only two participants who showed they had the internal drive required for senior positions and did not experience overwhelming backlash as leaders. They both emphasized the supportive institutional environment to women leaders and women's advancement. They were also specific in defining the leadership skills that faculty and staff appreciated in them, which had minimized potential resistance. Those leadership skills included: (a) good listening skills, (b) clarity and transparency in decision making and communication, (c) building and promoting strong trust relationships, and (d) staying strong behind one's decisions through transparency in decision making.

In conclusion, participants' experiences as college administrators, their leadership skills, and their internal drive guided their future leadership aspirations.

Summary

This section found that women leaders' motivators towards leadership varied at different points in their career trajectory. Their experiences prior to joining academia had a similar impact on their guide to leadership while in academia. Women experiences in leadership positions varied due to different period of time spent at their institutions, level of support and encouragement from supervisors and the overall college environment, familiarity with the positions they intended to serve at, and level of resistance.

This section concluded that the future leadership aspirations of the participants were influenced by various internal and external factors. Regardless of positive experiences, five of the participants were not interested in moving to senior positions. They blamed the lack of internal drive for such positions and isolation as the main culprits of their unwillingness to apply for higher positions. On the other hand, negative experiences and resistance to change seemed to be discouraging to future leadership aspirations regardless of participants having the internal drive for such positions.

In conclusion, internal and external factors simultaneously influenced women's aspirations for leadership positions. Next section elaborates on the barriers and risk factors that participants reported to have experienced in their academic and leadership career.

Barriers and Risk Factors

Research question two stated: What barriers and/or risk factors have women leaders encountered while advancing in their career? Participants elaborated on their career advancement experiences and recalled factors negatively impacting their experiences. Even though initially the majority of participants denied having experienced any overt barriers, the

data analysis of their experiences revealed three themes related to factors that might have inhibited their advancement, or that may negatively impact their advancement to senior leadership positions.

Barriers

During the data analysis, I found it more meaningful to separate the barriers participants might have experienced through their career from the factors adversely impacting their experiences while holding the dean position. Guided by previous research about factors inhibiting women's career advancement, I classified the first set of factors in the "Barriers" category, and second group in the "Risk Factors" category. Comparable to existing research, I grouped the emerging themes about barriers into three main categories: (a) Barriers at Individual Level, (b) Barriers at Institutional Level, and (c) Barriers at Societal Level. Two common themes emerged about risk factors, the impact of which was noticed particularly in the high burnout rates among deans. Table 2 presents the categories about barriers.

Table 2

Barriers

Emerging Themes
• Barriers at Individual Level • Barriers at Institutional Level • Barriers at Societal Level

Barriers at individual level. Barriers at individual/personal level, in this study, refer to those barriers which are conditioned by the individual, not the institution or the society (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007), although the society and internalized gender stereotypes may

indirectly affect barriers at the individual level. Three themes related to barriers at the individual level: (a) Hesitance/ Lack of Desire, (b) Family Responsibilities, and (c) Lack of Leadership Skills.

All participants claimed that they were not intentional in their advancement. They all loved teaching, being among students, and having an impact on students' lives. That was a reason they provided for not being intentional and actively seeking a higher position. Five of the participants provided more details about initially hesitating to apply for leadership positions.

Dr. Harnold elaborated on the role of her professors in choosing the graduate program in Curriculum and Instruction and adding an administrative license to it. She emphasized that she never envisioned herself as a leader.

> So I went and picked my master's. I was adamant I was going to do curriculum and instruction, teacher at heart and nudged a little bit by another professor who said: "why don't you do the principal administration route"? And I said, "Are you kidding? Who wants to be a principal? (laughing). But I pursued it a little bit, and he said "You will have two options: you can do curriculum and instruction but if you do this principal licensure, maybe there will be some other opportunities for you." I never envisioned myself as a leader.

Dr. Harnold did not consider an administrative position as unattainable or hard to pursue. She explained that, as she was growing up, she had never been exposed to situations that would have asked her to step up in any kind of traditional leadership roles. So she was not aware of her skills, and had not given leadership serious consideration. She also noted that she would not like to be in the limelight because of her introverted character. However, after the principal

internship, her viewpoints about principalship, leaders, and potentially effective school cultures changed and nudged her to pursue another graduate program in instructional leadership.

Dr. Bardhi, on the other hand, had no interest in switching to administration even though previous deans had encouraged her to consider administration. She emphasized her love for teaching and interacting with students as the main reason at the time for not considering an administration route. She explained:

> I think I liked the teaching side of it so much that I really didn't want to give that up. And I did, looking back, I feel like there were some previous deans that had encouraged me to consider administration, and I hadn't wanted to, because I had really enjoyed the teaching and interacting with the students. So I think, it was more my lack of desire to move into administration, not feeling that I wasn't ready.

Dr. Kodheli was also not intentional in her administrative progression. However, her reason for being reluctant was different than the examples mentioned above. She believed that opportunities to lead were abundant in the classroom while working with students, and there was no need for an official title to be considered a leader. She was happy to work behind the scenes. Even though she did not hesitate to accept the leadership positions encouraged externally to her, she noted that she would be hesitant to move to a senior position. She was cognizant that she could not be in a dean position forever, and would not want to, but she would not consider a senior position, at least not at the time of our interview. She considered such a move to be a big loop. She stated:

> I didn't ever aspire, even when I was a kid, I never thought I was going to be a dean when I grow up. You know, I am pretty much messing up your study here, but I like being with

> students. I taught students when I was a clinician, I taught students when I was a faculty member. That's why I came into higher education. I mean get where you can make a difference in someone's life. …So the core, that's kind of what I am all about. I would never formally put that in terms of I aspire to be a leader. I would never say that. It's not how I perceive what I do. It's what externally comes to me.

Dr. Stewart and Dr. Nelson concurred that they were not intentional in their career advancement. All participants' intentions were to become faculty and teach at a university. They pursued the graduate education required to teach in academia, but did not intend to hold leadership positions. Instead leadership encouragement came externally to them. For instance, Dr. Stewart explained that her first leadership position was not planned or intentional at all. The provost at her institution noticed her leadership skills and capacities, and nudged her to apply for an assistant vice president position. She also considered it to be too early in her career, and she was focused on her teaching.

Dr. Bardhi and Dr. Harnold commented on another reason that refrained women from applying for various positions, not necessarily leadership positions. They stated that women look for excellence and perfection in everything they do. Unlike men, who apply first and will prove that they are able to complete the requirements on the way, women try to complete all the requirements perfectly before they consider applying for any positions. Dr. Harnold stated that women have the tendency to prove their excellence before even applying, which may have a negative impact on their progression. Although proving their excellence and performance stems come from internalized beliefs present at the societal level, women exhibit forms of them (proving excellence and perfect performance) at an individual level.

Lack of leadership exposure and/or skills. Another theme that emerged from the data regarding factors negatively impacting women's career progression was lack of exposure to leadership experiences. Lack of leadership exposure and/or skills was also related to participants' hesitance in seeking out leadership positions for two main reasons: (a) lack of exposure to leadership opportunities resulted in lack of self-awareness about their leadership potential, as Dr. Harnold previously explained; and (b) lack of leadership skills either discouraged them from applying for such positions, or negatively affected their self-confidence about becoming a successful leader in higher level positions.

Four of the participants explained that even though they had been on campus for a long time, and had good knowledge of campus structures, processes and procedures, they still felt unprepared to deal with certain situations. Lack of exposure to situations or information related specifically to higher positions, marginalized them from using their full potential in those leadership positions. For instance, Dr. Nelson noted that every new position brings a learning curve with it. However, she felt unprepared particularly in the case of the interim provost position due to the lack of exposure to situations and information from that position's perspective. She recalled:

> Moving into the role of the dean was quite a learning curve, you know, straight up. And then, frankly, when I went into the office of the interim provost, that was a huge learning curve. Even though I had been here at the university at that point of time for fourteen years and I knew a lot of people, and a lot about the university, I still wasn't prepared. I felt like in many of the meetings, I was kind of the dumbest person seating in there. If you were the most ignorant of the most things that were going on, just simply because I

> kind of have not been exposed to the issues and the info at that particular perspective at the university. So that one was probably the biggest stretch moving into that role.

Dr. Bardhi also agreed that the lack of exposure to situations and decisions of a different nature influenced her sense of unpreparedness for such positions. She also emphasized that in discussions with her colleagues, they shared the same feelings of unpreparedness, particularly due to non-exposure to such leadership experiences. She noted:

> Even after being a chair, I don't feel like I was prepared for…. I guess the supervisory role. As a chair in the Beta State System, we aren't supervisors, we are faculty members with our colleagues. And so as department chairs, we are more of a spokesperson than a supervisor. So those of us who come through this system, we don't have that supervisory role experience. That was one of the skills that I personally felt was lacking, just that leadership supervision, and making the critical decisions that we have to make. And that's a shared feeling. I've talked to my colleagues and they say, 'yeah there are always days when you feel inadequate or unprepared, but I think that's just the nature of the job.

Dr. Bardhi explained that the lack of exposure to such decision making and leadership experiences might have been related to gender, but also the dean position is responsible to address a variety of situations and issues such as student grievances, faculty issues, budget decisions and so on. She recalled:

> If I had to put that into a category, I think just overall leadership experience. It would be lack of leadership experience. It would be a woman category, because we were presented with decisions that we haven't had to make before. Hmm-you know there are all kinds of avenues. There are student grievances, faculty issues, things like that. That is always new

> and different. So something that is new. Decisions, budget decisions would be another one.

Dr. Harnold and Dr. Gerald also elaborated on the significance that exposure to such experiences has on hiring or advancing candidates to leadership positions. Colleges are looking for people who have the experience and know what they are doing when situations arise. Dr. Gerald explained that she had the basic skills from observing the previous dean, and she appreciated the interim position to further expose her to such experiences and develop relevant skills. She noted:

> I think that I had some basic training and understanding. I don't think that in any position like this you are prepared right away. That is one of the reasons, that when you are looking for advancement, they will search for a number of years of experience and rank, because it takes a long time to see all of the different things that happen in the role that you are sitting in.

However, Dr. Harnold noted that in her experience, there were few leadership opportunities and exposures available to new teachers. Unless they had proven themselves, that they could handle the responsibilities of such leadership positions, promotion to such positions was not easy.

Family responsibilities. Family responsibilities were other discouraging factors which showed their impact more at the individual level. Four of the participants discussed the effect of family responsibilities at various relevant moments in their academic career. Participants elaborated about family responsibilities during the time they were choosing their graduate programs, while pursuing their doctoral degrees, and during their time as administrators. Two of

the participants shared the impact that family and child rearing responsibilities had during their graduate education.

For instance, juggling family and child rearing responsibilities put Dr. Gerald in difficulties. She was a first-generation college student and a non-traditional student. She did not pursue college right away after finishing high school. Instead she pursued her undergraduate degree while having to take care of her children. She explained that commuting back and forth to take classes was time consuming and put a lot of pressure on her, particularly when she experienced a lack of available child care options. Dr. Gerald explained that it affected mostly women who had other obligations, especially in those cases when family responsibilities were not equally shared among partners. She noted:

> I started my college education later than many people do, because I had family first and I was from the working class. And from my experience I think the combination of trying to be a person that had a family and trying to get a degree was quite challenging. Because there weren't support systems, and it wasn't easy to find child care. I had to make choices of the kind of degree in part based on when I could go to classes and when I could drive from the small community I lived in to university. I commuted most of the time to grad school. I think that those barriers are real and trying to understand how those opportunities work, especially for women that already have other obligations in their life, because those obligations are not equally shared. It put a significant burden on me to take care of the family, being a mother, and a supportive wife. These are all gender specific roles.

While all participants agreed that because of the ways academia is structured, it does not encourage a healthy balance between a personal and professional life, a few admitted that family responsibilities interfered with their career progression. They all reported having adult and/or self-providing children, except one of the participants who did not have children. However, they explained that family responsibilities did not constitute only taking care of their own children. Their aging parents also needed them. They would have liked to have more time to spend with their children and grandchildren, or even their partners. They explained that they needed to plan accordingly and prioritize their activities so they could spend time with their family members.

Dr. Nelson and Dr. Gerald agreed that as administrators they had a large amount of work, which did not allow for time to fully address family responsibilities. Even though they explained that the practices in their campuses had changed with the new administration, which advocated more family friendly practices, they were not sure whether there were written policies in place in that regard. Sometimes, participants' perceptions about the existence of such policies were contradictory even when they came from the same institution. Some participants explained that they sought out suggestions from mentors about how to deal with balancing personal and professional life, addressing family responsibilities, and consequently reducing the feeling of burnout.

To conclude, barriers at the individual level, such as lack of initiative, lack of self-awareness about one's potential, lack of self-confidence, and hesitance to apply for leadership positions might have roots at the personal level, but they may also have been partially the results of internalized societal beliefs and gender roles.

Barriers at the institutional level. Barriers at institutional level were related to two main trends: (a) Practices and Structures, and (b) Lack of Mentoring/Networking Opportunities. While practices and structures were directly connected to the individual institution, lack of mentoring/networking opportunities might also be a barrier at the individual level, in the cases when individuals may not take advantage of those opportunities. For the purpose of this study, I defined a shortness or lack of those opportunities as a barrier at institutional level, if institutions did not make formal provision for those opportunities.

Practices and system structures. Participants' perceptions about practices and system structures varied based on the situations they had faced. They varied from the application and hiring practices to promotion and/or to decision making. These practices and structures were perceived either as explicitly, or implicitly negatively impacting women academics advancement. Since the majority of the participants followed a traditional pathway to the dean position, i.e., they started at the faculty level and moved up through the ranks to the dean position, the barriers throughout these transitions are included in this section.

Dr. Samuel elaborated about the application and hiring practices. She expressed her frustration about the application practices, particularly due to the lack of response or notification on the stage of the application in the hiring process. She reported being pigeonholed in one area, and all the applications she had submitted to move out of the area had been unsuccessful. While trying to understand the causes for all the unsuccessful attempts, Dr. Samuel recalled that she had presented her educational and experience credentials in such a way that they met the job requirements. Her curriculum vitae had been adapted every time to apply directly to the position. She strongly believed that her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and the leadership

institute she attended should have opened more opportunities for her to move out of her field. She was frustrated with the lack of response in all the institutions within the Beta System to which she had applied.

Three participants elaborated about the promotion and tenure procedures, and their impact on other women faculty, or participants' careers. Dr. Bardhi and Dr. Samuel explained that the tenure process for faculty is contractual and cannot be deviated from unless for major health issues. Participants explained that they noticed hesitation from other women faculty and/or themselves to take further responsibilities, or apply for leadership positions due to the impact such factors might have had in their tenure process. Dr. Harnold recalled the advice of one of her close mentors to reduce the amount of service and committee meetings she would sign up for, since it might become overwhelming and delay her tenure. Dr. Nelson also recollected other women who would have been a good fit for the department chair position but hesitated because of the impact it might have had on their career among other factors. In addition, she stated that she decided not to serve a second term as a department chair as that would have taken all her time, and would impede her moving to a full professor. She stated:

> So, I did chair for three years and I only did it for three years, because I was at the associate professor rank. And I knew, that if I wanted to be a full professor I could not spend six or nine years being a chair, because it just eats up all your time, you know. I still worked on research projects during that period of time, on women leaders more on the correction's professions, and did interviews with them.

Dr. Stewart touched another aspect of university structures that had discouraged her from pursuing leadership opportunities in academia, and maybe consider other positions in the

industry field. She noticed that the slow pace of decision making, the bureaucracy, and too many union contracts had discouraged not only her, but also donors and members of industry in the community from investing in projects with the university. She noticed:

> I am hearing the same things over and over in higher education, and I am looking for different models and even networks. I am kind of interested in especially having colleagues and networks outside, in addition to higher education, something to balance you know. And probably, it's because I am a vocationally-oriented school dean.

Dr. Stewart also explained that maybe she noticed the bureaucracy and slow pace in decision making more than other people in academia due to the nature of her field and her personality as a results-oriented person. However, she emphasized that, with such slow processes and procedures, people feel that they much better do nothing. She stated:

> Part of it is shared governance, but we also have four different union contracts. Everything is a very long process. And really, in some ways, we have a bureaucracy and so we can't move very fast with the policies and procedures. And I will tell you one of the things that concerns me the most about it, is that when I hire new people and especially if they come from industry, or from other areas, the bureaucracy is very demoralizing for them, because they want to get something done. And there are a lot of barriers from business services to union contracts.

Dr. Samuel also expressed her frustration about bureaucracy and slow processes due to too many union contracts. They had a demoralizing effect on her in addition to dysfunctional departments and personnel issues. Particularly, these two participants listed bureaucracy and slow processes as an indirect barrier impeding them from reaching their goals and feeling

effective. Other participants did not share any frustration about bureaucracy and slow processes at their institutions. Since women leaders were the focus of this study, a comparison between the impact of the above two mentioned factors on women and men's career progression was not feasible in this study.

Lack of mentors/networking opportunities. The network of mentors and supporters played a significant role in the experiences of all participants. The experiences of participants in finding and establishing mentoring relationships varied depending on the institutional practices in place and the participant's individual ability to find mentors.

Based on Resilience Theory, when a supporting factor is present, it may be classified either as protective or compensatory. And the lack of that factor is considered a risk factor. However, Resilience Theory does not distinguish between various degrees of presence and intensity of that factor. In addition, the same factor may be a risk factor for some of the participants, but a compensatory factor for some others depending on the degree and intensity of the factor.

Some of the participants reported having established good relationships with mentors, who were more informal than formal mentors. While at a couple institutions, events or workshops were organized to facilitate women to find mentors and establish such relationships; in other institutions, those opportunities were missing. As a result, the informal mentorships were more common. Depending on their abilities to establish good relationships with their faculty colleagues and supervisors, participants found mentors or became mentors for other faculty members. However, when such relationships of good trust were missing, finding mentors and supporters was challenging. Some participants explained that they were not looking for the

institutions to assign them formal mentors. They needed training on potential approaches to seek out mentors and opportunities that would encourage those mentoring relationships to take place. Dr. Nelson recalled that she received neither training, nor encouragement to find mentors. She stated:

> I have really had more supporters than those barriers that we were talking about. I guess, part of it is, as you actually know, it is part of the relationships. I think other people know it, too. I don't know that we are currently encouraged or taught to look for those mentors. But I think because I have always wanted to have those kinds of relationships, both ways you know mentoring other people and being supportive of other people, and having other people and establishing that relationship with them, in some kind of subconscious way maybe. I always look for those kind of relationships.

Most of the participants shared that their mentors were their main supporters and sometimes their champions who made their career advancement smoother. That was the case of the participants who reported having mentors and supporters at their own institutions. Other participants who found informal mentors outside their institutions, including mentors from the HERS Leadership Institute, could not expect those mentors to be their formal supporters and champions in their career advancement.

For instance, the experience of Dr. Samuel in finding mentors was not similar to other participants, and her network of mentors, supporters and champions was not broad enough to facilitate her moving either up or out of her field, where she felt pigeonholed. She considered her dean colleagues to be her informal mentors, and her husband her greatest supporter. She shared her frustration about the lack of opportunities to broaden her network beyond her own institution.

She believed that her promotion to the provost position she applied for would have "had a greater chance to be successful if she had had a broader network of supporters and champions.

Dr. Gerald also agreed that the inability to find mentors was a factor that had negatively impacted her advancement. She explained that she had been looking for mentors of both genders, but they were hard to find. She explained that, when moving into the dean position, she did not have any formal guidance or mentorship about potential leadership training she should have attended, or skills she might have needed to be effective. She shared that she learned everything from observing her previous dean during the time she served as the department chair. She noted, "There was not a direct mentorship into the dean's role, nor was there a lot of educational aspects that would …. It's not like somebody said I think you should go to this leadership session, so that you can prepare yourself to be a dean. That was not part of my experience."

Unlike Dr. Samuel, all the other participants had always been at one institution, at least since the time they became tenured. Being at one institution and having the time to establish strong trust relationships with faculty members, administrators, and supervisors strengthened their network of supporters and champions.

To summarize, participants shared similar perceptions of the hiring, tenure, and promotion practices at their respective institutions and the impact that those practices had had on their career choices and progress. The slow pace of decision-making and bureaucracy were discouraging for two of the participants. But a comparison with the impact of these two elements on men's career progression was not viable. Some participants shared their frustration about the lack of training on potential approaches to finding mentors and expanding their network of supporters and champions. These participants noticed not only a lack or shortage of mentors and

supporters at their institutions, but also a lack of the skills they needed to establish mentoring relationships. They assumed that institutions would offer that training, but they subsequently saw that that was not the case. In conclusion, these institutional barriers, although not overt barriers specifically targeting women, were real barriers that negatively affected participants' experiences.

Barriers at societal level. I classified these barriers at the societal level rather than at institutional level because these barriers did not first originate at the institutional level. In addition, participants did not report any institutional practices and policies that might have promoted these barriers. Rather these barriers originate beyond the institutions, in the shared and accepted approaches to leadership and communication found in the broader society. Two patterns emerged under this category: (a) Different Gender Approaches, and (b) Barriers due to Gender.

Different gender approaches. Women take different approaches compared to men in various aspects of everyday work, including leadership and communication. Five participants elaborated on how their leadership style and the approaches they took to various situations were perceived. Their experiences and the support they received from faculty colleagues varied. Two of the participants explained that in their leadership career, their leadership approach was challenged either by the staff, or by the previous administrator who was the direct reporting supervisor to the participant. In the case of staff challenging the dean's leadership style, Dr. Samuel explained that her leadership approach clashed with the "normal" approach for that school. She explained that she was not sure whether the opposition was a result of reaction to her gender, or her leadership style that was not well received. She doubted it was due to her gender,

since her field was predominately women, with only two men faculty members. Even though she doubted the clash was due to her gender, she emphasized that she was the first women dean in the library, and a "men and authoritative" leadership approach had been the norm. She noted:

> When I came on board, as a women and you know, I make decisions. I will listen and take things into consideration, but I am not like this wall flower, if something that I don't think should happen, or I will shoot down a recommendation if I don't agree with it. And that's something that has not been well received. And so I don't know if that is something because I am a women and past deans were men, or whether it's just they don't like their leader's making that decision unless every single person agrees with it.

Dr. Samuel joined Prism University in the dean's position in the last three years. Faculty had no previous experience with her, and she did not know the approaches staff were used to. She described herself as a servant leader, which had been effective for her in other institutions. Dr. Samuel shared that her approach was not perceived as a good fit for the college. She recalled:

> I was challenged on a daily basis, all the time. I think that when I first started here, that my approach wasn't a good fit. Like I was shocked that somebody would be upset, because I made a decision about something. I mean, I just wasn't expecting it and it's not like this quiet disagreement. It's like rallying against me over, email to all the faculty and staff, or coming into my office. And you know, basically yelling at me for making a decision. I had never experienced that at any other institution.

Dr. Harnold also experienced being challenged for her decisions when she started at a new institution. Her decisions were not challenged as much by the staff, but rather by the previous administrator who was her direct supervisor at the time. He always wondered what she

was doing with his school. Dr. Harnold recalled that they disagreed on many issues and the approaches to solve the issues. She claimed that it was a pretty rough time to be in that position.

The above mentioned elements may also be considered part of the institutional culture. However, the institutional culture has been the result of a normalized and standardized leadership approach even beyond the higher education institutions. Consequently, people expect all leaders to act in alignment with a previously established norm approach.

Two participants elaborated about the impact of different communication styles and approaches women and men use. Dr. Nelson noted that at different meetings, depending on the gender dominating the meetings, the communication style was different. She noticed certain characteristics of men's communication to which she needed to adapt, if she wanted to be effective in those meetings. She recalled:

> The one place where I have noticed that gender has impacted me has more to do with interactional style, and it was really when I was in that role of associate provost. Because sometimes I would be in meetings that were mostly men dominated. At least my perception was that men and women, as I see gender, their communication styles are very different. I found that fairly quickly men interrupt each other, and they tend to hold on, stay on the floor longer; they command that and if I was going to be effective and communicating the kinds of things that I needed to, then I was going to have to work against my natural inclination to be polite and not interrupt and not talk over people. … I think that's just the way they communicate. I don't think they gave much thought or reflection to it. But I just started to notice, that if I was going to have to be effective, I was going to communicate differently.

Dr. Nelson recalled that she noticed such different communication styles only at the associate or assistant provosts' meetings, which were men dominated, not at the deans' level, which were more balanced gender-wise, or women dominated. She also shared that she felt excluded at the beginning of those meetings that were men dominated, since men would only start a conversation easily about sports, and sports did not attract her interests.

Dr. Kodheli, on the other hand, who had been the only women dean at Square University for a long time, focused on how the same thing has a different message when people of two different genders make the statement. The perceived message when a woman stated something was different from the message of a man expressing the same opinion or idea.

In addition, the expectations for women seemed to be different in some cases, particularly at the faculty level. Two participants explained that such expectations were overwhelming, and they had a slowing effect on their progression in the faculty ranks. Since all participants but one came from the faculty ranks to the dean position, I (the researcher) thought these barriers needed to be given fair consideration.

For instance, Dr. Nelson explained that the expectations, or the approaches women faculty and deans were supposed to take are sometimes gender bound. She recalled that the expectations for women faculty were to be nurturing, supportive, and caring not only for students, but for faculty as well. They ended up getting involved in excessive emotional labor, managing the emotions of students and colleagues, as well as their own. Dr. Nelson recalled that such processes exhaust peoples' energies. Another detail she emphasized was the inability of women to say "no." As a result, their workload increased, particularly with service and

committee meetings, which did not count towards tenure and could negatively impact scholarship. She explained:

> I think that's related to gender. I think men are much better at saying 'No' and creating boundaries. I had colleagues who were much better at saying 'No,' I am not coming to the meeting on Thursday because that's my scholarship time. That's when I am working on my research,' and women would be like 'yeah, I need to be working on this, but this meeting is important.' And, it is important to say no-definitely it is important to say no.

To sum up, participants reported being challenged when their leadership and communication approaches clashed with the more traditional approaches men used and the staff members were used to. They were also challenged by gender bound expectations, particularly during the time they were faculty members, but not only then. Finally, depending on the gender dominating the meetings, adapting a different communication style was necessary for participants to be effective.

***Barriers due to gender*.** Participants' responses about the influence of gender in their career advancement were contradictory. Initially seven of the participants reported an absence of barriers related to gender, because they were considering barriers only as overt road blocks in their career.

On the other hand, Resilience theory does not distinguish between inhibiting and/or blocking factors and risk factors. It places them all in the same category called risk factors. But it does not deny their existence. In addition, according to the same theory, people who develop resilience have successfully overcome the barriers and risk factors present in their journey (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994).

Only one of the participants recognized from the very beginning that higher education and the society are gendered. Further into the interview, however, three participants elaborated on certain aspects of their career in which gender may have been a discouraging factor in their advancement. Dr. Gerald explained that women's experiences in academia and in leadership positions are different. She emphasized the impact of gender roles and responsibilities as a relevant factor in the different ways men and women experience academia. She noted that women feel more pressures than men to be the caretaker for children, parents, and grandchildren, and to be caring and nurturing even when they may not have someone in their immediate family or unit that needs care. Dr. Gerald and Dr. Nelson believed that such expectations were transferred to university settings, shaping the expectations for women related to students and service obligations. Dr. Gerald also recalled:

> I think the responsibilities for women in the society as a whole, it's that they are still going to be the primary care giver for children, if there is going to be children in the household. I think that the barriers for women have to do with that most of those expectations about caring for others come into play related to students and related to changing the service obligations of the university. And I don't think that men feel as many pressures in those ways yet as women do.

Dr. Gerald admitted that higher education due to its nature is challenging for men, too. However, due to the gender assigned responsibilities and expectations, she explained that women feel more pressures than men. She also explained that barriers are not direct ones, blocking one's way to further advancement. Instead, the nature of higher education does not mesh well with

having other responsibilities and obligations, which fall on women's plates due to established gender roles and unequal distribution of those other obligations outside academia. She stated:

> I think that the barriers are not the direct ones, like anybody showing that I couldn't do things. But I think the barriers are simply the ways that come up in higher education, and the level of education as well as professional development. It simply doesn't mesh well with having other obligations in your life.

On the other hand, Dr. Samuel mentioned having to relocate constantly due to the nature of her husband's job. As a result, her network of supporters and champions suffered, since she did not spend enough time at any of the institutions she worked throughout her career. She applied for a senior position at one institution only, in which she believed she had the credibility, but she was not even considered for an interview. Had she been a man, she would not have to relocate so often and her network of supporters would not have suffered. However, the societal expectation was that women usually adjust to their partner's needs.

Dr. Nelson also elaborated on factors she considered before she decided to apply for a senior position at another institution. She explained that the need to be close to aging parents was a factor she took into consideration even though not the main one. She stated, "There are so many factors, but there were also two other factors that were less important, but important enough in making this decision. I have aging parents and I need to get closer to them." She recalled that one of her mentors had advised her early in her career that geography mattered and needed to be taken into consideration when applying for jobs.

Three of the participants talked about either less support and appreciation for them, their skills and education as women leaders, or people actively trying to hinder their advancement. Dr.

Bardhi and Dr. Harnold elaborated about the support they had had or lack thereof from their men colleagues. They both claimed that they found older, men colleagues to be more supportive of men deans rather than women. Dr. Harnold noted:

> I think for some faculty, many of whom are older than me, I think maybe it's an age thing, or maybe it's gender. I think there are a few that might question some of my skills, and it's never been just in my face. But I think it's just a few that wonder why I am in the position. But I mean, you can just tell while working with people from different backgrounds and nationalities, that there is a difference between men and women.

In addition, Dr. Stewart mentioned two factors that she believed had challenged her and/or negatively impacted her experiences in this position: (a) her experiences with older, men donors who were unsure how to behave with a younger, woman dean, and (b) experiences with women who tried to block her advancement to the dean's position and afterwards in her professional career. Dr. Stewart also shared that women faculty members noticed such an impediment from other women, too. She did not deny the fact that there were some women faculty who were supportive and encouraging to women leaders, but the obstacles came from other women faculty rather than men. She explained:

> I think this barrier is still present. I have seen it in other situations, too. I have seen it between faculty that women faculty don't support other women faculty in leadership roles. And then there are cases where women are supporting each other, but it's interesting I see more the obstacles put up by other women. I have not noticed it as much from men as from women. The couple of really extreme cases have been women.

Dr. Stewart was unsure about the motivation of these women faculty trying to negatively impact her as a professional and could not find an explanation for such attempts. Dr. Bardhi, Dr. Stewart, and Dr. Samuel shared that they did not believe the challenging of their decisions and/or attempts to hinder their advancement were targeting them as particular individuals. They believed it was mostly related to the gender of the administrator (participant's in this case) clashing with the norm.

In conclusion, participants in this study shared their experiences about barriers they had experienced throughout their academic career. They explained that barriers were not in the form of road blocks to halt their advancement. They described them as factors restricting their career progression and negatively impacting their future leadership aspirations.

Risk Factors

All participants shared that there was a high burnout rate among mid-level administrators, particularly deans in the Beta System. They explained that they could not differentiate the burnout rate between men and women deans. They shared that on average, deans felt burnt-out within three years. They elaborated on the factors that might have an adverse effect, and made deans feel overwhelmed and burnt-out, and that might jeopardize their career advancement. Participants related these risk factors to the position itself rather than gender. However, with the assigned gender roles and responsibilities, such factors might affect women more than men. Two themes emerged as risk factors, negatively impacting the careers of mid-level administrators: (a) Position's nature and (b) Lack of administrative support.

Position's nature. The nature of the dean position affected participants' perceptions of their mid-level positions. The extent to which they were familiar with the roles and had the

necessary skills to lead at that level also influenced their experiences and their feelings of burnout.

Participants agreed that being in the middle between the upper administration and faculty may put deans in uneasy situations. Such uneasy situations may have an adverse effect, wear deans out, and result in burnout. In particular, two participants mentioned that being in the middle and having to make and stand strong behind tough decisions was challenging for them. They also explained that developing the skills to negotiate and make tough decisions required time, training, and maturity as a leader. Once developed, these skills improved participants' comfort level with the position and also their resilience to move forward. Dr. Merkel shared:

> We are part of the administration, and so you need to take on that side as well. So we get stuck in the middle. With a lot of what our bosses are telling us, 'well, you got to do this.' It's unfortunate, but you have to tell faculty members, 'no you don't get to do that because we don't have the budget for it right now.' And yet I feel so much empathy with the faculty, because I was faculty for 24 years. So I still think like a faculty member. I would say the experience of a mid-level woman leader in academia, that's the hardest part is dean mid-level, not necessarily because I am a woman. I just think that some of the toughest things I have to pass aren't because I am a woman; it's because I am a dean.

Dr. Merkel also explained that another factor that causes high burnout rates among deans is the immense number of responsibilities assigned to them. She attributed this to the changes and challenges experienced in higher education institutions in the United States. She explained that deans are required to cover many more roles and responsibilities with less staff than before due to lean budgets and shortages in personnel. She stated:

> The responsibilities of being a dean is what cause the burnout. And some people can just carry that heavy weight every day for many many years, and it doesn't get them to after a while, because it's like…: We just put one fire out, and then another fire starts. We just resolved one crisis and here is another one. And it just seems so never-ending. I just think that these are tough times now in our state, as far as higher education is concerned. Budgets are so tight, and everybody is operating on a lean budget and the staff is lean. We don't have enough faculty, and we don't have people doing the things that need to get done.

All participants talked about the tremendous amount of work assigned to administrators. Some of them explained that administrative tasks take the majority of time during their working day. Five out of eight participants elaborated about the impact of their work overload. For instance, Dr. Nelson stated that she did not expect to have so many things assigned to her role as an administrator, which allowed for no time for her scholarship. She shared, "I had no idea about how hard administrators in higher education work these days. I mean, the amount of work is really limitless, and the expectation is that you are almost always working, always responding, always available."

Dr. Nelson, Dr. Stewart, and Dr. Kodheli agreed that a dean might be working 24/7 and there was still work to do. Even though they were at different institutions and schools, they shared the same thoughts about the workload. While some of the participants explained that they had reached an agreement with upper administration and among themselves to respect personal and weekend time, for the dean of the School of Vocational-Programs that option was not viable. Dr. Stewart explained:

> I do work over the weekend, yes. I think there is an expectation that most of us work on the weekend. In fact, I am looking at even doing a donor visit on Saturday next week because it is too hard to schedule. And so, donor visit, alumni visit, you know, I often times will have coffee with a business professional on the weekend. Yeah, even on weekend there is still an expectation that you will be doing work.

Dr. Bardhi compared the time she was a faculty member with her current position. She explained that as a faculty member she was busy during peak times, or when deadlines were approaching. There were other times less intense and breaks during holidays, such as Christmas and winter break, spring break and summer holidays, when she could get herself energized and start fresh afterwards. However, administrators' job seemed intense at all times.

A few participants explained that their schools had initiated some changes about the expectations of working long hours and being always available. Some participants brought examples of direct supervisors' support to respect the time deans need to maintain their personal health and attend to family needs. However, there was no consistency in those practices even within the same institution. Two participants from the same institution, had different perspectives about these practices of respecting deans personal time. They also noted differences in those practices as their supervisors changed. Hence, policies in place would provide consistency and clarity for deans and their supervisors.

Two of the participants shared examples of previous men deans, who were taking two weeks off themselves, and advised the participants to do the same to energize themselves. They explained that one week is not sufficient, and the second week may allow one to clarify one's

thoughts and ideas. Despite such advice, the participants did not report taking more than a week off during the summer. They blamed the great amount of workload for that.

In addition to the excessive number of responsibilities and the workload participants had to handle, the lack of administrative support required participants to develop endurance and resilience in order to minimize the burnout effect. Three participants explained that at their institutions, deans did not have associate or assistant deans, which in turn put all the responsibilities on their shoulders. Even though senior administrators were aware of the overload of responsibilities deans were experiencing, there was a lack of policies and practices to make their work manageable. Dr. Stewart shared that even though she was at an age that allowed for long working hours, she found herself working all the time. She stated:

> The role is so demanding, and, for some reasons, we have a bit of a practice here at the university for deans not to have associate deans or assistant deans. So I have no associate dean, no assistant dean, so I work pretty much all the time. I would work until 11 o'clock many nights and I would wake up at five, and began working the next day. So the amount of work is …and I have a really high capacity to work long hours. For example, because of our union contract, I am the only supervisor of faculty. So my span of control is immense. And you know, it doesn't even compare to some of my colleagues in other colleges, who even have more faculty. Deans of schools like mine are expected to be out fundraising and having business relationships. And I mean, the norm is for deans like me to be off campus 50% of their time. The share workload is incredible.

Finally, Dr. Stewart noted that the amount of work deans had to perform was not only position dependent. She explained that changes in supervisors added to deans' workload, mainly due to the changes in the priorities of their supervisors. She stated:

> Probably something that has changed is the amount of work I have changes a little based on who my supervisor is. I have had three-four different supervisors, provosts since I have been in this position, and so this is one thing that changes. You know some of their priorities change. What their priorities are and how they perceive the role of dean as a part of their team is different. Hmm, we have had changes over the time kind of around budget, and changes around procedures and policies so, yeah it depends. I think it also depends on the style and then also kind of the context or the situation that the supervisor is in at the time.

Another risk factor related to the nature of the dean position was the amount of personnel issues they had to deal with. Both Dr. Nelson and Dr. Bardhi, discussed the impact of disagreements and conflicts between staff members, as well as difficult employees, on a dean's life. Dr. Nelson also elaborated on the impact that such issues have on the well-being and functionality of departments, and on students and faculty success. She explained:

> I probably spend too much time thinking about disagreements among staff members, but those are the real challenges that I experienced in dealing with personnel issues such as people not getting along with each other. They really can complicate things drastically, and sometimes it takes you years to get a department back on track. And sometimes you end up waiting until someone retires, and it is like – "oh my gosh, that's frustrating."

In addition, three participants elaborated on the impact that personnel issues had on faculty members' aspirations to take administrative positions or on participants' future leadership aspirations. They all agreed that they did not expect to have to address the number of personnel issues they were currently addressing. Dr. Nelson explained that one of the reasons other faculty members hesitated to take administrative positions was the number of personnel issues they would have to deal with. She explained, "I had a couple colleagues who just thought they had no desire to be chair. And I think that people do not want to do that, because they just don't want to deal with the personnel issues and things that go along with being chair." Dr. Nelson also explained that initially, when she started in administration, she was concerned about the effect negative relations among faculty members might have on the department itself and students' success. She shared that as a graduate student she struggled to create her research committee with faculty members from a dysfunctional department. Hence, she focused on solving such issues. She shared:

> Because most of the personnel problems that I find myself dealing and grappling with are when, in those relationships between student and faculty or faculty and faculty, people are being disrespectful. And sometimes it's long term negative relationships that you are dealing with. Sometimes somebody didn't act respectfully, and before you know it, you've got people exchanging harsh words. And then it's always amazing to me how one difficult person or difficult relationships in the department can make a whole department struggle.

In addition, Dr. Bardhi noted that isolation is another risk factor that administrators experience at different rates depending on their level. She believed that senior administrators

were more isolated that mid-level administrators, and deans were more isolated than department chairs. Part of such isolation came from the physical space where their offices were located, and part came due to lack of time to meet with faculty, again related to the enormous number of responsibilities on a dean's plate.

In conclusion, participants believed that all these factors related to the nature of the dean position were the culprits for the high burnout rate at the deans' level. However, these factors were not necessarily related to gender, since they applied to men deans, too.

Little administrative support. Even though only a few participants elaborated on this theme, I considered it a relevant factor based on the effect it might have on dean's everyday job. Dr. Samuel explained that her fellow deans and she had noticed that they were experiencing restrictions from upper administration regarding decisions, which the deans thought should be their responsibilities and rights. They felt micromanaged and were not always supported in addressing the challenges they faced. She shared:

> I think there are barriers from levels above the dean. I would say that, and I have had conversations with my fellow deans here about this. It feels like there is a lot of micromanaging of the deans happening at the higher administrative levels like hmm, you know things that deans should be able to decide.

Another thing she noted was the lack of clear and consistent communication between higher administration and deans and faculty. Dr. Samuel shared that she had experienced similar issues at other institutions in the Beta System and at private institutions, too. However, she explained that she had noticed that this element was more prominent in public institutions than in private institutions. Lack of clarity in communication added to the challenges she was already

experiencing. She explained, “I would say too, that higher administration says things to faculty and staff that aren’t what they might tell the deans and then it’s just the whole communication structure. And how much support there is for deans in that has been challenging.”

Dr. Stewart opined regarding the challenges deans in her field face in “educating” their supervisors. She explained that the challenges are greater particularly in the case when their supervisors do not have a business background. In such cases, their supervisors do not understand the priorities of a vocationally-oriented school dean, so achieving the results desired requires more effort on the dean’s side.

Overall, participants in this study reported having experienced risk factors that men deans might have experienced, too. However, as Dr. Gerald explained, “the barriers and risk factors may be similar, but their effects on women may be different due to gender and gender roles.” Participants explained that women are still the primary caregivers in the family regardless of having their own children or not. The time and workload requirements that dean positions put on deans’ shoulders took away time for other responsibilities participants had outside academia. They also did not promote a healthy work-life balance. In addition, the expectation that women need to be more nurturing than men, makes dealing with inter-personal disputes and conflicts more difficult for women. Furthermore, women’s approaches towards such inter-personal conflicts varied based on the extent to which they lived the gendered expectations.

Summary

Data analysis from this study revealed a distinction between barriers participants had experienced through their career advancement in academia and risk factors they were experiencing while serving in the dean position. On the one hand, even though participants

shared that they did not experience overt road blocks in their career, they faced subtle barriers at individual, institutional, and societal level. Barriers at different levels seemed to originate from similar causes such as gender roles, gender stereotypes, and internalized values and beliefs.

Risk factors such as overload, number of personnel disputes and conflicts, time requirements, and lack of administrative support for deans challenged participants of this study. These risk factors may apply to deans of both genders since these factors are more position specific rather than gender.

Protective and Compensatory Factors

Research Question three stated: "What factors have a significant impact on helping women leaders overcome barriers and risk factors?" Findings in this section are presented in two subsections: (a) protective factors and (b) compensatory factors. While protective factors protected participants from the barriers and risk factors, compensatory factors worked regardless of the presence of risk factors and helped participants in overcoming the barriers and risk factors and consequently in building resilience (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994).

Protective Factors

Participants elaborated on the factors the presence of which they perceived to be supportive in their advancement and daily work in the dean position. The three themes that emerged from analyzing the data about protective factors include: (a) Leadership Skills Set, (b) Support Systems, and (c) Gender Equity.

Leadership Skill Set

Participants were at various stages in their leadership skills development, depending on their exposure to various positions and/or circumstances requiring certain skills. They found

those skills relevant in their advancement and in reducing the number of barriers and risk factors they would have experienced otherwise. Participants shared that those skills originated from one or more of the four following factors: (a) Being an Insider, (b) Familiarity with the Position, (c) Approaches to Responsibilities Assigned, and (d) Personal and Family Values.

Being an insider. All participants but one had been at the same institution during all their academic careers. Hence, all reported having good knowledge of their own institutional structure, processes, faculty and administration.

Deep knowledge of institutional structures, system, practices and procedures facilitated participants' advancement and reduced opposition from faculty or other staff members. In addition, some participants had encouragement from other staff members or faculty to apply for various leadership positions. Dr. Merkel explained the relevance of knowledge and expertise about structures and procedures while recalling the moment when she was asked to apply for the dean position. She stated, "They're going to go internally, and will be looking for an interim dean of the College of Arts, and we would like you to apply because you totally understand how it works around here."

She also added that she was recommended for other leadership positions because of her knowledge and expertise, and for being a player. She explained that particularly in the cases when there was no time for a learning curve, institutions were looking internally for experienced people who had great knowledge of institutions, structures, and administrative practices. She noted that in December of 2014, she was invited to serve in the Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs for six months and then return to the dean's role. She explained that because of the long time she had been at her institution, and her involvement in many leadership

positions on campus, she "knew where all the skeletons of the university were, and who put them there; knew the Union Agreement upside down and backwards."

Dr. Nelson also shared that being an insider would put internal candidates at an advantage compared to other candidates, particularly when institutions were searching internally. She also added that internal candidates should be open and willing to honestly answer any question their colleagues and the staff community may have. She also emphasized the importance of being willing to accept hiring decision without hurt feelings. She stated:

> I had sought for advice from some women like the president of HERS, about being an internal candidate and what that meant. And she asked me a number of questions. The only thing I needed to ask myself before applying here was: 'Could my ego handle it if I wasn't selected at my place of employment?' I thought that was a really good question, but I wouldn't let that stop me in any way. I applied and was one of the four finalist. And then I was selected and offered the position.

Participants' rich work and leadership experience also reduced resistance they would have faced otherwise in their advancement. Such experience not only made them stand out among other potential candidates, but also increased support from faculty and staff. All seven participants who stayed at their respective institutions reported that they were recommended for leadership positions even when they did not take the initiative themselves to apply for such positions. The recommendations were based on their supervisors or other administrators' observations of the good work participants had accomplished. That was not the case for Dr. Samuel. Instead, she had to take the initiative to apply for various positions, and her applications were not always well supported or successful. She shared that due to not long enough time she

had spent at various institutions, she believed that her experience was not acknowledged, and she had to prove herself the same way as an external applicant.

Dr. Merkel, Dr. Nelson, Dr. Stewart, and Dr. Gerald elaborated on the impact of exposure to leadership, information at various leadership ranks, and administrative situations. While two of them focused only on the positive impact of this exposure, Dr. Nelson compared her experience in two different situations related to two different leadership rank positions. She explained that moving into a new position was always a learning curve regardless of the previous experiences one may have had. However, there was a realistic and relevant difference in that learning curve depending on the exposure to information, issues, and similar situations. She explained that moving into the dean position was a learning curve despite her previous leadership experience. But, it was a much smoother transition than the time when she served as an Interim Provost. She explained that such experiences may affect self-confidence and future aspirations. For instance, she explained that her experience in other leadership positions had helped her in many internal searches and had boosted her self-confidence.

Dr. Stewart explained that her deep theoretical knowledge of leadership and management theories, the exposure to leadership situations, which required her input and working with successful supervisors all helped make her transition to administration, and particularly the dean position, easier. She recalled that her experience as the Assistant VP for three years had prepared her for the dean position. Therefore, she recalled that, when she moved into the dean position, she was well aware of roles and expectations of the position and had developed leadership skills which she deemed effective for her position.

Dr. Gerald concurred with previous participants' opinions about work and leadership experience. She shared, "That is one of the reasons that when you are looking for advancement, they will search for a number of years of experience and rank because it takes a long time to see all of the different things that happen in the role that you are sitting."

Being at the same institution also promoted trust relationships with faculty and staff. Dr. Nelson explained that having the trust of faculty members, knowing that she would be the best person to represent them, and also having good relationships with faculty and staff made her transition to the administrative position smoother. She shared:

> This is going to sound simplistic, but I have always, starting when I first came here, I have always been focused on developing good, strong, positive relationships with people. I think that helped me when I was moving from faculty to dean, because the people, not everyone obviously here at the college, but most of the faculty, and staff already knew me and my reputation. And they knew how I worked with people, and I think that was in my favor. I think they knew they could trust me and who I was. And that I would be ethical and fair. And the thing, I have heard most often is that people know I will listen. I mean really listen, and really want to understand their perspective.

Dr. Stewart commented that her experience in the dean position had been good overall and had improved after faculty realized how hard she worked, and that she had the best interest of students, faculty, and college. Dr. Merkel also agreed that having the trust of faculty members and strong relations with them had made the collaboration between faculty and she as an administrator effective. She shared that they knew she had done her best to protect faculty, but not all her recommendations were approved. She shared that despite bad experiences with

previous faculty who switched to administration, her faculty respected and had trust in her work. She shared:

> So I am a member of the faculty for 24 years. Some of my best friends are faculty. We came in together in 1988, or they joined us along the way. And my really, really tight social circle are faculty. And guess what, with the exception of three of them they're all in the College of Arts and I became their boss.

Therefore, having the trust of faculty members facilitated Dr. Merkel's transition to the administration position and her everyday work in that position.

Another factor related to being at the same institution was participants' ability to have a supportive team of faculty and staff in their everyday work. Dr. Bardhi, Dr. Kodheli, and Dr. Gerald, all agreed about the relevance of having a supportive group of faculty and staff had on their everyday work. They particularly shared about the need for truthful and sincere people around, which might not be possible if they did not know their supervisor well, in this case, the participant. Hence, being at the same institution was an avenue to achieve people's respect, sincerity, and trust. Dr. Stewart shared that having a supportive team also reduced the feelings of isolation particularly when work load was immense and increased the probability for isolation.

Thus, being at the same institution throughout their academic career increased the knowledge and expertise participants had related to those institutions. Being at the same institution also promoted trustworthy relationships among colleagues, faculty and administrators, which in turn, made participants' career progression easier. Being at the same institution also implicitly satisfied the personal criteria for perfectly meeting the requirements before applying for a position. Two participants stated that unlike men who apply even though they do not

perfectly meet all requirements, women hesitate to apply, looking for perfectionism or a perfect fit for the position and institution. Therefore, being at the same institution protected participants from barriers and risk factors related to the dean position.

Support Systems

Another protective factor that participants reported were the systems of support they received from their spouses, advisors, supervisors and champions.

Participants' perceptions of the extent to which those support systems had been present in their career advancement varied. Some participants shared that advisors, mentors, supervisors, and champions had a positive impact on their advancement either through providing advice, encouraging participants to take on leadership responsibilities, recommending them for leadership training, or championing for them to senior administrators as potential candidates for various leadership positions. Seven participants elaborated on this kind of support, which they considered a relevant factor in their career progression. Participants explained that they had experienced such support at various stages of their academic career, from the time they started graduate studies to the time of our interviews. They reported continuing connections with their academic advisors from graduate school. They went back to them for advice related to either leadership positions they would like to apply for, or challenges they were experiencing while in leadership positions.

For instance, Dr. Harnold recalled that it was her academic advisor who recommended that she pursue a graduate program in educational administration. She stated that her advisor had been a great mentor for her, and he had a significant impact on her career progression. She recalled that she had to drop her first graduate program due to concurrently working full time,

having family responsibilities, and commuting long distances for her program. She stated, “And then, I had an opportunity, this same professor and I share this because I really, in hindsight, think he was a great mentor. He helped and nudged me to be a lot more than I thought I would be career-wise.”

Dr. Harnold noted that people learn and develop skills from experience. However, having someone teach you, or simply nudge you to pursue interests because of the potential they see in you, always helped. She also emphasized the role of check in people, making sure that she was in the right track and was doing things correctly. She further explained:

> Experiences are crucial and also having the opportunities to learn and grow. Also, I have always had a few people that really nurtured and reinforced that I was doing the right thing. Or I could go seek for advisor guidance. Or they continued to help me grow professionally, so that I had a rationale. I got better at understanding and addressing various situations and have solutions. All those things come from experience and then continue to grow. But having people teach you, I mean, is always great.

Dr. Merkel also agreed that advisors played a significant role in her progressing through the academic career, particularly at the beginning to set her foot at the door. After 18 years of work experience, at the time when she was about to be laid off from her previous job one of her professors informed Dr. Merkel about a job opening at the university, which would turn her career in a different direction. Despite her great experience in her field, she would not have applied for that position unless her professor encouraged her.

Some participants did not limit their network of advisors only to their professors, their direct supervisors, or people within their institutions. Three of the participants elaborated on the

impact that HERS had on their career. Besides developing valuable leadership skills, HERS served as a networking opportunity for all participants. Three of the participants in this study maintained strong relations with leaders of HERS (Higher Education Resource Services) and the Leadership Institute offered by the Beta System. They also maintained strong relationships with other women who participated in such training, who provided and looked for support and advice from each other.

For instance, Dr. Nelson and Dr. Harnold recalled they contacted the president of HERS and asked for advice at critical moments in their careers such as applying for senior positions, managing workload, and staying on track towards tenure. These participants emphasized that their institutions had a strong representation of women in leadership. Senior administrators, both men and women, had encouraged these participants to get leadership training that they would need to be successful in future leadership endeavors. Furthermore, the senior administrators of these institutions had strategically planned to embrace more women in leadership. Hence, they established a commission to explore the representation of women in leadership at these institutions, and organized and financed their participation at HERS Leadership Institute. Dr. Nelson stated:

> There have been some women here at this institution from the president, this former dean, a former provost. …Yeah, I have been blessed in certain ways - just very fortunate to have had them. And I have had good men mentors as well, who have been very supportive. Our president at our university has been financially supporting women to go to this HERS leadership program for as long as he has been here, maybe twelve or

> thirteen years. He set up a presidental commission on the status of women in leadership here on campus to give those voices.

All participants found a great support from their colleagues and particularly their fellow deans. They asked for and provided advice to each other in various occasions, not only when they were holding a leadership position. Dr. Nelson explained:

> When I started off as a faculty member in the department, I had several of the women faculty who would very much kind of embraced me and, you know, we had weekly coffee, once a week. We started doing a research project together; they knew the importance of kind of getting me fully embedded in the research project. But again beyond that, it was just kind of learning about the university and how the university works. There was a woman that I still do respect and admire very much, who was here at this university and now she is the president at another institution. She is one of those people that I would always keep in the back of my mind and follow her on social media, and just really think a lot of her. Then there have been other women as well, there is a long serving dean at this institution who subsequently retired, but you know I see her in occasional events. I have lunch with her this week. She very much has been a mentor and a supporter.

Three other participants shared similar experiences and emphasized the great support women and colleagues had provided to each other. Dr. Bardhi and Dr. Samuel noted that they found support and informal mentorship in their colleagues more than they could find in formal mentors. Dr. Bardhi stated:

> I think the biggest amount of support is from my fellow deans. We are all at the middle level, and we lean on each other to help us through different situations. But certainly the provost, our supervisor, is behind us. Other cabinet members that work with human resources are there. But the biggest thing that helps is having a team with the other deans that we can talk through situations. So, there are lots of times, that you know, we'll meet and get each-others' counsel to work through things.

Dr. Gerald also agreed that having a supportive mid-level management team helped and made a big difference. She also noted that she had a great staff in the college as well. Dr. Stewart and Dr. Samuel also agreed that when supervisors came from faculty ranks or from the business realm in the case of Dr. Stewart, they were more aware and understood dean's priorities and challenges.

Dr. Stewart elaborated on the impact that having strong men advocates had on her advancement. She acknowledged the facilitating role of internal and external support in her career, emphasizing the role of good external men support on campus and of industry executives as well. She stated:

> In fact, the reason why I am doing what I am doing is because the provost at the time, you know, was a man advocated for me. You know, if you would have some really strong supporters that have been men on campus… I think they positively impacted my advancement. There were internal and external factors. Externally, I think I have had good support and mentorship from both my husband, but also some colleagues within the university, and also some industry executives.

Four participants shared that the support from campus community and supervisors would have not been sufficient unless enough support came from their spouses. Dr. Gerald shared that academia and leadership positions were gendered and would not work well for women who had the majority of family responsibilities. Working in academia would also have been hard in the absence of a fair share of family responsibilities among partners. Four participants elaborated about the support they received from their spouses and the impact of such support throughout their career. Their support was appreciated through all stages in participants' professional life in academia, including the time participants were pursuing graduate studies, searching for new career pathways, and/or performing in their current positions.

For instance, Dr. Stewart shared that her husband's support was invaluable. They both made the choice of going from two incomes to one, and her husband was going to be a stay-at-home dad. She explained that they considered all potential options, and they really wanted one of them to be with their children most of the time. She commented on her husband's uniqueness, which she noted particularly when he faced criticism from other family members about their choice of him being a stay-at-home dad. Dr. Stewart emphasized that her administrative career would not have been possible without his support and his willingness to take more responsibilities at home.

Dr. Stewart explained that despite her great work ethic, determination, and ability to work long hours, she could not be as effective in her work without her husband constantly taking more responsibilities at home. She also noted that he had also been a great mentor.

In conclusion, participants appreciated the support of mentors, advisors, supervisors, fellow deans, colleagues, and last but not least their partners, without which their career progression would have been different.

Gender Equity

The third aspect of protective factors included gender equity and lack of barriers. Participants' perceptions varied, when asked about whether they had faced any barriers in their career advancement in academia.

Four of the participants claimed that they did not face any barriers or overt roadblocks to their career advancement due to various reasons. However, one of the most common reasons reported by the majority of the participants for lack of barriers was their unintentional advancement. These women stated that they did not intend to move to leadership positions themselves, but there were other people who recommended them for such positions. They thought that the barriers might have been different in cases in which they were themselves actively seeking leadership positions. Dr. Bardhi stated:

> I guess, since it wasn't something I was seeking out for myself, I don't perceive that there were any barriers. You know, it might have been different, if I had planned to be a faculty member for fifteen years and then I knew I wanted to be in administration. The path may have been different. But since I kind of…Like I said, since I wasn't seeking it out, and in that respect it came maybe too early.

Dr. Stewart also agreed that initially she did not intend to apply for the Assistant VP position that was her first leadership position. Her nomination was unexpected for her. In her

later career, when she took the initiative to apply for other leadership positions, particularly for the dean position, she faced barriers especially by other women.

Dr. Gerald and Dr. Samuel thought that they did not face too many barriers, particularly because of the disciplines they were in, which were predominantly women. However, Dr. Gerald explained that barriers are not so much overt, but subtle and related to the nature of higher education, such as having the ability to work long hours and over the weekends, which did not work well with other responsibilities women hold outside academia. Dr. Gerald stated, "I don't think I experienced too many barriers as I entered the academy. I think in part that is probably of the discipline that I chose. I think, that the barriers are not the direct ones. Like anybody showing that I couldn't do things."

Dr. Merkel, on the other hand, claimed not having experienced any barriers even though she started in a predominantly men field. She admitted that maybe she was young and oblivious initially. She claimed that she never felt like a token woman or put on the glass cliff. Instead she believed that her men colleagues appreciated her excellent work and leadership skills, which unfolded naturally for her. She stated:

> I was only 19 at the time. I think I was so kind of naïve and oblivious that anything that might have been considered a micro-aggression or a micro-insult, you know if that happened to me, I didn't even recognize it for what it was. … Now, at that time I was in a department with all men and I was the only woman, and I have a natural tendency to emerge as someone willing to take on leadership roles. So I don't think, I really do not think that the men in my department thought, 'let's take advantage of her.'

She also talked about her likely reaction had disparate treatment happened:

> But another factor that I know about myself, and I think other people know too, is that had any of those things, negative things happened, I would have pushed back. And everybody that knows me really well would have said, 'she would have pushed back on it.' I would have said, 'No, this is not going to work.' I would have defended myself, but not everybody can do that.

Participants' perceptions about lack of barriers went hand in hand with lack of gender discrimination and/or disparate treatment. They shared that they had experienced neither barriers due to gender, nor challenges different than anyone else. Three participants commented on gender equity and support for women in leadership they had observed at their institutions. For instance, Dr. Nelson commented that she had experienced challenges in her career advancement, but challenges were not different than anyone else. She explained that challenges and risk factors were not related to gender, or at least, she did not consider them related to, or due to gender, but to the position itself.

She also added that she did not feel like 'facing significant road blocks or a more significant road block than anyone else'. She opined that other identities may be more potential causes of barriers and road blocks than gender.

> I really do not feel like I have. I think there are challenges with everything, you know. But when I think of barriers, I don't ever recall feeling that I had a road block, or a more significant road block than anyone else in that mix. And again, you know, thinking strictly from gender, I am not thinking from race or ethnicity. That's another layer you know, sexual orientation, all the things that can be a barrier. I realize that my experiences maybe have been different in some ways, because I didn't have all those kind of

additional challenges. I hope that I am not missing something. Maybe there were barriers, but I didn't recognize them.

Dr. Bardhi elaborated about her career progression. She recalled that she had always been a minority in the sciences, but that was the norm. However, she did not believe that she was ever impeded in her career because of her gender. She also hoped that decisions neither in her favor, nor against her would have not been made based on her gender. She shared:

> As far as progression throughout my career, I personally don't feel that any decisions based on my gender have affected it. I guess in the sciences, I was always used to be in the minority, because there were more men in the sciences. And that was just the norm to me. And so I don't feel that I was ever impeded or decisions were made for or against me based on my gender. Frankly I hope that they weren't. I wanted to stay on my own accomplishments, not because of something else.

Dr. Bardhi also commented about her experience with upper administration. She shared that she had not noticed any disparate treatment compared to other men deans. She explained that all deans and their respective ideas have been given fair and respectful listening regardless of the final result.

> I don't perceive any like, pre-conceived notion, like, anything that individual deans brought forward were listened to. Certainly, not everything is approved, but I think we all, including myself, were given a fair hearing. And we discussed things and then reached the best solution. So it's very respectful in that way.

Dr. Merkel, Dr. Harnold, and Dr. Nelson shared that their institutions were pretty supportive and encouraging of women leaders. They explained that not only did they not

experience barriers due to their gender, but there was encouragement of women stepping up and holding leadership positions at various ranks. Dr. Merkel shared, “We have a very rich tradition on this campus. You know some of the best, go to people are women.” Dr. Nelson also shared that even men senior administrators had been supportive of women leaders and had encouraged them to get trained in leadership skills they may need.

All the protective factors that participants reported had reduced the strength of barriers participants might have otherwise experienced in their careers. These factors protected them from barriers at various levels. Sometimes, the impact of some factors were noticed at two different levels. For instance, having the leadership skills set increased women self-confidence and promoted their aspirations for leadership positions. The same factor reduced resistance and adversity towards them as leaders at the institutional level. Hence, the impact of protective factors was multi-fold and multi-level.

In addition to all the protective factors that participants mentioned, which prevented or lessened barriers and road blocks in their career advancements, they also shared their thoughts about factors that had helped them overcome challenges and barriers and reduce the feelings of burnout among them.

Compensatory Factors

In the Compensatory Model, according to Zimmerman and Arunkumar (1994), a compensatory variable “does not interact with the risk factor; rather it has a direct and independent influence on the outcome of interests” (p. 5). Both risk and compensatory variables influence the outcome (in this case women’s advancement to leadership).

Through the data analyses process, two main themes emerged about compensatory factors that participants reported having a significant effect on helping them overcome challenges and risk factors and build resilience. The two themes under this category included: (a) Promoters of Protective Factors; and (b) Promoters of determination/Endurance/Resilience.

Promoters of Protective Factors

Despite the barriers and risk factors participants experienced, they shared other aspects which helped them reduce the feelings of being overwhelmed and burnt out, promote protective factors, and build resilience. An aspect that participants found particularly helpful was developing skills they deemed relevant for many positions. They developed skills through various ways, such as through leadership training and workshops.

Dr. Nelson commented about the impact that attending training workshops or the HERS Leadership Institute had on her career progression. This impact was multi-fold. First, she received further training on leadership skills she considered to be relevant in her career as a leader and administrator in higher education. Developing such skills increased her self-confidence in performing leadership tasks and her willingness to take initiatives and risks. Second, she could meet and interact with other women leaders and expand her network. Third, this was another opportunity to send a clear message about her abilities and intentions for career growth in the future.

Other participants also actively searched for training opportunities either through further education, such as, pursuing doctoral degrees, attending training workshops offered by Beta State System, attending HERS Leadership Institute for women leaders in higher education, and through reading a broad literature on leadership skills and administration. They were conscious

of the shortfall in skills they originally experienced and were open to learning and developing such skills. They further explained that they learned and developed skills from their own experience, as well as from observing other leaders in action.

Dr. Kodheli and Dr. Stewart elaborated on their efforts in consulting literature on leadership styles, leadership scenarios, and/or potential effective traits and skills. Dr. Stewart had broad and deep theoretical knowledge on leadership and management because of her field of study and tried to put theory into practice and further improve it. Dr. Kodheli surrounded herself with leadership books to expand her knowledge. She commented that she did not have all the answers, but she was open to learn and continuously be engaged with current issues. She stated:

> I think you have to be open to opportunities when they are presented to you as well. And so as a chair, I did seek out training and more formal leadership help even though chairs are leaders in some sense, I think they are. And as a dean, I mean look at all the books I am reading. I am not saying that I have all the answers. I don't. The president at the time had pushed me to do a leadership sort of continuing education. And I took him up on that and, I just think it's continuous. You just have to be continuously learning and engaged in the issues. I don't have all the answers; I just have to keep working on it.

Dr. Stewart, on the other hand, explained that she would learn by observing leaders in action. She shared:

> I said yes to the position because I had a deep respect for the Associate Provost who used to be my direct supervisor. And I wanted to learn from him. I think sometimes it's part of working with them. And you know, for me it's less of being a formal mentoring

> relationship. It's probably me more reaching them out and getting their advice, working with them and learning.

Most of the participants received encouragement to pursue further training in leadership and administration from senior administrators on their campuses. Four participants emphasized the significance of the encouragement they received from senior administrators at their institutions to pursue leadership trainings and workshops, organized either by the Beta State System to prepare them particularly for mid-level administrative positions, or other leadership educational opportunities such as HERS Leadership Institute. Dr. Samuel explained that the Leadership Academy made her aware of the leadership potential she had and encouraged her to pursue various avenues for other leadership positions including senior positions. Dr. Samuel was the only participant who clearly stated her intentions for higher positions. The rest of the participants got training and developed their leadership skills, but still showed little interest to senior positions. Dr. Samuel noted:

> When I was at another Beta State institution for that long period of time, they sent me to a leadership academy. That's a Beta State System thing where people are nominated to go. And I was put through this leadership academy, which is quite involved. And that was probably the turning point for me, where I decided that if they saw potential in me as a leader, sent and paid for me to go through this, then I would just keep pursuing leadership roles.

Other participants concurred with previous participants about learning from experience and observing leaders in action. For instance, Dr. Merkel noted that, without the experience, she would not have reached the professional and leadership maturity she reached. Dr. Gerald

commented that experience helped her with negotiation and compromising skills. She also noted the significance of networking in getting things done, and the networking skills partially came with experience. She shared:

> I think that, through doing the work, it helps you develop skills, but you know I have also gone to professional education, training, just becoming dean brings having opportunities to meet with people in the system, those kinds of things help. I think that there are negotiations skills that you develop, how you are going to negotiate your way and compromise with people.

Dr. Kodheli and Dr. Harnold agreed that skills came with experience. Furthermore, Dr. Harnold opined that with skills and experience, a leader becomes more confident and comfortable in decision making. She shared, "I learned some skills and strategies for one, and I just got older. I think with age comes a little bit more comfort and confidence."

Participants also shared that besides developing leadership skills, seeking mentors and expanding their network promoted their confidence in their leadership abilities. Participants reported that their experiences about mentoring and networking varied partially based on their institution, and the mentoring practices in place. Five participants elaborated on successful mentoring experiences and their approaches to find either mentors, advice, or an expanded network. They explained that they found mentoring opportunities in: (a) their colleagues; (b) training opportunities; and (c) industry.

All five of them mentioned their colleagues as their best mentors, particularly their dean counterparts in the Beta System, since they had a better understanding of the policies, union practices and agreements, and so on. However, they considered it as a more informal mentoring

rather than formal one. They explained that they personally would approach colleagues and sometimes supervisors to ask for advice and mentorship. Some of them explained that there was formal training on leadership skills, but not a formal mentoring program. It needs to be mentioned that all five participants in this group had always been at the same institution and have known faculty and administration for at least fifteen years. Dr. Bardhi explained:

> Probably I learned the most from colleagues. As an early career faculty member, you know, you learn the most from the colleagues that have been teaching for more years than you have. As a new administrator, I learned from other administrators that have been at the job longer than I have. So just a lot of peer to peer assistance and help. Previous deans, yes helped. The dean that I had previously, not the one that I replaced, was in the provost role. So I still actually had her. It was a woman. I had her to talk me through, so I did have some assistance there.

Dr. Harnold also agreed that colleagues and other deans had been a great support to her in many critical moments in her career. Dr. Nelson and Dr. Harnold attended the HERS Leadership Institute and she recalled often contacting the mentor she established a mentoring relationship with there. However, she explained that they were neither directly encouraged nor taught how to create such mentoring relationships. She considered her ability to build strong relations with other faculty and staff an invaluable asset, which helped her in asking for and providing advice. She stated:

> I don’t know that we are currently encouraged or taught to look for those mentors. But I think because I have always wanted to have that kind of relationships, both ways you know, mentoring other people and being supportive of other people. Having other people

> and establishing that relationship with them, in some kind of subconscious way maybe, I always look for those kinds of relationships. And it makes it easier in some ways, I think, for people to give you advice. Do you know what I mean?

Dr. Kodheli and Dr. Stewart shared similar experiences about training as opportunities to expand their network and find mentors. They also agreed that they had had more informal mentors throughout their career than formal ones. Dr. Stewart also had the opportunity to search for mentors in the industry field since her position provided strong connections with industry. Even though private industry and higher education operate in somewhat different terms, there are still many common or joint practices where advice from industry mentors was helpful. She had also attended many leadership trainings for deans, as well as the Harvard Leadership program, all which provided many networking opportunities. She shared:

> I attended the Harvard Leadership program. I have attended many many deans' leadership programs. I have sought out even some of my own industry specific leadership programs and that's been a really actually great network for me. Actually, I am increasingly looking to do leadership development outside higher education.

These participants shared that they found their mentors' advice helpful not only in addressing critical situations, but also in learning about potentially effective strategies, practices, or institutional culture in general. Dr. Nelson shared her experience in meetings with other provosts at the time she served in a provost position at her institution. She recalled the advice of another women provost:

> I can remember the provost once said to me, if I was going to those meetings, I should be watching the sport news the day before, because you have something to contribute,

> because the first 15 minutes of the conversation will be about sport's stuff and I appreciated her mentorship in that area. But that felt really kind of artificial to me. I am not going to read the sport news, so I can participate necessarily in that conversation, just felt really weird. But I appreciated again that kind of mentorship that I think women have probably shared with each other and with a variety of ways over the years about how to participate when you are primarily surrounded by men in workgroups.

Another relevant compensatory factor that participants reported focused on the participants' awareness about the environment. The awareness about their position/role impact and zone of influence also fell under the same category. Finally, in this category, I included participants' awareness about faculty and staff's feelings and perceptions about the dean's position, and their own (participants') feelings and perceptions about administrative positions.

Four participants elaborated on the impact that being aware of such elements had on their experience as administrators. Dr. Merkel shared that being aware of the staff and faculty's perceptions about administrators helped her when faculty members were teasing her about moving to the dark side. She further explained that she was aware of such perceptions due to previous experiences with other faculty who had switched to administration, and their behaviors, attitudes, and approaches to faculty had negatively changed. Such awareness helped her become more flexible and more effective in addressing the situations, because she did not take them personally. She understood the real cause of such reactions. Other participants shared similar perceptions, too. Feeling effective increased participants' job satisfaction, self-confidence, and resilience as leaders.

Dr. Samuel shared her experience with argumentative faculty and staff. When she first started in the dean's role, she was neither knowledgeable nor aware of the problems, practices and approaches previous administrators had had. As a result, her approach was not welcome. She explained that learning about the politics of the library and institution as a whole helped her in developing strategies and more effective approaches in addressing various situations, including personnel issues. She explained:

> I think the thing that overwhelms me the most is the politics of the institution and trying to navigate the politics, especially being in a highly unionized environment where there is a lot of head-butting between the faculty and administration. That's probably the area where I most feel overwhelmed. I am sure my years of experience have a lot to do with the level of my confidence I have now when dealing with such issues.

Dr. Samuel also shared her experience with argumentative faculty who would not be willing to provide any input in the process of decision making, but always argued about decisions being made. She explained that she realized that was the college culture, and she should revise her approach in order to be more effective. She shared the following experience:

> After being here almost three years, I am trying to revise my own tolerance with that type of conflict by not responding in any type of a defensive way. I just refer back to what is said in the bargaining agreement, that faculty may recommend, but the dean has the final decision-making authority. So I think and my husband has told me, 'You have to let things run off your back. You need to realize that this is the culture and it's not about you. It's about them not having the same type of authority, but maybe they did with the past dean.

Dr. Samuel and Dr. Kodheli elaborated on the impossibility of pleasing everyone and the "not liked" feelings. Dr. Kodheli explained that she was aware that her decisions would not please everyone. However, she tried to listen to all perspectives and be transparent in decision making and communication. Dr. Samuel became aware of the "not liked" feeling later in her position. Initially, she took things personally, and that was creating a conflict with her wanting to be liked by all faculty and staff. Later she became aware that she should not have taken things personally, and that deans' decisions could not please everyone. Coming to such realization allowed her to let the "not liked" feelings go and better explore the real reasons behind people's reactions. It also improved her responsive strategies and efficiency while dealing with similar situations. She shared, "So I just try to really think now why he might be acting that way, and not why he doesn't like me. It's not about me and also just getting over the fact that I really like to be liked, and in a dean's job you have to let go of that."

Dr. Bardhi agreed that in her position she could not please everyone. However, she believed that by following a collaborative approach and asking for input, she could make decisions representative of everyone's perspectives. Transparency and clarity in communication were two factors that were mentioned by all participants as significantly improving the process and outcomes of their leadership.

In addition, seven participants explained that they found their leadership style effective and an advantage. All seven of them, either explicitly or implicitly, emphasized the significance of being true to themselves, to their values, and to their core in their success, effectiveness, and work satisfaction related to leadership positions they had served. Dr. Kodheli was more explicit than the rest, as she firmly stated that her approach to leadership was tightly related to her core.

She explained that a leader should always be true to one's core, and do the right thing. A leader may study many leadership books, but cannot be a leader unless staying true to one's self. She emphasized that staying true to one's self keeps a leader grounded and determined. She stated:

> I have all these books about leadership. I have read them all. But if you don't know who you are, at the core of who you are going to be as you show up in that space, you are in a really different world at that point. And you're not going to withstand everything that comes at you. So I know who I am, and I know how I want to do it. And I know how I show up in my space. You may not like it; I get that. Some people may not like me; I totally get that. That's not what motivates me; that's not who I am or why I am here.

Dr. Nelson also agreed on the significance of staying true to one's core values and beliefs. She explained that her listening skills, which stood at the heart of her ability to establish and maintain strong relationships, were key to her success and support she received as a leader. She noted:

> That is my core. I think that they all kind of run together through that thing of relationships. The thing that people have said to me most recently, about those abilities are the listening piece that I mentioned to you. And I know again this sounds really simple, but I can tell you about how much it has helped me to really listen.

Dr. Bardhi and Dr. Stewart shared that their collaborative style has facilitated their work. Dr. Bardhi explained that even though by nature she is a collaborative person, and takes listening to heart, regarding her leadership style, she followed the advice of a former fellow chair. That chair advised her never to lead by dividing, and she made it part of her core. She was aware that

decisions even when made together, do not please everyone, but at least everybody was heard. She recalled:

> One of the pieces of advice that I was given early, actually from a fellow chair, was never lead by dividing. And I have tried to take that to heart, and so creating coalitions and bringing people together is what I try to do. I know there is always two sides or multiple sides to one situation. I always try to listen to all sides and try to bring them together. That doesn't always work, sometimes there is somebody that is just wrong and you have to correct that but… (pauses). I will assess my leadership style as collaborative, I would rather bring folks together rather than try to divide them. And I know that I can't always make all sides happy, but we can reach the best decision possible for everyone. That is what I try to do.

Two participants emphasized the positive role that transparency and authenticity in leadership and decision making had on their everyday work in the dean position. Dr. Kodheli explained that all people appreciated transparency and could easily understand when someone was trying to fake competency and/or could not stand strong behind decisions made. Dr. Stewart also noted that faculty and staff appreciated her transparency, collaboration, and consistency.

In addition, Dr. Stewart, Dr. Nelson and Dr. Kodheli explained that their balanced approach between building relationships and being results oriented had facilitated their everyday work and reduced resistance from faculty and staff and their own burnout feelings. The three of them agreed that relationships are as relevant as goals and results. They explained that no one would like a leader that is focused only on one aspect, either results or building and maintaining relationships.

Dr. Stewart shared that being balanced between result oriented and people oriented benefited both the results and the relationships. A leader who gets constituents to buy into accomplishing objectives and goals together increases constituents' well-being, excitement, and satisfaction. Following a balanced approach and being comfortable with it as a leader, kept leaders well positioned among their constituents and reduced resistance to their decisions. She shared:

> I am pretty result oriented, but I really enjoy relationships. I would say I am pretty balanced. I know there is a continuum between the two, I would say I am pretty much in the middle. […] because it is not very fun, to get things done if you don't have good relationships with people. Likewise, it's not really fun if you have good relationships, but you never get anything done. I think accomplishing things together is very exciting. I think people really feel a great sense of purpose when you get things done. It also helps relationships when they get things done, rather then, all you do is enjoy eachothers' company and don't really get anything done, any work done. That's not fun either.

All these approaches had facilitated Dr. Stewart's transition to administration and made her work in administrative positions easier. She explained:

> Collaboration is important. I also really value a lot of authenticity in my leadership style. So being authentic with my team and being transparent with information and being collaborative, being consistent in how I behave no matter what meeting or relationship I have.

Other participants also agreed that consistency in behaviors and transparency were well received by staff and faculty in all situations. However, they explained that they tried to be as transparent as they could since they could not share all the information they received.

In conclusion, factors like building relevant managerial and leadership skills, becoming aware of the environment and their zone of influence, seeking mentors and establishing relationships, and following a balanced approach between results and people-orientation helped participants either explicitly or implicitly to further develop their resilience or be efficient leaders.

Promoters of/contributors to determination/endurance/resilience. According to Wei and Taormina (2014), determination and endurance were two aspects of resilience. According to the participants, factors that promoted determination and endurance included: (a) Elements that kept them grounded, and (b) Means to reach a work-life balance.

Participants reported various elements that kept them grounded. However, they all shared that they chose a career in teaching because of the appreciation and love they had for education, students, and the impact they could have in students' lives. They explained that they continued their careers in various teaching and administrative positions in higher education with the same appreciation for education, love for teaching, and the best interest for students. Those were the same reasons that helped them stand strong in difficult or adverse situations.

Dr. Kodheli shared that her leadership was grounded in teaching. She explained that not only teaching in itself, but also her leadership position was about making an impact on people's lives. She believed that her position had a transformational power precisely because of the ways it could transform students' lives. That was a significant factor in keeping her grounded. She

shared, “It keeps you grounded because you can make an impact. And the ripple of the impact is better. So that is the transformational power of the position I have.” Dr. Bardhi also shared that she chose to switch to a dean position because of the impact she could have on students’ lives. She saw it as an opportunity to positively impact others’ lives. She shared, “I think I was a successful chairperson and so I felt that I could bring something to the role. Bringing something into the role, not about me as a leader, more on the impact I could have on other’s lives.”

Other factors that participants mentioned were their grit, work ethic, and positive attitude, which positively influenced their persistence and endurance in progressing toward their goals. Dr. Stewart, Dr. Nelson, and Dr. Merkel shared that their persistence resulted from their family values, work ethic, and/or personality traits.

Three participants elaborated about the role of respective family values in their inspirations for career advancement, overcoming barriers and challenges, and developing character traits that would further help them in their career. For instance, Dr. Merkel shared that her parents’ appreciation for education, equal encouragement to pursue college for both boys and girls, and indistinguishable treatment, encouragement, and support to pursue one’s dreams, nourished her optimism and determination that she could achieve all objectives and goals she would choose in her life. She explained that even though she was raised in a very traditional family of 1950, her parents were always supportive of her choices, her “cheerleaders” as she would name them. Even though not explicit in their encouragement for her to attain a college degree, she explained that it was no question that both her brother and she should attend college. She recalled:

> I was truly blessed with family, cultural values, training, sponsors whatever… Nobody ever told me that I couldn't, and never crossed my mind that I couldn't achieve my goals. … Maybe my parents weren't that explicit, overt about that, but it never dawned on me that I couldn't do whatever I wanted to. I have an older brother - four years older than me. It was just the two of us. We knew that both my brother and I were going to go to college.' And I always knew that I could do anything I wanted and my parents were my biggest cheerleaders.

Dr. Stewart explained that her determination and tenacity were deeply rooted in her family values. Values, such as a high work ethic and endurance, were nourished and embedded in her from an early age. These values allowed her to work long hours and complete the tremendous amount of work a vocational-programs dean had to accomplish. She also shared that she approached situations with a positive, passionate, and caring attitude, which helped her in relationships with people while holding leadership positions. She recalled:

> I would say, too, I am an incredibly hard worker. I worked a lot as I grew up and I have family that worked very, very hard. And so, I can pretty much work a lot of hours every day and weekends and evenings. And I have a husband who supports me. I would also say that I am very passionate and I have a pretty positive attitude about people and about the situation. I am incredibly committed and I am very persistent. And that has helped me, I think, to positively stay in this role. I think most people know, too, that I care deeply about the situation.

Dr. Gerald explained that her determination resulted from multiple factors, including her curiosity to explore new perspectives and ideas, family situations, and her social class. She shared that she had developed determination due to her life experience as well. She shared:

> I am really determined. I have always been determined. I don't know that I could exactly identify whether its socialization, or just part of who I am. I think it's a combination of things. I also think that, you know, I have always been intrigued by ideas. And it was like, it was just for me, when I discovered the discipline that I am in. The worldview that I had, I think that it changed with a variety of ideas encountered, as well as family circumstances, social class that I am in, and the recognition of all those things together. So, it's been a variety of things.

Dr. Samuel shared that her determination was partially in her character and partially developed throughout her life experiences, and that was what kept her grounded. She noted:

> I think I am …I don't like to get beat. I don't want to get chased out. I don't want to surrender. I want to make things better and there are certainly people here who believe I am making improvements and am making things better. There are also my distracters that keep down but hmm…. You know, I just think I need to have those challenges just in order to keep getting better and improving my leadership skills. I think I developed determination through my life. When I think back to, I guess my school days, which is way back, I was always volunteering for leadership roles. And I think that that helped cultivate that in me.

Another factor that participants related to their endurance was establishing a healthy work-life balance. Five participants emphasized the strategies and skills they had developed to

reach a healthier work-life balance. These participants shared that they found the following strategies helpful in reaching a work-life balance: (a) setting boundaries; (b) setting personal time off; (c) keeping one's self energized; and (d) prioritizing.

On the one hand, the conversations among mid-level and senior administrators to respect personal time and limit communication over the weekend and the initiation of such practices may mostly be considered a promoting factor of protective factors. On the other hand, women taking advantage of such practices may be considered a contributor to their resilience. Dr. Nelson and Dr. Bardhi elaborated about setting boundaries and respecting personal time. They shared their experiences and perceptions about previous administrative practices related to weekly working-hours for administrators. Dr. Nelson noted that this initiative would benefit all administrators. She recalled:

> What we did, quite frankly, as a strategy to straight out, we started to talk about it, and talked about, 'this is not good, we need to have better boundaries.' And it was really through that communication that, I think, it started to…. Maybe that message got through to some people who do work all the time, and message through all the weekend. And things like that. So that started to slow down. You know, 'Let's not send emails and texts to each other on the weekend. Let's protect that time. And you know, maybe people shouldn't be sending them late at night so the first thing when you wake up in the morning, you are, 'Oh my Gosh you are 6 emails behind.' So that was a pretty deliberate conversation amongst everyone about, we need to work on this and be respectful of each other's time.

Dr. Nelson noted that after that discussion, many have been pretty collaborative and there had been improvement, even though not in a perfect state. The effort was still in a practice stage, and not embedded in policies or institutional culture. She was trying to use this practice as much as she could, even though she found it hard to take both days over the weekend off and not think at all about work.

Dr. Bardhi shared similar experiences about respecting each-other's personal time. She explained that her current supervisor was very supportive of respecting her weekend time. Despite the support though, she would shut off the job only one day of the weekend if she could. She recalled, "I have learned to at least pick one day during the weekend, if I can, to just turn off the job. So I actually have not checked emails for a whole day before. And our current upper administration has helped with that."

Some participants shared their experiences and advise from other women leaders or from their supervisors about the significance of setting personal time off in order to reenergize themselves and start fresh after the time off. So they would take the advice of either their supervisor or other women leaders to take some time off when the time allowed for that. Dr. Stewart shared that she would take a couple days off mostly during Winter or Spring break even though she would still be working for a few hours from home. Still she would be better off after the break. She would also go for a couple days to the mountains where there was no cell phone or internet coverage and just relax. However, that was the case only when time permitted.

Dr. Nelson agreed that a tired mind could not perform as creatively as a refreshed one. However, she still could not follow completely the advice of her previous supervisor, a very successful man. She recalled:

> I had a previous provost who used to say that people should take two weeks of vacation– not one week, two weeks. Because the first week you are just kind of decompressing. It's not until the second week that you can actually think creatively about things, so your mind works, and so you can think beyond that. I think he was really wise about that. And he was again a very successful person. He always took two weeks every summer, and he really encouraged other people to do that.

However, she would take only a few days off in order to energize herself.

Dr. Kodheli shared her experience and thoughts about how to get herself energized after long working days. She explained that she had made a point of relaxing, reading, and exercising every day. She noted that she was an early morning person, who tried to be respectful of other colleagues' time, so she would save her emails in draft form at 4 in the morning, and then go exercising. She shared:

> I try to take a break. So the weekend is kind of a like-don't email, don't bug people. They need the break as much as I do. I can still work, but not do that. And then, it depends what the definition of work is. I think I am always thinking about it, in some ways. I try to relax, read a lot and exercise. I am a morning person and don't put work late at night, but I do wake up early in the morning. I start my early emails, save them in drafts, and go exercise.

She explained that setting a routine and respecting the time set for everything helped keep her work-life balance.

Three participants agreed that with the overload and pressing deadlines, they could not be successful without prioritizing their work. Dr. Nelson shared that she got the idea of de-cluttering

and prioritizing from a book she was reading on minimization. The book encouraged her to question assignments and tasks she had to perform based on her values and deadlines approaching. She also started to schedule time on her calendar to do just administrative work related to her position. She recalled:

> I have started to think about how to de-clutter my work life a little bit. And what prompted me to that was, I was reading a book on minimalizing. And I was actually thinking about de-cluttering my house. But when I was reading about minimalism and started thinking about it, I thought, 'oh my gosh, there are so many things on my calendar that if you stepped back and said what is essential? What is essential to the work that connects with my values? And that I feel that I can accomplish this week, this month? And what should be de-cluttered, be removed? And I am not completely successful at that, but I do look at that. This way I have started to think and place strategically some things on my calendar, so somebody else can't put something in there.

She explained that she had started to strategically plan her time and found it more efficient.

Dr. Bardhi and Dr. Nelson shared that they learned from the advice of other leaders in the field of higher education, either men or women, about how to deal with and improve their work-life balance. They shared that meeting with other women leaders and sharing their experiences and strategies that may be working in this regard was helpful.

In conclusion, despite the risk factors and challenges participants have experienced, they still felt energetic and determined to progress. They mentioned several factors that kept them grounded and optimistic for the present and the future. All the protective and compensatory

factors mentioned by the participants helped their leadership advancement and their performance as leaders. Because of such factors, participants had not experienced burnout even though overwhelmed at certain times.

Summary

Findings of this study answered the three posed research questions. Research question one asked about participants' perceptions regarding their academic and leadership experiences. It also explored the roles and motivating factors while holding leadership positions and their future leadership aspirations. Participants stated multiple factors that motivated them in their leadership journey. One of the factors that they shared was that they were willing to assume responsibilities and take risks. They explained that such a willingness helped them in their career progression because they were aware that all institutions looked for experienced staff who have proven their leadership capacities in various roles. Another factor that guided participants' choices was the familiarity with expectations and roles for various leadership positions. In addition, they perceived the timing and stage in their career and personal life a significant factor in their current and future leadership. Last but not least, participants reported that the period of time they had been at their respective institutions was crucial for advancement to leadership and in dealing with day-to day responsibilities at various capacities.

Research question two asked about the participants' perceptions of barriers and risk factors they had experienced in their career progression. Participants shared barriers at individual, institutional, and societal level. Among barriers at individual level, the study revealed the hesitance/lack of desire to apply for leadership positions as one of the most striking findings. Participants reported the lack of mentoring and networking opportunities as a critical barrier at

the institutional level, particularly because of the lack of institutions' awareness regarding the needs of women leaders. Finally, findings from the data analysis revealed that most barriers at the societal level were rooted in internalized beliefs of gender roles, expectations, and stereotypes.

Findings from the study regarding the risk factors emphasized factors related to the position's nature rather than gender. Participants reported that the immense amount of work deans had to perform was the most significant risk factor impacting high feelings of burnout among deans. Findings also showed that other factors either related to the position's nature or not, may increase the effect of the overload on the burnout rate among deans.

Research question three explored the perceptions of participants about protective and compensatory factors that positively impacted their career advancement. Among the protective factors, participants emphasized the invaluable support and championship from their direct supervisors. Participants also reported the high importance of having supportive partners/spouses that allowed them to develop a work-life balance and take more responsibilities at work.

Findings from this study emphasized the significance of character traits and family values among other compensatory factors in contributing to leader's determination, endurance, and resilience. Participants identified the courage to take initiatives and risks and determination as the most important character traits that kept them grounded in the face of opposing thoughts or influences.

In summary of the findings, participants agreed that their experience, barriers and risk factors, and protective and compensatory factors shaped their aspirations for leadership even though participants admitted that they were not interested in senior leadership positions at the

time of the interview. Participants also reported that overcoming barriers and risk factors increased their resilience and their leadership capacity.

Chapter IV presented findings from analyzing the data from interviews with eight participants about their perceptions and experiences in their leadership and career progression, the barriers and risk factors they had faced, and the protective and compensatory factors which minimized the effect of risk factors. Chapter V discusses the findings in regards to existing research literature and presents recommendations for practice and for further research.

Chapter V: Discussion

The purpose of this interpretive, qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of women, mid-level, academic leaders about the barriers, risk factors, and protective and/or compensatory factors throughout their professional advancement in academia. The experiences of women in leadership have been the focus of research studies in the last three decades. However, data about women in leadership positions still show overrepresentation of women at entry levels, and underrepresentation at senior-level leadership positions. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the inhibiting and encouraging factors for those women who have successfully advanced in their leadership journey. Since there are women who have successfully overcome the barriers and inhibiting factors, this study is necessary to further explore risk, as well as protective and/or compensatory factors as perceived by women holding mid-level, academic positions. This study addressed the following research questions:

- What are the perceived experiences of women leaders in mid-level leadership positions in academia?
- What barriers and/or risk factors have women leaders encountered while advancing in their career?
- What factors have a significant impact on helping women leaders overcome barriers and risk factors?

The qualitative research methodology used in this study was interpretative methodology, focusing on interpreting the attributions eight participants holding an academic dean position gave to their perceptions and experiences.

Discussions and Conclusions

The study's first research question stated, "What are the perceived experiences of women leaders in mid-level leadership positions in academia?" Based on data analysis of the participants' accounts, findings revealed the significant impact of participants' perceptions and attributions they gave to their experiences had on their career progress, experiences as leaders, and their future leadership aspirations.

Participants' perceptions about experiences in their leadership advancement varied partially due to the nature, service, and expectations in their different institutions. They elaborated on three significant aspects in their leadership journey: (a) motives for leadership aspirations, (b) perceptions of academic and leadership experiences, and (c) future leadership aspirations.

The study's second research question stated, "What barriers and/or risk factors have women leaders encountered while advancing in their career?" Findings from this study unfolded subtle rather than overt barriers, which were found at participants' personal level, institutional level, and at the societal level. Participants related risk factors and high burnout rate particularly to elements and responsibilities specific to their dean position. They identified two patterns of risk factors. Risk factors which were related particularly to the dean position included: (a) position's nature, and (b) lack/shortage of support for administrators.

The study's third research question stated, "What factors have a significant impact on helping women leaders overcome barrier and risk factors?" Findings from this study attributed the participants' immunity to high burnout rate common among deans to the protective and

compensatory factors which they reported were displayed at the personal, family, and institutional level.

Participants described factors that protected them from barriers and risk factors, and compensatory factors which did not interact with the barriers directly, but had an additive effect to the final result, i.e. their career progression. Participants mentioned three patterns of protective factors which may have buffered them from significant roadblocks to their advancement: (a) leadership skill set, (b) support systems, and (c) gender equity.

Compensatory factors mentioned included: (a) promoters of protective factors, and (b) contributors to determination/endurance/resilience. Participants explained that all these factors played a significant role in their success as women in academia and in their leadership advancement.

Perceptions about Their Experiences

The study's first research question focused on the perceptions of participants about their experiences and their advancement in academia. The following themes elaborated in this section summarize the conclusions I drew about women's perceptions of their leadership journey and how they (women leaders) see leadership in general: (a) motives for leadership aspirations, (b) perceptions of academic and leadership experiences, and (c) future leadership aspirations. I concluded that all these themes are closely related to the participants' viewpoint of leadership.

Women and Leadership

Participants' experiences through the academic leadership pathway varied, and they followed different career trajectories. On the one hand, some of them pursued a traditional pathway to the dean position, i.e., they started as faculty in probationary positions, received

tenure, served as department chairs, and finally moved to dean positions. On the other hand, others followed a non-traditional pathway and served in various leadership capacities even before getting tenured.

As I was comparing their stories, I noticed that regardless of their pathway to deanship, all participants except Dr. Merkel, would not have been the initiators of applying for leadership positions. They all aimed to become teachers, but did not see themselves as leaders outside their classrooms, at least not at the beginning of their careers. Even later in their careers, when they were confident in their leadership abilities, they preferred leading within the classrooms or from behind the scenes. Previous research has also shown women's preferences of leading behind the scenes or not taking credit for their leadership input (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014). Most of the participants in this study still needed encouragement from supervisors or waited to be invited to apply rather than taking the first step toward higher level positions themselves.

Second, I noticed that unless exposed to various leadership opportunities and responsibilities, participants may have not been aware of their leadership abilities and/or would not develop an interest in those positions. The earlier in their academic career they were exposed to leadership, the earlier their attention was guided to such opportunities. For instance, Dr. Merkel who was exposed to leadership opportunities even prior to joining academia, was more aware of her leadership potential than other participants who had such exposure later in their career. On the other hand, Dr. Harnold was initially laughing at the idea of potentially pursuing graduate studies on becoming a principal. The reviewed literature supports the infringing impact on women's career advancement of their unawareness of their leadership abilities, or beliefs that they might not be ready to further expand their leadership and/or sphere

of influence (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). All the above said, I concluded that women still show a natural tendency towards women dominated professions such as teaching, and they seem hesitant to assume official leadership positions even within those professions.

Third, this study showed that women were over-thinkers when it came to applying for leadership positions. They tended to delay applying for such positions while working to meet all the requirements. Consequently, women may progress slowly towards senior positions providing that all other factors are kept constant.

Fourth, all participants saw leadership first as a benefit to others or a way to better serve others, rather than a goal or a personal accomplishment. Participants put the interests of other people, either students, faculty, or staff members before their own personal interest. In addition, while listing the factors influencing their decisions in assuming a leadership role, the desire to challenge themselves was rated as the last one. This factor may partially explain participants' claims that their advancement was not fully intentional, since their advancement and its trajectory, were shaped by the goals of participants to serve others and their (participants') approaches to address various problems.

In addition, participants seemed to realize later in their careers that not everyone, but leaders can make things happen. Therefore, they assumed leadership roles when they wanted to see change happen and had come to the realization that leaders could make things possible.

However, before and after switching to administrative positions, participants seemed to be concerned about the perceptions their faculty colleagues and/or other staff members had about their move to administration. I conclude that women seemed to substantially focus on rapport and relationships and how they would change when this position changes. In addition, focusing

on rapport and relationships seemed to have a restraining effect on their progression towards senior position. In addition to lack of internal drive for those positions, losing contact with staff and students was the second most mentioned factor discouraging participants from applying for senior positions.

Furthermore, findings showed that most women would take the risk to serve in leadership positions when they felt comfortable and secured that they had the trust of faculty members and their supervisors. I concluded that even though participants did not openly admit their fear of possible glass cliff, that fear is subtle and internalized by women. Therefore, it is harder to address it since women are not fully aware of it. Thus, the amount of time they spent at their institutions seemed crucial in reaching the trust level, so they could overcome such fear and take further steps in their career.

Last but not least, women who had the internal drive to serve in senior positions (only two in this study), would find venues to achieve their career goals. Comparing the stories of Dr. Merkel and Dr. Nelson, I concluded that women in most of the cases lack the assertiveness and boldness to pursue their leadership goals. Unlike men (Avolio, 2007), Dr. Nelson would leave multiple doors open for her potential to be noticed, rather than courageously take action and apply for senior roles. Therefore, I also concluded that women need to develop skills to proactively promote themselves and their potential as leaders, in order for them to at least aim to move faster towards higher positions.

In conclusion, I came to the realization that women would take leadership roles upon their supervisors' encouragement, support, and invitations; or when they had supportive institutional environments to women leaders; and when they felt sure they had the trust of

faculty, staff, and supervisors. This study showed that women's viewpoint and perception of leadership has not changed a lot compared to findings by Kellerman and Rhode (2007). Therefore, that could explain the slow progress of women in leadership.

Barriers and Risk Factors

Research question two stated: What barriers and/or risk factors have women leaders encountered while advancing in their career? I found it more meaningful to distinguish between the challenges and barriers participants had faced as they transitioned from one position to the other, and management challenges and risk factors participants experienced while serving in the dean's role.

Transitioning Challenges and Barriers

In this category, I included factors that had restrained participants' advancement in academia from the time they (participants) entered academia until present day.

While reviewing the stories of all participants, I realized that initially participants denied having experienced barriers in their advancement. I concluded that their denial was due to the subtle nature of those barriers. The challenges and barriers that data analysis revealed were dominant at the personal level compared to the institutional and societal level. However, I noticed an overlap of the impact barriers at various levels, particularly internalized societal beliefs, had on barriers at the personal level.

I concluded that hesitance or reluctance to apply for leadership positions was one among other significant barriers at the personal level that participants were facing for various reasons. First, I noticed that the factors encouraging participants' hesitation had been present for a long time in their lives. Second, they had become ingrained and internalized as norms and beliefs,

which they (participants) did not question. Therefore, fighting against them becomes hard, since they are not defined as barriers.

Findings revealed that hesitance/reluctance to apply for leadership positions resulted from the following factors: (a) lack of awareness of leadership potential, which was also related to (b) lack of exposure to leadership opportunities and roles even before participants joined academia (Girl Scout Research Institute, 2011); (c) women's beliefs that they lacked the internal drive, particularly for senior positions, which in turn is internalized from a long-time societal belief that leadership is mostly for men rather than women (Eagly & Carli, 2007); (d) satisfied and happy to work behind the scene rather than being in charge (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007); (e) overthinking position's requirements and looking for perfection (Marquez, 2014; Whelan, 2013); (f) sense of unpreparedness for certain positions which influenced their self-confidence; and (g) lack of exposure to decision making experiences, which Dr. Bardhi, one of the participants, clearly defined as a women's category, because she believed that women were mostly presented with decisions their supervisors made rather than having to make decisions themselves. This study revealed the lack a crucial feature in women's preparation for leadership positions: that of decision- making experiences. Observing other leaders make decisions, particularly men, and being able to make decisions oneself differ substantially. Finding the causes of such a shortness was not the direct focus of this study. However, Dr. Bardhi pinpointed it clearly, as she stated that women were mostly presented with decisions, made by men, rather than making decisions themselves. That is clearly related to a long-time, societal tradition of men in decision making positions.

I came to the conclusion that although hesitance to apply was a subtle barrier displayed at a personal level, most of its roots came from the societal level, and the ways society has operated so far. Most of the participants were reluctant to apply, not only for a dean or senior position, but also for formal leadership positions in general. Since most deans follow a traditional pathway to this position, lacking initiative to apply for lower rank leadership positions, such as department chair or director of a program, would reduce the number of potential women candidates for the dean position. Consequently, the number of potential women candidates for senior positions would be reduced, too.

Another dominant factor that participants recognized as impeding their advancement in academia was family responsibilities. Findings from this study align with previous research about the impact of family responsibilities on women educational and career decisions (Eagly & Carly, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). Seven out of eight participants noted that family responsibilities influenced their decisions throughout various stages in their career from selecting and attaining graduate education, becoming faculty members, getting tenure, and advancing to the administrative realm, as well as in their everyday job as administrators. Family responsibilities included not only the immediate family members, such as participants' kids, but also aging parents and spouses with careers that required the whole family to relocate. Because of all these factors, women had to adjust their career decisions, take responsibilities, and meet expectations assigned by gender roles. I found that the impact of family responsibilities, gender roles and expectations varied at various stages of participants' careers. Their restrictive impact seemed to be higher when combined with other factors such as lack of available childcare, commuting long hours between campuses, and unequal share of family responsibilities among

partners. Marquez (2014) also concluded that when all these factors are combined, they result in a personal-work life imbalance and block women's advancement.

Assigned gender roles and expectations and family responsibilities also originates at the societal level, but they display their highest impact at the personal level. Therefore, I concluded that women's personal decisions to not apply for leadership positions or to not take additional leadership responsibilities, even though personal choices, are still influenced by factors beyond the personal level. This study reconfirmed that women still present their decisions to stay at lower hierarchical ranks as their personal choice. I concluded that by so doing, either consciously or unconsciously, they were preventing the real causes of their decisions to be displayed. Therefore, it is important for both women and institutions to identify challenges/barriers as well as their real roots, in order to better address them.

On the other hand, participants' stories showed that gender expectations for women to be caring and nurturing to students, faculty and staff, (more at the faculty level, but still present at the administrative level) engaged them in emotional labor. This emotional labor exhausted women's energies, so they could not add leadership responsibilities to their plates.

Finally, I acknowledged the fact that regardless of more family friendly practices some institutions had in place, not all participants were aware of or took advantage of such practices. Reviewed literature also suggests that practices which are not institutionalized yet, may not bring the desired impact, and women may not take full advantage of them (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Eisenkraft, 2004). Therefore, managing family responsibilities remained a challenge for a few of the participants. I concluded that these practices, because they had not become the norm yet and were not institutionalized in polices, did not benefit women to their (practices') full impact.

Second, I assumed that these practices would have had a long-lasting effect if institutionalized in policies, since changes with a less sensitive administration to family responsibilities would reverse the practices. Third, institutions would show their full commitment to gender equity by promoting these practices, making sure everyone on campus, regardless of their gender, was aware of such practices.

Regarding challenges and barriers at the institutional level, I came to the conclusion that these challenges and barriers did not overtly target women directly. However, they may turn into obstacles limiting women's advancement. First, practices such as no or late response to job applications and lack of clarification on unmet requirements increased participants' confusion about other potential applications. Therefore, in addition to the time and energy required to complete decent applications, this confusion discouraged women from applying.

Second, I noticed that the network of supporters and champions played a significant part in both internal and external hires and promotions. Marquez (2014) also concluded that the network of supporters played a significant role in promotions to senior positions, and recommended women who aspired for such positions to broaden their network of supporters and champions of both genders. Since participants' supporters and champions were, in most of the cases their direct supervisors, this implied that women were hired or promoted based on proven performance. In turn, hiring or promotions based on proven performance only, reduce the chances to be selected for the position, particularly for external hires or candidates who have been at an institution for a short period of time, since their network of supporters is not well consolidated to champion for them. I concluded that women were still impeded in their advancement until they had proven their leadership capabilities at least to their immediate

supervisors. Therefore, I concluded that the play field is not leveled for women, regardless of institutions good intentions to promote women leaders. This study showed that, even though these barriers have been talked about in so many research studies, they are still present and inhibit women progression subtly.

Third, I noticed that the tenure process may restrain women's intentions to serve in leadership roles prior to getting tenured, due to the excessive number of administrative tasks these positions entail and the amount of time they would take. Therefore, administrative positions would reduce the time required to be dedicated to scholarship and research. Contrary to Nguyen (2014), this study restated, that in four-year institutions, the pressures for scholarship and publishing are still frustrating for aspiring administrators coming from faculty ranks.

Fourth, I found that despite good intentions and encouraging practices toward women leaders, institutions still looked at certain aspects of leadership from a man-centered viewpoint. For instance, although it was clear that mentors and supporters within respective institutions played a crucial role in promotions, participants were never trained or provided with purposeful opportunities to expand these networks. I concluded that the participants' higher education institutions in this study seemed to have established leadership routes around men leaders in regard to mentoring and networking opportunities. Van den Brink and Benschop (2014) found that current networking practices were producing gender inequalities since practices such as identifying with the similar and/or reproducing the proven success model might exclude women. Therefore, the more women in leadership positions, the easier it would be for young women joining academic ranks to find mentors and supporters. I also noticed that the institutions in this study did not seem to have fully considered women's needs, lack of skills, and opportunities for

them to further expand their networks. Since women had not been the majority in leadership positions in academia, institutions might experience a lack of awareness about women's needs in various areas including mentoring and networking. I also realized that mentors and supporters played even a more significant role in women's advancement since most of the participants did not advocate well for their intentions.

Finally, I found that most of the participants were hoping that their mentors would guide them to leadership trainings and workshops that would help them develop skills relevant for the dean position or other senior positions they would consider in the future. This did not seem to be the case when their mentors and supporters were other dean counterparts or their spouses.

In conclusion, even though these barriers at the institutional level did not target women specifically, they were real challenges that negatively impacted women's experiences and leadership aspirations. These findings suggest that institutions pay close attention to women's needs, characteristics, and experiences and address them accordingly for feasible results in improving their career advancement.

Challenges and barriers at the societal level seemed to shape challenges and barriers at the individual and institutional level. I realized that clashing leadership approaches to the norm increased the challenges and barriers for participants transitioning to the dean position. Nguyen (2014) also found that understanding the institutional culture was a challenge that participants faced when transitioning to the dean position even for internal hires. On the one hand, understanding the culture of an institution was a challenge at the institutional level, particularly for the external hires, since they needed to create a realistic understanding of the common and accepted approaches, practices, and values in that institution. Internal hires for the dean position

had the knowledge of an insider about the institutional culture. Therefore, their transitioning challenges seemed more manageable and predictable.

On the other hand, the "norm" approach was an authoritative, top-down approach, and the dean had always been a man in a women-dominated field. The assignment of a woman dean interrupted the norm twice. First due to her servant and collaborative leadership approach, and second, since she was a woman. If faculty and staff had experiences of a different norm, even outside higher education institutions, they would have at least tried to see some positive aspects in this leadership change. Therefore, I concluded that this barrier went beyond the institution level, to the perception of leadership that was rooted in the broader society. Findings suggest that experiences with diverse approaches to leadership would make faculty and staff members more flexible and adaptable to various leadership styles. However, experiences with various leadership approaches should not happen within short periods of times, as findings suggest this increases frustration and resistance to administrators' decisions and change in general.

Another challenge, which originated at the societal level, but was noticed at various ranks of leadership meetings was different communication styles between men and women. Some participants noticed that men communication characteristics, such as constant interruptions while talking, assertiveness and holding up the stage longer, and not caring about being polite in conversations, were common among men dominated meetings. Since the higher the rank of the leadership meetings, the more men dominated they were, this style of communication seemed more to be the norm. Women needed to adapt to it in order to be effective in their roles. I concluded that the origin of this factor may overlap at both societal and institutional level. At the societal level because communication styles develop overtime and since an early age. I realized

that this factor still may be displayed at institutional level particularly in those institutions where the higher ranks had not experienced as much gender diversity yet. Therefore, communication style had not changed as much as in lower-ranks meetings, in which women were the majority.

In addition, I noticed that participants perceived that similar thoughts or ideas were interpreted and/or valued differently based on the gender of the person stating them. Findings imply that, even though not explicitly stated, one's gender still plays a significant role in determining the value and viability of ideas and/or suggestions. Marquez (2014) also found that women' experience and intelligence were not equally respected as men's regardless of the administrative position they were holding. I concluded that questioning women's experience and knowledge, even though not overtly and in their presence, still affected women and pushed them to do more in order to convince others of their abilities and potential as leaders.

Societal challenges and barriers that were related directly to gender, such as the confusion of men donors on how to approach and behave with a young, women dean, and the active attempts of other women to stop participants advancement, had also been noted in the broad society in previous research by Van Nostrand (1993). Van Nostrand (1993) emphasized the role of women in creating road blocks for other women leaders, particularly when younger than forty years old. I came to the realization that changing these last two factors in particular, needed to be portrayed by changes in the society as well, so these cases would become the norm.

To conclude, findings from this study confirmed that women leaders in academia still experience subtle rather than overt barriers in their career progression. At the beginning, most of them denied having faced any barriers, particularly related to gender. Data analysis showed that they had experienced barriers and challenges with overlapping impacts at various levels. and the

impact of those challenges and barriers overlapped. I noticed that their (barriers and challenges') effect was manifested mostly at the individual level, and the women's hesitance to further advance in their career, particularly to senior positions, seemed like their personal choice. I concluded that being oblivious and in denial of the real factors shaping the challenges and barriers may not help improve the situation. Therefore, acknowledging barriers at each level may help respective stakeholders adjust approaches, practices, and the environment to better support women in their leadership aspirations.

Management Challenges

Unlike transitioning challenges and barriers that seemed to have negatively impacted participants' career advancement up to the dean position and their leadership aspirations for senior positions, management challenges were risk factors related to the high burnout rate among deans. I found that these factors were related mostly to the position itself rather than to gender. However, particularly due to other pressures and responsibilities women face outside the academic world, these factors may impact the burnout rate among women deans differently than among men deans. A comparison between the impact of such factors on burnout rate for men and women was not possible, since men were not included in this study. I found that these management challenges included factors related to the nature of the dean position, lack of familiarity with dean's roles and responsibilities, and lack of support for administrators.

First, comparing the stories of the participants, I noticed that certain risk factors impacted some participants more than others. I found that these factors increased the frustration and the overwhelmed feelings of the participants who were not as familiar with position's roles and responsibilities and/or who had not had similar decision-making experiences before, either first

hand, or from closely observing their supervisors in action. Unlike Dr. Merkel who had taken leadership opportunities at various levels from the very beginning of her career at her institution, all the other participants shared feelings of frustration when they felt unprepared to address various situations in the dean's position. I realized that six out of eight participants did not foresee the amount of personnel issues they had to address, and they were not prepared for that. Findings from this study complement findings from Nguyen's (2014) study on the impact that managing personnel issues had on the feeling of burnout among deans. It is significant to recognize these management challenges as it applies to a better understanding of the needs of potential candidates and relevant skills to be effective in the dean role.

Second, data analysis indicated that being positioned between higher administration and faculty, making tough decisions, and communicating such decisions seemed to be another high burnout factor for academic deans for the following two reasons. First, participants explained that coming from faculty ranks and empathizing with faculty appeared to make their position in the middle harder, particularly when communicating unfavorable decisions. Second, at the beginning, some of them felt they were not well prepared and lacked the communication and negotiation skills, as well as means to back up their decisions. Therefore, these participants pinpointed the significance of developing the skill to make tough decisions and communicate them in respectful ways while maintaining collegial relations. Participants found these skills important as they related to the position and their (participants') decision-making responsibilities. Similar to Nguyen (2014), adding responsibilities for which participants lacked knowledge and skills increased their frustration. Participants in Nguyen's (2014) study were of both genders, and a distinction between which participants felt more frustrated and unprepared

was not clear. I could not determine whether these skills and knowledge were lacking because of the gender of participants or due to lack of exposure to such situations only, or both. From the data analysis, I concluded that overcoming the frustration related to this point required time, training, experience, and maturity as a leader. This finding implies that institutions need to provide all these elements to "new" leaders to make them feel prepared for the leadership position they are responsible for at their institution.

Third, findings from this study complemented results from Marquez (2014) and Nguyen (2014) that changes in the higher education realm, such as reductions in financial resources, institutional restructuring, and shortness in staff, added to the amount of responsibilities in the dean's position over the years. Participants also blamed a lack of assistant deans for the increased responsibilities deans had within their areas of their responsibility. Findings from this study indicated various factors, such as lean budgets, requirements for small administration, and unsupportive faculty as the causes for an established, common practice of not having associate or assistant deans in the Beta System. Some participants reported that senior administration was unwilling to propose policies which would make deans' work more manageable due to pressures from one or more of the above mentioned factors.

Based on the findings, I came to the conclusion that the enormous amount of work that mid-level administrators in general, and deans in particular, had to deal with was the main factor that could lead to a high burnout rate among deans in the Beta System. However, the effect of this factor on the burnout feelings increased in the presence of other factors including pressing deadlines. Findings indicated that hand in hand with the overload, pressing deadlines increased the frustration and the pressure deans were constantly experiencing. Reviewed literature has also

indicated the negative effect of overload on administrators' stress, well-being, and job satisfaction (Marquez, 2014; Nguyen, 2014; Steward, 2012). It is relevant to understand the factors that determine administrators' stress, their personal well-being, and job-satisfaction since all these factors shape one's motivation and job performance.

Finally, as part of the nature of the administrative positions, this study restated that isolation makes administrative positions look less appealing (Sobers, 2014; Steward, 2012). I found that isolation resulted partially due to the overload and partially due to the physical space assigned for administration offices. Based on participants' stories, I found that isolation of administrative positions, which participants perceived to be higher at senior level positions, was a discouraging factor when considering senior positions. Findings from this study added to the current research regarding potential factors increasing the isolation of administrative positions, particularly senior positions. Hence, institutions may focus on addressing these factors among others and make senior positions more appealing.

In conclusion, all these management challenges and risk factors seemed to be related more to the position rather than gender. Overload seemed to be one of the main factors leading to burnout feelings among deans. Since administrative tasks required a lot of time and due to responsibilities outside academia, overload in particular may affect women deans differently than men.

Protective and Compensatory Factors

The third research question focused on the protective and compensatory factors. Unlike other studies based on Resilience theory, findings from this study indicated protective and compensatory factors beyond participant's individual level. It is significant to identify protective

factors beyond the individual level, so the impact of the changes may address a broader range of needs where all aspiring women leaders may experience success and growth as leaders.

Protective Factors

Participants in this study emphasized the impact of protective factors in minimizing the barriers and challenges they might have experienced otherwise. According to Zimmerman and Arunkumar (1994, p. 6), protective factors also interact with risk factor(s) in reducing the probability of negative outcomes, by moderating the effect of the exposure to risk and modifying the response to a risk factor. However, a general perceived weakness of the Protective Factor Model is the difficulty to determine which protective factor goes with which risk factors (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). The protective factors reported by the participants seemed related to reducing the intensity of unique barriers and challenges they experienced. These protective factors include: (a) leadership skill set, (b) support systems, and (c) gender equity. The impact of each protective factor on potential risk factors is discussed below.

Comparing the stories of the participants, I noticed that participants displayed possession of leadership and managerial skills at various levels. I realized that the broader and the greater the skill set was, the smoother the transition from faculty to administration and between other administrative positions. The participants who assessed themselves high enough on these skills stated/claimed that they (skills) helped them (participants) in their transition. Therefore, I put having these skills into the protective factor category. I also acknowledged the fact that the development of such skills resulted from being an insider, which allowed for better knowledge of institutional practices, processes, and culture, facilitated establishing trust relationships between faculty and administrators, and increased the probability for familiarity with the position's roles.

Nguyen (2014) also concluded that knowledge of institutional culture and familiarity with position's roles and responsibilities, as well as exposure to relevant information about critical issues specific to their institution, college, or department smoothed the transition and management challenges for participants. I came to the conclusion that all the above-mentioned factors increased women's self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy as leaders. Identifying factors that promote women's self-esteem and self-efficacy, therefore their emotional intelligence (Steward, 2012), provides insight into potential solutions to their reluctance to apply for leadership positions.

Another factor related to being at one institution was participants' opportunity and ability to establish trust relationships with faculty and demonstrate their leadership abilities. I realized that strong relationships with faculty members reduced faculty members' opposition to participants' advancement in administrative roles. In addition, I found that demonstrated performance in various positions, strong relationships, and internal institutional knowledge garnered participants support and encouragement from their supervisors and champions and put participants at an advantage relative to external candidates, particularly in times that did not allow for a learning curve. Understanding factors that facilitate women's transition between administrative roles and their promotion provides helpful insights to women aspiring for leadership positions, as it may save them energy and discouragement in their journey.

In addition, I found that having the ability to accurately assess the time and fit to the position participants were applying for seemed to have protected participants from unnecessary challenges and barriers. Sometimes, the appropriate time seemed to have been an external positive factor rather than an individual assessment, such as the EEOA (Equal Employment

Opportunity Act). However, I acknowledged the fact that unlike in other studies, participants did not seem to attribute their success exclusively to good luck and/or proper timing (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Rivers & Barret, 2013). This study showed that women leaders have developed coping strategies to minimize challenges and take advantage of time factors in their favor. The fact that they did not attribute their success completely to luck and/or proper timing, demonstrates women's ability for self-assessment. I also concluded that women tend to be over cautious before applying for positions because the glass cliff perception was still present particularly among women faculty members. It is important for women leaders to better understand and assess their leadership potential and their leadership environment, in order to make informed decisions.

Another significant protective factor was related to the systems of support participants had in place. I noticed that all participants appreciated the support of advisors, mentors, and supervisors throughout their careers in academia. Findings from this study indicated that participants who had support systems in place felt more confident in their career undertakings. I realized that the support, advice, and encouragement of advisors was critical, not only during participants' graduate studies, but also in their later academic career as leaders.

I found that mentors and supporters helped participants by (a) encouraging and guiding them in their academic and leadership career and (b) providing guidance and mapping out steps in their professional advancement process. Sobers (2014) and Marquez (2014) also found mentors, advisors, and supporters, either formal or informal, to have a significant role in helping women overcome challenges and roadblocks they experienced in their career advancement. I realized that many of the participants' main supporters and champions were their direct supervisors. Therefore, their encouragement and support had a significant impact on participants'

willingness to transition to administration. I came to the conclusion that regardless of their experience and skills, seven out of eight participants needed confirmation of their potential as leaders, particularly early in their academic career. In addition, I realized that the impact of supervisors' support was more evident and immediate in participants' advancement relative to mentors and supporters outside the institution. Therefore, it is important for aspiring women leaders to recognize the impact of their supervisors, both as mentors and supporters, on their career progression. It is also significant for institutions to explore and understand the mentoring and supportive role that supervisors may play in the personal and professional growth of potential leaders as well as supervisors' training needs in order to better support potential leaders and address their needs and challenges.

Findings from this study also indicated that spouses/partners' support and mentorship was crucial in participants' career advancement. Similar to Marquez (2014) and Sobers (2014), spouses' help in taking a fair share of family responsibilities had a critical impact on participants' work-life balance and personal well-being, since they did not experience as much pressure to choose between time to dedicate to work and other family responsibilities. Therefore, I came to the conclusion that participants were successful because of the ongoing support of their spouses, in addition to having a great work ethic, determination, and individual ability to work long hours. It is significant for women to learn that a fair sharing of family responsibilities between partners may be feasible when there is willingness. It also reminds the institutions the significance of having a balanced personal-work life, in terms of workload and share of responsibilities among leadership positions.

Last but not least, I realized that the absence of disparate treatment and/or discrimination due to gender had saved participants from road blocks related to gender. In alignment with reviewed literature, findings suggest that in addition to gender, other identities may influence women's advancement, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, socio-economical class, and sexual orientation (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Therefore, I concluded that gender alone did not seem to directly inhibit women's advancement.

In addition, I came to the conclusion that equal treatment and fair listening to women's ideas and suggestions seemed to have encouraged women's aspirations for administrative positions. I also found that certain campuses had strategically planned to support women leaders and allocated funds for their leadership training. Unlike Sobers (2014), findings from this study suggest that the support women received, the fair hearings, and empowerment they had experienced while serving at various administrative positions had left no room for feelings of being a token woman or placed on the glass cliff. Nevertheless, it needs to be clarified that participants' race in addition to gender, in Sobers (2014) study might have revealed different findings. Participants in Sobers' study were women of color and listed feelings of being a token woman as a risk factor. I came to the conclusion that a good number of opportunities had been provided in certain campuses for aspiring women to become successful administrators. This finding is encouraging for women to overcome feelings of hesitance and reluctance and apply for leadership positions in academia. It is also significant for institutions as it may provide them with models of reaching gender equity in leadership.

In conclusion, all the above mentioned protective factors had tackled critical aspects in the career advancement of women in academia, and had eliminated certain barriers or reduced

them into challenges. This study added to the literature about resilience theory and leadership because it pinpointed protective and compensatory factors at all levels, not only at individual level, even though resilience is a personal trait.

Compensatory Factors

Unlike protective factors, compensatory factors act upon the outcome independently of the risk factors (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). Some of these factors seemed to impact protective factors at personal and institutional levels. Whereas other compensatory factors listed provided insights into coping strategies helpful to overcome challenges and risk factors as well as to develop their resilience. Findings form this study suggested that institutions may provide for an optimal environment for compensatory factors to occur and/or be promoted. Compensatory factors included: (a) promoters of protective factors, and (b) contributors to determination/endurance/resilience.

Compensatory factors that promoted protective factors included: (a) developing leadership and management skills; (b) exploring opportunities to expand networks of mentors; (c) revisiting work approaches; and (d) authentic and transparent leadership.

First, in this study, I found that seven out of eight participants were aware of shortcomings in their leadership and management skills. I realized that they were all curious and willing to learn new skills; took initiatives to attain training; inquired about leadership theory and practice either through educational graduate programs or leadership institutes; took full advantage of the time they served in the interim position in order to develop the skills they deemed critical in that role; learned from their own and others experiences; and finally reached out for support and guidance. I acknowledged that all the above steps were applauded,

encouraged, and supported by participants' supervisors and senior administration on various campuses. I found that supervisors' encouragement for participants to attain relevant trainings and develop such skills had a positive impact on the participants' self-confidence, trust in leadership potential, and leadership aspirations. Ngyuen (2014) also found that a learning curve of new skills was perceived crucial in transitioning to every new position and allowing time for new leaders to develop and/or strengthen necessary skills that promoted participants' confidence and self-efficacy and reduced their stress and feelings of burnout. I came to the conclusion that both new leaders and institutions may benefit from assessing leaders' skill needs at various administrative levels and provide training and time to develop such skills.

Second, I found that taking advantage of HERS (Higher Education Resource Services), the Leadership Institute offered by the Beta System as well as other workshops and opportunities to expand participants' networks of advisors and mentors provided participants with resources of guidance, advise, and access to different perspectives on certain challenges and issues they were facing. I also found that their closest group of mentors were other deans in the Beta System due to their knowledge of the system's policies, structures, union agreements, and practices. However, I noticed that participants were involved more in informal rather than formal mentoring, which was possible in cases of well-established trust relationships between mentors and mentees. Participants who took advantage of informal mentoring had been at the same institution for at least 15 years and had already established trust relationships. Nguyen (2014) found that informal mentoring was more effective than formal mentoring, particularly due to the mismatch in characteristics, personalities, and/or values between mentors and mentees. Therefore, I came to the conclusion that informal mentoring seemed to work well for most of the

participants in this study. Formal mentoring programs, on the other hand, would particularly be helpful to leaders who had recently joined campuses, as in the case of Dr. Samuel. Formal mentoring would be beneficial to new leaders if it focuses on developing skills to establish mentoring relationships, approaches to acquire advice, and expand the network of potential mentors rather than assigning formal mentors.

Another factor resulting in developing and/or expanding management skills had to do with participants' awareness about leadership environment, the zone of impact and influence of their roles, and their ability to assess the effectiveness of their approaches in addressing various matters at hand. I also noticed that participants who were aware of "not liked" feelings developed skills to avoid such feelings and therefore, improved their personal well-being, their performance, and their job-satisfaction. Kellerman and Rhode (2007) emphasized the role of women's ability to accurately assess the leadership environment and the effectiveness of their approaches on their perception as leaders. Therefore, I came to the conclusion that tailoring one's leadership and management skills to the uniqueness of the environment and being open-minded to better understand that environment facilitated participants' work and improved their performance, while maintaining healthy relationships with one's self and others. This finding is important for women new leaders as it pinpoints relevant aspects of leadership which may make a real difference in the experience of a leader when handled effectively. It is also relevant for institutions since it may guide them to some of the needs of the new leaders.

In addition, I found that leaders' transparency, consistency, and their collaborative leadership approach, which provided opportunities for faculty and other constituents to provide input on relevant matters, were appreciated by faculty and staff. Consequently, the leader's

decisions were challenged less due to a better understanding of the process and its outcome. Understanding and practicing these elements of leadership approaches that increase leaders and consequently institutions' efficacy in reaching their goals benefits institutions since smoother processes require less energy, time, and expenses to reach a goal. It also benefits individual leaders, because it reduces opposition to their decisions, and increases constituents trust in their leader.

Finally, I noticed that the feminine approaches of focusing on building strong relationships with faculty colleagues and maintaining that rapport when in leadership positions was helpful in avoiding transitioning challenges from faculty to administration. In addition, applying elements of the transformational leadership approach, such as nurturing interpersonal relationships, showing care and compassion for others (Vinkenburg et al., 2011), showing more concern for people, being a good listener, and earning constituents' trust (Pounder & Coleman, 2002), and focusing on embracing multiple perspectives in leadership practice (Kezar et al., 2006; Vinkenburg et al., 2011) seemed to have facilitated career advancement and experiences in leadership positions through the positive impact such elements had on constituents and overall climate in respective colleges and departments. Vinkenburg et al. (2011) also found that the communal behavior women leaders exhibit has a positive effect on followers. However, I also realized that participants who followed a balanced approach between people and a results orientation felt comfortable and efficient in their roles. Reviewed literature also supports the finding that a more balanced approach between focusing on building and maintaining relationships and being results oriented is a crucial balance in being effective at various leadership positions (Vinkenburg et al., 2011). Therefore, it is important for aspiring leaders of

both genders to understand and accept the significance of reaching a balance between results and human relations in leadership, since these sides both complement each-other and may guide the leader's success. I came to the conclusion that women do not necessarily need to quit women leadership traits to be successful in leadership. Instead, they may use those traits to their advantage, particularly in cultures where similar values and traits are promoted.

In conclusion, all the above mentioned factors seemed to have positively impacted and strengthened other protective factors, which in turn reduced the effect of barriers and risk factors on participants' career advancement and experiences in current leadership roles.

The second group of compensatory factors included factors that promoted women's determination, endurance, adaptability, and consequently their resilience. I noticed two subgroups of factors in this category: (a) elements that kept them grounded in face of adversity; and (b) means to reach a work-life balance.

First, I noticed that appreciation for education and the positive impact that leaders had on students' lives had increased participants' persistence and endurance even in cases of adversity and kept them motivated to continue to serve in those positions and/or aspire for positions where the impact on students' lives might have been greater. Sobers (2014) also found that giving back to the community, or the impact that mid-level student affairs administrators' jobs had on students' lives helped them persevere in times of adversity and overcome risk factors. Therefore, I came to the conclusion that appreciating and celebrating the successes of positively impacting students' lives may improve women's internal motivation, give them a "purpose for their leadership" (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014), and may increase resilience in overcoming challenges

and risk factors, particularly the management ones. It is important for institutions to notice and celebrate such successes more often, so women feel empowered and valued.

Second, I realized that personal and family values, such as determination, tenacity, strong work ethic, and a positive attitude promoted participants' endurance and ability to work towards reaching their personal and professional goals, which in turn helped them successfully address overload issues in a dean's role. I noticed that participants whose determination, grit, and work-ethic was encouraged by parents at an early age were less stressed out by challenges and risk factors. Sobers (2014) also concluded that those values which were either nurtured at an early age in their families, or developed later in life through experience, had a significant impact on keeping women leaders grounded. I concluded that believing in women's abilities and potential and challenging them from an early age may increase their confidence in their abilities and encourage them to take on new challenges and diligently work towards reaching them. This finding is important for all educational levels and workplaces as they are raising and educating future leaders.

Another factor that increased participants' adaptability, endurance, and consequently resilience was related to coping strategies participants had developed towards a healthy work-life balance. I noticed that coping strategies such as setting boundaries between personal and work time and scheduling time to exercise and re-energize reduced the stress and the probability for burnout, particularly from overload. Findings implied setting a routine with time built in for exercising and/or re-energizing activities usually early in the morning in order to maintain a positive mood and tone over the day. In addition, I found that participants with more experience in administrative positions were better at prioritizing and strategic time management, which had

a positive impact on reducing pressures of approaching deadlines and maximizing participants' effectiveness. Therefore, I concluded that someone's ability to prioritize and effectively manage their time may improve with experience and deeper knowledge of positions' expectations and responsibilities. Since prioritizing and time-management are skills that may be taught and seem to be essential skills for mid-level administrators, it is important for individuals and institutions to focus on developing and practicing such skills, as well as familiarizing new mid-level administrators of their responsibilities by providing a specific guideline/timeline of re-occurring projects and nature.

Even though these strategies seemed to be related more to the individual rather than the institution, their impact would have been different without the support of higher administration in those institutions. This study showed the significant impact of the institutional support to women leaders in their professional and leadership growth. The above mentioned compensatory factors promoted participants' endurance, adaptability, and self-confidence in their effectiveness as leaders, and consequently their resilience while in various leadership positions.

In conclusion, findings from this study indicated that the pipeline up to mid-level positions is not blocked with overt barriers for women. However, inhibiting factors, of which participants initially seemed unaware, negatively influenced their decisions particularly for senior leadership positions. Findings indicated that regardless of the level those barriers laid, most of them rooted in internalized gender stereotypes, roles, and gender beliefs. While risk factors seemed to be related more to the position than gender, their impact on women progression might be different compared to men due to other responsibilities and roles women hold outside academia.

Data analysis also revealed factors that had protected women from barriers and risk factors and also compensatory factors that had further promoted their resilience in case of overwhelming feelings and adversity. I came to the conclusion that institutions may play a significant role in promoting protective and compensatory factors, and in adjusting the higher education environment with women leaders and their needs in mind. Regardless of the positive initiatives some institutions had undertaken, findings suggested that such practices and initiatives need to be institutionalized for maximizing the positive effects.

Pipeline Theory and Women's Advancement

Findings from this study showed that the pipeline for women in academia is not clogged with overt barriers, which may block women's advancement. Nevertheless, subtle barriers, such as gender stereotypes and gender roles, seemed to still be present and significantly shaping and/or inhibiting women's career progression. In addition, the pipeline theory fails to explain women's hesitance to apply for leadership positions and their slow movement to the top. According to the Pipeline theory, the more women join the workforce at the lower, entry level and become part of the candidate pool for higher leadership positions, the more women will be promoted to leadership positions and reach parity with men (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014; White, 2005). Even though, some participants in this study confirmed that women were the majority at faculty ranks in their disciplines, since their fields were women dominated fields, women and men had not reached parity in leadership positions at various levels, let alone senior positions.

Second, I found that women hesitated to apply for leadership positions due to gender roles and responsibilities outside academia, the expectation to act according to assigned gender roles in academia regardless of their position. Participants also shared that administrative

positions were time consuming and did not allow time for their scholarship, which was a crucial element in their tenure. Even though the tenure process was not the focus of this study in particular, participants stated that the tenure process restrained them from applying for leadership positions early in their academic career. This may also be true for men, but women are put to an unequal hardship to get tenure due to the previously listed factors. Since, the Pipeline theory cannot assure that all factors impacting advancement for men and women are kept constant, by implication, parity cannot be reached.

The Pipeline theory presumes that men and women have or can develop more or less the same qualifications (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014). Even though both men and women may have the same educational credentials, some of the participants shared that they lacked exposure to leadership, leadership experience, and skills, which would put them at a disadvantage compared to their men counterparts. Vinkenburg et al., (2011) concluded that due to mobilizing with the same gender, men leaders would promote men more than women, and they are more likely to provide leadership opportunities to men than women. Lack of experience and skills could explain participants' hesitation to apply for leadership positions even to the rank closest to faculty positions, such as department chair.

Second, this theory assumes that gender bias does not exist (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014). While most of the participants did not believe that they had faced barriers due to their gender, two of them shared their frustration with people of both genders who either were confused about how to work with women in dean's position, or actively tried to halt women's advancement to dean-level positions.

Third, the Pipeline theory assumes that organizational structures equally favor men and women (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014, p. 23). Participants shared that despite the efforts that institutions were putting forth to promote women, the way academia is set up fails to fully consider aspiring women's needs. None of the institutions in this study had considered the fact that men may be more comfortable mentoring other men than women. Since men who had always dominated in leadership positions did not have those needs, these institutions failed to provide equitable opportunities for women to be promoted and aspire for senior positions. Therefore, women may find it harder to find mentors, which in turn affects various aspects in their advancement as shown in this study's findings.

Finally, this theory suggests that women need to be patient and gender parity in leadership is just a matter of time (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014, p. 23). Sadly, the majority of the participants in this study were not interested in senior positions at the time of the interviews. It is important to admit that, even though all participants were part of leadership at the decanal level, six out of eight of them were invited to apply for that position. However, they were not necessarily waiting for someone to promote them to senior positions, so they could contribute towards reaching the parity at that level, too. They shared that they did not find senior leadership positions interesting, particularly due to their own lack of internal drive and these positions' isolated nature.

Based on the findings from this study, I concluded that the pipeline may not be overtly clogged. Rather it is leaking and obstructed due to subtle barriers which make it harder for women to advance to higher level positions. Keohane (2003) also concluded that the pipeline was obstructed by subtle, but pervasive barriers blocking women's advancement. Therefore,

institutions need to focus on addressing these subtle barriers, which may be harder to address compared to the overt ones. In addition, this study showed that women leaders may be oblivious to the subtle barriers and do not necessarily take steps to overcome those barriers. Therefore, their advancement may be slowed down, unless institutions take further steps to directly name and address those barriers.

Resilience Theory and Women's Career Progression

Looking at the findings through the lenses of Resilience Theory provided insight into the approaches that women leaders use to deal with barriers, challenges, and risk factors. It also provided valuable insights on how healthy and supportive climates minimized the impact of the barriers and risk factors. Even though Allison (2011) describes resilience as "a personal quality that predisposes individuals to bounce back in the face of loss" (p. 79), many contextual factors and organizational cultures (Wolff, 1995) define and shape the resilience of a leader. Participants in this study identified protective factors which were mostly at the institutional level including encouragement to apply for leadership positions, institutional funded training for women leaders, time to get familiar with positions' roles and responsibilities, and gender equity as relevant factors in building their resilience.

Allison (2011) found that similar risk factors may impact different leaders in unlike ways due to differences in personality traits and skills, as well as other contextual factors. Participants in this study who believed they had either innate or developed determination and grit were not impacted by challenges as negatively as other participants who believed they still needed to further develop their determination. For instance, Dr. Merkel and Dr. Stewart, who were used to working long hours and reported owning an innate determination nurtured by their parents since

an early age, seemed to be better off despite the immense amount of work they had to perform in their positions. Other participants who did not believe they had the skills, determination, and drive to undertake leadership positions were reluctant even to apply for those positions. However, with the support of their supervisors, supporters, mentors, and their institutions, they managed to develop the skills, determination, and endurance they needed to be successful in their respective roles.

Findings from this study revealed the actions participants were taking to build their resilience although they did not use this term to describe themselves. For instance, Dr. Nelson and Dr. Merkel recognized both opportunities and problems and worked proactively to address them. They also made sure they left doors open for future opportunities. Working proactively to address challenges and issues involved asking for the input of various constituents. Allison (2011) also noted that resilient leaders recognized both opportunities and disasters and were engaged in receiving input from various perspectives.

In addition, participants shared that they tried to make time for their personal renewal, but that was much harder for women deans than men deans. Even though the amount of work was the same for deans of both genders, due to other responsibilities and demands from outside academia, women deans could not find sufficient time to renew their energies. I suggest that institutions need to consider providing workshops on these healthy practices and allow the time for these practices to take place. While resilient leaders take care of business and themselves simultaneously (Allison, 2011), participants in this study were constantly under the pressure of taking care in their roles and seemed to prioritize business over themselves. I concluded that both

institutions and leaders need to consider this element and provide means to reach a healthy work-personal balance.

In conclusion, even though resilience is a personal characteristic that all leaders need to develop, institutions may provide encouraging and supporting environments and cultures to promote leader's resilience.

Recommendations for Practice and Further Research

Based on the findings revealed from the data analysis of participants' perceptions about their leadership experiences in academia, barriers and risk factors they had encountered, and protective and compensatory factors they deemed relevant throughout their professional advancement in leadership, the following recommendations are provided for practice at women's personal level and at the institutional level.

Recommendations at Personal Level

This study showed that exposure to leadership opportunities at any age, but particularly at an early age, increased women's self-confidence in their leadership abilities. Findings suggested that experience in projects where women had opportunities to provide input and share their perspectives would increase their self-awareness about their leadership potential and spark their interests in administration. Therefore, women need to get exposed and involved in various leadership projects, starting at an early stage in their academic career, including graduate studies.

Second, this study found that being authentic, transparent, and consistent, and combining good listening skills, nurturing relationships, and caring nature with determination, self-confidence, and assertiveness, minimized barriers and helped participants overcome challenges.

Consequently, while in a leadership position, women need to be authentic, stay true to their own values, and combine feminine traits with assertiveness, determination, and perseverance.

Third, findings from this study suggested that the impact on students' lives was a relevant factor that kept participants constantly grounded and elevated their persistence. Better policies and practices may be developed with input from women administrators coming from faculty ranks, who highly value the policies' impact on students' lives. Therefore, women need to consider administrative positions where the impact on students' lives is significant.

Fourth, this study found that gender stereotypes are still inhibiting women from taking further steps in their career advancement. Even though overcoming internalized beliefs needs time, women need to question and challenge beliefs such as the need for perfection and proven excellence. Both women and institutions need to take a closer look at the promotion practices at respective institutions, in order to evaluate the presence or lack thereof of gender stereotypes in those practices. Such assessments would facilitate women in developing a plan to strategically progress through the ranks and break those stereotypes. In addition, institutions may use such assessments to identify challenges women may be facing if such stereotypes are present and address them accordingly.

Fifth, findings from this study reported that clashing leadership approaches between the new leaders and the ones with which faculty and staff were familiar, increased the levels of stress and feelings of burnout. Women need to assess institutional and/or department climate and culture before and while serving in leadership positions. Such assessment may provide potential strategies which would be more effective for reaching the desired goals with more cooperation and less confrontation.

Sixth, I found that since overload was one of the main challenges in the dean's position, participants who had developed prioritizing and time management skills did not feel as overwhelmed as others by the overload. Consequently, I suggest that women get trained at such skills early in their career. Better prioritizing and time-management would help women with maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Finally, this study found that women who took advantage of potential opportunities for growth, regardless of the time they had spent in academia, had a smoother transition to administration and considered themselves sufficiently prepared for such positions. I suggest that women invest in their professional growth in academia starting at the beginning of the academic career and take more initiative to leadership positions.

Recommendations at Institutional Level

This study showed that the participants' institutions had made improvements in women's representation in leadership. However, there are still practices/approaches that need to be improved to meet women's needs and help them reach their full potential as leaders.

First, this study found that the majority of the participants, at the beginnings of their administrative career needed external encouragement to step out of their comfort zone of teaching. Therefore, academic advisors and supervisors need to be trained in identifying potential women leaders and encouraging them to further develop their interests in leadership and increase their self-confidence in their administrative and leadership abilities.

Second, I found that participants who were familiar with position's roles and expectations were more confident in dean's role compared to other participants who felt unprepared. Therefore, I suggest that institutions provide opportunities for women to get exposed at least to

the closest administrative roles and respective role responsibilities. Such opportunities may be voluntary, in-house workshops, tailored to the needs of the institution. Even though voluntary, institutions may provide incentives for participating in those workshops. In addition, since participants mentioned lack of time and about responsibilities outside academia, institutions need to consider the time and format of the workshops in order to maximize outcomes.

Third, findings from this study revealed the discouraging impact of position's unattractiveness and isolation on women's aspirations for senior positions. Participants' perceptions of isolation seemed to increase towards the top of the leadership ranks. Institutions may make the senior leadership positions more attractive and less isolated by: (a) creating opportunities and available time to meet with colleagues outside formal meetings; (b) providing administrative support staff to reduce the deans' overload, so time to connect with faculty, colleagues, staff, and students may become available.

Fourth, this study showed that constant changes in administration personnel and consequently lack of consistency in leadership approaches, and decision-making processes, lowered faculty and staff's willingness to provide input to various matters, and increased resistance to newly assigned leaders. In turn, leader's stress and burnout level increased. For these reasons, institutions would be better to avoid constant changes in administration and decision-making processes when possible.

Fifth, I found that it takes time for constituents to figure out approaches for how to work with women leaders. Hence, institutions may need to increase the number of women leaders at all levels, so faculty, staff, community, and interested sponsors get more comfortable with what may soon be the new norm in leadership. In turn, this would save women leaders the frustration

and dilemma created when the previously mentioned constituents have to report or provide recommendations to a women supervisor.

Sixth, this study found that women who had participated in various leadership training considered themselves better prepared to serve in administrative roles. Nevertheless, they emphasized the significance of in-house trainings particularly related to the state of the institution, pertinent information for each position, and current issues that institutions may be experiencing at the time. Accordingly, institutions may provide in-house training tailored to the institutional needs and financial support for leadership programs at a broader level, such as state, regional, or national level programs.

Seventh, findings from this study suggest that higher education administration is challenging for men too, but it impacts women differently than men due to social and cultural gender roles. Consequently, institutions should consider the presence and impact of gender roles on the lives of women administrators, in order to design and implement practices and policies which would respect women's personal time, increase their opportunities for a better presence in family life, and contribute to a healthy work-life balance. In addition, this study found that, even in cases when such practices existed, participants' knowledge about those practices varied. Two participants coming from the same institution had different perceptions of such practices. Therefore, institutions need to consider institutionalizing these practices and clearly stating them. In addition, institutions need to continuously inform all stakeholders about those policies and encourage administrators, particularly women, to take advantage of those policies and practices.

Finally, findings from this study revealed the considerable effect of overload in increasing burnout rate among women deans. Institutions need to consider potential approaches

to provide additional administrative support for all deans across the Beta System, in order to address the issue of overload and reduce the effect of a high burnout rate for deans.

In conclusion, higher education institutions may have a significant impact in improving women's representation at all levels of leadership, including in senior positions. Higher education institutions may create a supportive and encouraging environment for women leaders and reduce challenges and barriers at both the individual and institutional level.

Chapter V: Summary

Recommendations for Future Research

The focus of this study was to explore the experiences of women leaders in mid-level positions in academia. Even though all women, academic deans in the Beta System received an invitation to participate in this study, the final group of participants turned out homogenous in regard to race and age. All participants were identified as Caucasian and between 50-65 years of age. Based on the findings from their perceptions, experiences, barriers and risk factors, and protective and compensatory factors, higher education and women leaders may benefit from further researching on the following categories:

Since participants in this study were all self-identified at the 50-65 years of age and were all administrators at the mid-level, expanding the scope of the study with women leaders at a younger age and those who are serving at various administrative levels, including entry level administrative positions would be beneficial. The results from those studies may be analyzed for perceived barriers and risks, and protective and compensatory factors at various levels. Those results may bring insights regarding women's aspirations for higher leadership positions or lack thereof.

In addition, participants were all self-identified as Caucasian and of the American nationality. It would be valuable to replicate the study focusing on the experiences and perceptions of women leaders who self-identify as non-Caucasian and/or non-American nationality and serve in mid-level positions. Those results could complement the picture of the experiences of women in mid-level positions in academia.

This study focused only on women at mid-level positions, however, findings showed that risk factors were more related to the position than to gender. Therefore, it would be useful to expand the scope of the study to include men deans and consider the challenges they may face while in a decanal position. A comparison of the results of the two studies would further deepen the understanding of risk factors and burnout rate among deans and the relation between gender and burnout.

Finally, replicate the study in five years to evaluate the developments, improvements in practices and policies, and their impact on women leaders' representation in higher administrative levels. The results from the new study would help evaluate the impact of current practices and policies in (dis)encouraging and (un)supporting women to serve in leadership positions and identify potential improvements in policies and practices.

Limitations

According to Roberts (2004), limitations are features and/or areas of the study over which the researcher has no control. Roberts stated that limitations may marginalize the researcher's ability to generalize findings of the study. The following list presents the limitations identified in this study.

- This study focused on the experiences of women deans in four-year-public institutions in a highly unionized system of colleges and universities. Consequently, the study findings may not be generalized and/or transferred to four-year private institutions, two-year community colleges, and/or institutions in which union activity is less pronounced.

- Since all the women deans who agreed to participate in this study were self-identified as Caucasians, of American ethnicity and nationality, and between 50-65 years of age, findings on their perceptions, barriers and risk factors, and protective and compensatory factors may not be generalized for women deans of color, of another nationality and/or ethnicity other than American, and of a younger age than 50 years old.
- The study focused only on academic deans. Hence, the perceptions and experiences of non-academic, women leaders may vary from the ones of the participants in this study.
- The response rate to the invitations for participation in this study was eight out of sixteen. The perceptions and experiences of the other women deans may be different than those presented in the findings of this study.
- Due to the self-reported nature of data collected through personal interviews, a potential of bias on participants' side exists. They may have been selective in their memories, and/or reporting of their perceptions and experiences in regard to barriers and risk factors.

Summary

This study portrayed the perceptions, barriers and risk factors, and protective and compensatory factors that women deans in four-year-public institutions in the Beta System had experienced in their career advancement and while serving in mid-level leadership positions. The participants revealed their perceptions about their experiences as they progressed through their academic career. Their perceptions about barriers and challenges varied due to their unique

experiences in academia. Their knowledge about family friendly policies and practices in place was inconsistent even within the same institution. All the participants agreed that overload, the position's nature, and lack of administrative support increase stress levels and burnout rates among deans in the Beta System. Participants explained that these risk factors impact women deans differently than men deans due to other responsibilities and gender roles women typically comply with. Therefore, institutions still need to consider gender in developing policies and practices that would equally encourage and support women leaders at all levels.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction:

This research study aims to explore the experiences of women leaders in mid-level positions, particularly focusing on the challenges and barriers they experience while advancing in these positions. It also aims to explore the factors and resources these women found helpful in overcoming the challenges and barriers they face.

You will be asked eight main questions which include sub-questions. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions and your identity will be kept confidential. Please ask for clarification of any questions that may sound unclear. Your answers to all questions are important; however, if there are any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering please let me know.

Is it Ok, if this interview is digitally recorded? (Yes/No-circle one). During the interview I will be taking notes and perhaps ask follow-up questions. You will be given an opportunity to review the transcript of your interview. A copy of the complete study is available to you upon request.

Interview-Guiding Questions

1. Can you talk about your career progression from the time you entered the academic profession? (Roles, positions you have held).
2. How would you describe your experience as a women leader moving into this position?
    a) What were your expectations about your roles in this position?
    b) What actual roles do you fill in this position?
    c) How are your perceptions about your experience similar and/or different now compared to when you started in this position?
3. What barriers have you encountered while advancing in your career?
    a. How would you describe your experience in academia from the time you first started until where you are now?
    b. What aspired you towards leadership positions?

c. What factors did you perceive as negatively impacting your advancement (lack of leadership skills, lack of mentors, lack of supporters, not suitable leadership style, lack of training, gender stereotypes, gender roles).

4. What challenges/barriers have you experienced while advancing to leadership positions? (lack of mentors/sponsors, lack of educational credentials, lack of support/encouragement, family-work life balance, chilly institutional cultures)
   a) How do you perceive gender affecting each barrier/challenge you have faced?
5. What challenges/barriers have you experienced while holding this leadership position? (unexpected roles, overload, relationships with faculty and supervisors, accepted/unaccepted leadership style, navigating institutional culture, creating coalitions, negotiations).
6. What factors do you think minimized the challenges you have experienced?
   a) How would you describe the impact of these factors?
7. What factors helped you develop skills and identify strategies to overcome challenges?
   a) What strategies did you deem effective in overcoming challenges and barriers?
   b) What skills did you find helpful in overcoming challenges?
   c) What factors influenced your determination, endurance, adaptability, recuperability? (supporters, mentors, sponsors, trainings, family support, cultural values)?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share with me that you think is relevant to the topic?

Appendix B: Consent Form for a Non-Medical Research Study

Title of the Study: Exploring the Experiences of Women Leaders in Mid-level Position in Academia.

Consent to Participate in Research

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Eglantina Cenolli, a doctoral student in the Higher Education Administration program at St. Cloud State University. The results of this study will contribute to her dissertation requirements for an Ed.D degree from this institution. You were selected as a potential participant for this study because you meet the following criteria: a) you are serving at a mid-level position in a four-year public institution in the MnSCU system; and b) you have been working in this capacity for at least 3 years.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of women leaders while advancing in their careers, the barriers and challenges they encounter, and the skills and strategies they have developed to successfully overcome those challenges.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study you would be asked to:
Agree to meet with the researcher for a face to face interview, which may take about an hour. The interview will be conducted at a mutually agreed location that is convenient and safe for you. You will also be able to set an interview time that is convenient for you. If you agree to have the interview digitally recorded, the interview will be recorded. While I prefer having the interview recorded so I can stay as close to your words as possible, I will be taking handwritten notes in case you would not choose the recording option. You will also be asked whether you agree to review the transcript of your interview for accuracy.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

The potential risks that you may encounter are that you may have to recall difficult situations you have experienced in your leadership advancement, which may involve conflict and situations you may not be comfortable recalling. An external reviewer will review the transcribed interviews for cross checking the codes and emerging themes, but the reviewer will not have access to any identifiable information.

To minimize this risk, you may refuse any questions that you feel uncomfortable with, or withdraw from the study at any time. Regarding the second risk, each participant will be given a pseudonym and a different name to their respective institutions in the transcript of the interviews, to eliminate any risks of relating the information with the participants.

The demographic information will be kept in a separate file in a computer that is password protected to which only the main researcher will have access. The original interviews will also be stored in a password protected file and will be destroyed three years after this study is completed.

Potential Benefits for Participation

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the research study. However, the findings of this study may significantly benefit women leaders and higher education institutions. The findings will contribute in the literature about women and leadership, minimizing the barriers they face, as well as indicate further steps that higher education institutions may take to increase women representation in leadership positions and promote diversity.

Confidentiality

Any information obtained in relation to this study, and which may be identified with you will remain confidential and may be disclosed only with your permission.
The demographic information will be stored in a separate file, password protected in my personal computer which is also password protected. Only the main researcher will have access to it. The recordings from the interviews will be transcribed by the main researcher, so no other person will have access to that information. Once the researcher transcribes your interview, the researcher will send a copy of the transcript to you to review for accuracy and if any edits need to be made to the information you provided. The original interview recordings and final transcripts will be stored in a password protected, secure file in the researcher's computer and will be destroyed after three years from the completion of this study. The only individuals that will have access to any information that may relate you and your interview transcript are the researcher and yourself.

Rights of Research Participants

Participation in this study is voluntarily. You may withdraw from participation at any time during this study. During the interview, you may refuse to answer any questions you may feel uncomfortable responding, and still participate in the study. If you have any questions about the confidentiality of this study, you may contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at St. Cloud State University at (320) 308-4932 or by email at osp@stcloudstate.edu.

Dissemination of Results

You may obtain results of this study upon request sent directly to the main researcher. Upon request you may also be provided with a draft of the study findings before the study is presented to the dissertation committee for final defense and published.

Researcher's Contact Information

If further questions arise, you may contact the main researcher, Eglantina Cenolli at ecenolli@stcloudstate.edu or by phone at 320-262-6052, or the researcher's advisor, Dr. Michael Mills at mrmills@stcloudstate.edu or 320.308.3730.

Signature of Research Participants

□ I understand the procedures and conditions of my participation described above.

□ My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study.

□ I consent for audio recording of the interview for the study outlined above.

□I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

If you agree to audio recording please sign your name below:

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Name of Researcher: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date:_____

IRB Approval Letter

ST. CLOUD STATE UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION FOR LIFE.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Eglantina Cenolli

Address 1205 Maine Trairie Road Apt 201
St. Cloud, MN 56301

Email: ceeg1001@stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: Exempt Review

Project Title: Exploring the Experiencesof Female Leaders in Mid-level positions

Advisor Dr. Michael R. Mills

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

-Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.

- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-3290 or email ri@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Institutional Official:

Latha Ramakrishnan

Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan
Interim Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSU IRB# 883 - 2068	**Type:** Exempt Review	**Today's Date:** 12/16/2016
1st Year Approval Date: 12/16/2016	**2nd Year Approval Date:**	**3rd Year Approval Date:**
1st Year Expiration Date:	**2nd Year Expiration Date:**	**3rd Year Expiration Date:**