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A Grounded Theory of Women's Leadership Experiences in Higher Education: Navigating from the Director Level

Laura Ann Maki
Minnesota State University - Mankato

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A Grounded Theory of Women's Leadership Experiences in Higher Education:

Navigating from the Director Level

By

Laura A. Maki

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This dissertation has been examined and approved by the following members of the

student's committee.

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Jennifer Preston, PhD

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Richard Auger, PhD

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Penny Rosenthal, PhD

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John Seymour, PhD

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I dedicate this to my grandmother, without whom I would not be here. She might be the

most pragmatic person I know, and I learned a lot about the world from her. She shaped

my identity in important ways, and I am so grateful.

To my mom, who taught me persistence and resilience. I would not be here without you.

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This dissertation would not be what it is without the guidance, support, and efforts of many important people. I first want to acknowledge the women who participated in this study. Without the generous gifts of their time and reflections, I would not have been successful in this project. Thank you for sharing your experiences.

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Abstract

In higher education leadership, the proportion of women in senior-level positions has grown very modestly. This stagnation is present in representation in leadership as well as in wage equality. Although institutions and organizations have policies and practices aimed at improving diversity and equity, ongoing underrepresentation indicates that barriers, lack of interest, or other unidentified factors influence women's opportunities for achieving senior-level leadership positions. To help address the ongoing underrepresentation of women in senior-level leadership in higher education, I have focused this dissertation on women's experiences in mid-level leadership positions. In this study, I use grounded theory to examine women's leadership experiences in higher education. Findings indicate that women's experiences of developing a career identity and navigating the institutional climate include setting boundaries, prioritizing values, and experiencing blocked opportunities. Those invested in recruiting women into senior-level leadership should consider the environment, and future research should focus on diverse individuals' experiences both within and outside of the higher education context.

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

In higher education leadership, the proportion of women in senior-level positions has grown very modestly. This stagnation is present in representation in leadership as well as in wage equality. In 2011 the American Council on Education collected data on the college presidency. Of the 1,662 college presidents who responded, 432 (26%) were women; an increase from 21% in 2001 (Kim & Cook, 2012). The representation of women at senior levels was up from 23% in 2008 (Allan, 2011). One year after graduating from college women earn 82% of the income that men earn (Corbett & Hill, 2012). Although the researchers accounted for numerous factors including field of study and field of employment, they could not account for all of the variance (Corbett & Hill, 2012). Although some numbers indicate that women are advancing, the current status is that nearly three-quarters of senior-level leaders in higher education are men, and this imbalance has implications for women's career development.

Scholars have addressed underrepresentation and have identified issues of access and climate that influence career advancement and mobility (Allen, 2011) and have pointed out the "limited empirical base upon which understanding of women's leadership is formed…and a lack of attention to social and organizational environment" (Stead & Elliot, 2009, p. 15). Although institutions and organizations have policies and practices aimed at improving diversity and equity, ongoing underrepresentation indicates that barriers, lack of interest, or other unidentified factors influences women's opportunities for achieving senior-level leadership positions.

In response to the ongoing underrepresentation of women in senior-level leadership in higher education. I have undertaken a study of women's experiences in mid-level leadership positions. The experiences of women in mid-level positions should provide some heretofore unexamined insight into the pipeline for senior-level leadership in higher education. In the following sections, I discuss the need for this study and clarify the purpose and scope of the research. Additionally, I provide an overview of the theoretical framework and methodology guiding the study and present my rationale for my choice of methodology. I conclude this chapter with a personal introduction to the topic and an overview of the remaining five chapters.

Need for This Study

The research on women in mid-level leadership is underdeveloped in a number of ways. As I discuss more fully in chapter 2, the research on women in higher education leadership has previously focused on women faculty and administrators who have ascended from faculty ranks and on women who have successfully achieved senior-level positions. Although the extant research on the experiences of women who have achieved senior-level positions provides insight into their successes and the challenges they faced, those findings do little to explain why women opt out of senior-level positions or are unsuccessful in their attempts to advance.

The well-documented underrepresentation of women in senior-level higher education leadership is likely attributed to a number of reasons, including pipeline inadequacies (Bornstein, 2008) as well as aspirational differences and environmental constraints. By constructing a grounded theory of the experiences of women in mid-level

leadership experiences, I hope to add to the current research on women in mid-level leadership positions (Bailey, 2012; Hebreard, 2010) by exploring and describing the salient factors influencing women's decisions about pursuing senior-level leadership positions. This dissertation does not presume that these women desire or aspire to senior-level roles; however, these women do provide leadership on their campuses, and gaining a richer understanding of their previous and current leadership experiences will provide insight into the influence of their career development on their aspirations.

The goal of this dissertation is to contribute to a more nuanced and complex understanding of the leadership experiences of women serving as directors of student affairs and student service-oriented offices in higher education. The literature on women in higher education leadership, given the documentation of the aforementioned challenges, has focused on strategies and supports that women can use to help overcome the negative effects of environmental barriers. However, in light of the information researchers have about women's leadership experiences in higher education, there is still a lack of understanding of how gender-based expectations interact with the work environment, how career aspirations develop and influence choices, and more generally, how women respond to environmental constraints. A more holistic, critical examination of this topic is necessary to make change.

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the interrelated aspects of women's experiences of leadership in higher education to better understand the factors that influence their decisions about pursuing leadership positions. The grand research

question that guided this study is "What experiences influence women's decisions to

pursue senior-level leadership positions in higher education?" Moreover, the purpose of

this study is to understand the career aspirations of women in mid-level leadership

positions to determine if they are a part of the pipeline to senior-level positions. Studying

the experiences of women in mid-level leadership roles provide vital information about

whether the strategies and supports suggested in the literature are effective and about the

other, unmentioned barriers that prevent women from moving into senior-level leadership

positions from mid-level leadership.

I have limited the scope of this dissertation to focus specifically on women

serving in director-level positions in higher education. Additionally, to gain a deeper

understanding of the career experiences of the participants, I focused my initial interview

questions on participants' career paths, leadership experiences, and future career goals. I

also limited the number and location of participants, recruiting eight women working on

seven college and university campuses in two Upper Midwest states. In chapter 3, I

provide detailed accounting of the procedures I used to identify and recruit participants.

Limiting the scope of this study is beneficial insofar as it allows me to focus on my

purpose of gathering rich data and developing a deep understanding of the participants'

experiences.

Preview of Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks guiding this study have been informed by the

previous research on women in higher education leadership. The complexity of the

topic—one that integrates identity development, career development, institutional norms

and structures, and the interactions among all these factors—calls for integrating several

theoretical frameworks that provide perspective for engaging in thoughtful analysis and

critique. Feminist theories have provided theoretical background for many studies of

women's development and experience, and feminist theory provides a method for

engaging an emancipation discourse (Lather, 1991), for investigating distributions of

power that marginalize some and reinforce the privilege of others (hooks, 2010).

Additionally, feminist theory helps understand how intersecting aspects of individuals'

identities, including gender, history, class, race, and ethnicity, shape how reality is

represented.

Constructivism is a complementary paradigm that values the development of

understanding, sophisticated reconstructions, vicarious experience, authenticity, and

trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Under the paradigm of constructivism, reality is

comprised of socially and experientially based mental constructions; reality is viewed as

relative and knowledge as co-created via subjective interactions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Reality viewed through the lens of social constructivism is redefined as individual

perceptions of experiences filtered through the lens of multiple intersecting identities

(Abes, Jones, & McEwan, 2007).

Theoretical frameworks that incorporate the complexities of identity development

and the intersections of race, class, and gender provide crucial framework for this study.

In the context of this dissertation, development refers to "the person's evolving

conception of the ecological environment, and his [sic] relation to it, as well as the

person's growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties." (Bronfenbrenner,

1979, p. 9). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development provides a

theoretical framework through which I can better understand participants' experiences of

the higher education environment and the interaction of the various contexts women must

negotiate as leaders. Although Bronfenbrenner's theory is not particularly contemporary,

the stated emphasis on perceptions, thoughts, and knowledge and how knowledge

changes depending on exposure to and interaction with the environment (Bronfenbrenner,

1979), a perspective well-aligned with constructivist paradigms.

Overview of Methodology

The decision to use a qualitative methodology to for this dissertation was based

on the questions I wanted to answer. Specifically, I sought a deeper understanding of the

experiences that influence women's decisions to pursue leadership positions in higher

education. Constructing grounded theory involves studying and understanding others'

representations of reality based on authentic information connected to how others view

and understand their worlds (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). The goal of qualitative

methodology is not to control for these influences but to incorporate the rich information

provided in the interaction of all of the above to enrich the descriptive and explanatory

power of qualitatively derived theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Rationale for Grounded Theory

Grounded theory begins with gathering rich data (Charmaz, 2006). I endeavored

to gather rich data through in-depth interviews with eight women in higher education

leadership positions. Additionally, grounded theory provides a means for engaging in

conversations about knowledge and power and for constructing emancipatory discourses

that expand opportunities for research and practice (Lather, 1991). "Knowledge is not

neutral, nor are we separate from its production or the world" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 185). I

worked to enhance the richness of the data by requesting and incorporating information

about participants' histories, identities, and responsibilities (age, ethnicity, marital status,

parent status, education, family SES, ability status). Grounded theory informs the

theoretical framework and literature review as well as the methods of data collection,

analysis, and final construction of the theory. Additionally, my perspective as a

researcher is informed by theories of human development and social constructivism.

Personal Introduction to the Topic

During the fall semester in 2011, one year into my doctoral program, I began

studying the literature on women's career experiences. At the time, I was also one year

into a substantial career change: I had moved out of book publishing hoping to move into

the field of student affairs via a degree program with a practical emphasis. I was trying to

envision my career in higher education post-doctorate, so I began reading about other

women's experiences. I quickly became fascinated by research on women's career and

leadership experiences. In 2011, as my career aspirations took shape and my doctoral

studies progressed, I tried to envision what the world of work might look like for me in

the future.

My experiences with and perceptions of leadership have developed slowly over a

number of years. As a college-age woman, I did not identify as a leader in part because

many of the role models I had for leaders were men. As a graduate student in my mid-

twenties, I had to take on a leadership role as a teacher of college students, and I felt ill-

suited to this role due to the discrepancy between what I expected leaders to be like and how I saw myself. In my thirties I learned that I could perform leadership in a manner congruent with my identity, and I committed myself to an authentic way of modeling leadership. However, I became and continue to be aware that my genuinely derived and authentically enacted leadership identity fits some contexts better than others. Moreover, I believe that others make assessments about this fit and that the results of these assessments will likely affect the range of opportunities I will have to serve in formal leadership positions.

Women's experiences of leadership, both in the form of those who lead them and in the form of their own leadership, are important to me because they—in ways great and small—influence my experiences of leadership. Results from the research reviewed in the opening section of this chapter indicates that I have chosen a career that, as a woman, is beset with systemic barriers that will negatively affect my chances of success. These barriers might take the form of an unwelcoming environment during a job interview or a biased evaluation during a review for a promotion. In either case, if I am systematically excluded from leadership positions due to my gender, the structures put in place to perpetuate the social subordination of women remain intact (West & Zimmerman, 1991). Based on my personal experiences of leadership as a woman, I believe that the barriers women experience are both shared and uniquely influenced by different aspects of identity and context. I also believe that proposals for lasting change must be based on studies of women's experiences that examine the interrelated nature of context and identity.

Overview of Remaining Chapters

As I previously mentioned, chapters 2 and 3 provide additional background for this study. Specifically, in chapter 2, I review the literature on women in leadership in higher education and discuss the limitations and implications of the extant research. In chapter 3, I discuss the theoretical frameworks that informed this study and detail the grounded theory methods for data collection and analysis. I follow with a section on evaluating grounded theory and conclude by addressing methodological considerations.

In chapter 4 and 5, I present the results of the coding and analysis of the first- and second-round interviews. In chapter 4 I describe the preliminary categories, subcategories, and properties that emerged from the first-round interviews. In chapter 4, I also triangulate the emerging categories, subcategories, and properties with literature. I conclude chapter 4 with a discussion of the findings. In chapter 5, I develop the categories, subcategories, and properties and discuss the relationships and contexts influencing the categories, subcategories, and properties. After the second-round interviews were coded, I engaged in member checking and triangulation with the literature, and I discuss both of those in chapter 5. I conclude chapter 5 with a discussion. In chapter 6, I present the grounded theory, address limitations, and discuss implications for practice and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In constructing grounded theory, the literature review functions to take a stand and make an argument on a theoretical position (Charmaz, 2006). The goal of a literature review oftentimes is to identify a cohesive, delimited body of research and analyze and critique that literature in a manner that identifies limitations and gaps that can be filled by the current study. The literature reviewed in this chapter is necessarily circumscribed in several ways. First, the literature is focused on women's career experiences in higher education. Some studies I reviewed include participants working as faculty or as administrators promoted from faculty ranks (Gibson, 2006; Metcalf & Gonzalez, 2013). Second, I also focused this literature review on women's experiences as leaders. Many of the studies focused on women in senior-level administration roles or in vice president and president roles (Bornstein, 2008; Dean, 2009; Gill & Jones, 2013).

For this chapter, I focused my review on literature specific to women in higher education, and the experience of career development, gender roles and career expectations, and leadership identity development. In the following sections, I discuss the representation of women in academic leadership, gender and diversity in leadership, and the paths to academic leadership. I then discuss women's experiences of the institutional climate followed by women's leadership development. I end with a discussion of the limitations and implications for this dissertation as well as for women working in higher education leadership.

Women in Higher Education Research

Much of the research on women in higher education leadership is focused on

understanding the ongoing underrepresentation of women in higher education, although

many studies also focus on lack of diversity, a more widespread and complex issue.

Consequently, women in leadership research is somewhat synonymous with women

working in senior-level positions, although leadership occurs at multiple levels of an

institution. In this section I discuss definitions and operationalizations of leadership,

diversity in research, paths to leadership, and competency development before moving on

to discuss institutional climate.

Leadership defined and operationalized. Leadership is broadly defined as

"behaviors, learned and learnable, that are largely defined by contextual needs"

(Freeman, 2001, p. 37). The generalness of this definition illustrates the various ways

leadership can be practiced and highlights the gender-neutral potential of leadership

behaviors. Leadership can be defined by behaviors and practices; however, when

leadership is operationalized, researchers more often focus on formal roles and positions.

Although leadership is often embodied in a role, the act of leading includes social

interaction between multiple levels, such as supervisors, peers, and subordinates (Ayman

& Korabik, 2010). And when the goal of leadership is to guide subordinates, leadership

also involves a process of persuasion that is interactional, contextual, and systemic aimed

at the pursuit of specific objectives (Gardner, 1990).

Older models of leadership have traditionally been White and male, as well as

able bodied, young, publicly heterosexual, and ethnically homogenous (Cook, Heppner,

& O'Brien, 2005). These attributes become more relevant in the context of expectations for men and women and for leaders, whose assertiveness, authoritativeness, and competitiveness are a virtual match for stereotypically masculine characteristics. These traditional models and expectations have aligned leadership with traditional masculine gender roles. These descriptive and prescriptive expectations for women's and men's behaviors (Ritter & Yonder, 2004) are based on the idea that women and men differ with regard to achievement-oriented and social/service-oriented traits (Heilman, 2001). The mutual exclusivity of leadership and feminine gender roles served for many years to exclude women from more widespread involvement in career development experiences that would have prepared them for formal leadership positions.

Various studies recruited participants serving as executive leaders—vice presidents and presidents—at community colleges (Eddy, 2009; Gill & Jones, 2013; Gonzalez Sullivan, 2009). Other researchers recruited deans, provosts, and chancellors along with vice presidents and presidents for their participants (Ballenger, 2010; Gerdes, 2003; Montas-Hunter, 2012). Some studies were specific to women, others were not. For example, Eddy (2009) interviewed five men and four women and Gill and Jones (2013) interviewed four women, two presidents and two vice presidents. Both studies, however, sought to examine the influence of gender and position within the university.

Research on women in mid-level leadership positions in higher education is underdeveloped compared to the research on women in senior-level roles. Although the research is more scarce, studies specific to women who could potentially be in the pipeline to senior-level administration has provided insight into career experiences

including (a) individual perceptions, satisfaction, and turnover intentions (Rosser, 2004);

(b) negotiating the dual role of administrator and mother (Bailey, 2011); (c) the career

decision making processes of mid-level student affairs professionals with young children

(Hebreard, 2010); (d) the influence of supervision on career mobility (Donohue-

Mendoza, 2012); and (e) the implications of performance appraisals on career

development (Corral, 2010). While these studies provide many insights, they provide no

information about women leading from the middle of the organization. These women

also have the potential to ascend to senior-level positions. However, the transition from

mid-level to senior-level is often accompanied by the presence of a doctorate, among

other factors.

Diversity in research. In a 2011 survey of college presidents collected by the

American Council on Education (ACE), just over one-quarter (26%) of the respondents

were women, and women of color represented less than one-seventh (13%) of those

responding (Kim & Cook, 2012). This ongoing underrepresentation has been addressed

in a number of recent studies. Most recently, Montas-Hunter (2012) interviewed eight

Latina women in leadership positions (dean, provost, vice president, president, and

chancellor), all of whom had doctorates and served at four-year public institutions. Four

themes emerged from the interviews indicating that participants attributed their success in

leadership to support, self-awareness, professional experience, and values that aligned

personally and professionally (Montas-Hunter, 2012). In another study, Kamassah

(2010) recruited 16 women who identified as South Asian and African for interviews

about their self-perceptions and their perceptions of key factors to their success in higher

education. Themes that emerged from participants included the importance of

relationships and support and the value of trust, respect, and honesty (Kamassah, 2010).

In a study of women community college presidents, Gonzalez Sullivan (2009) recruited

two African American women, two Hispanic women, and two White women for

interviews about their learning strategies, stance toward lack of knowledge, and possible

cultural influences. Participants identified personal needs, including communities of

practice and mentoring, as well as institutional factors, such as power issues and

culturally derived expectations of competence, that influenced their leadership

experiences (Gonzalez Sullivan, 2009). These studies shared a common focus on factors

that contributed to success, according to the participants, and highlighted the need for

ongoing changes to the higher education environment to support recruitment and

retention of diverse women in leadership. These studies have also addressed the unique

and complex roles of gender and ethnicity and how those characteristics influence

leadership and workplace climate.

As several of these studies have demonstrated, leadership no longer belongs only

to a title; it also comprises a set of behaviors and competencies that one must display as a

leader. For example, the participants in Kamassah's (2010) study held positions ranging

from coordinator to dean broadly defined as having administrative or policy making

responsibilities. These personal attributes, actions, and skills could be exhibited by

individuals in many roles and are also expected of individuals in formal leadership

positions. This research, and other studies like it, acknowledge that leadership comes

from many levels of an organization. However, many of these studies focus on women in

senior-level positions or women faculty. These participants are highly educated and have

previous senior-level leadership experience under their belt. In the following section, I

address the typical paths to leadership discussed in the literature and how those paths

influence women's leadership experiences.

      Paths to leadership. In studies of faculty, traditional paths have been through

the ranks of professors (Metcalf & Gonzalez, 2013; White, Riordan, Ozkanli, & Neale,

2010). In a study of senior managers in four countries, researchers interviewed men and

women about their career path, management style, and the organizational culture (White

et al., 2010). Participants' paths were distinguished by receiving invitations and

encouragement to apply for positions as well as support from family (White et al., 2010).

Some community college presidents attributed their success to following a career path

within the academy and acquiring encouragement and mentoring (Campbell, Mueller, &

Souza, 2010). Using a collective case study of six women community college presidents,

Campbell, Mueller, and Souza (2010) sought to describe women's paths to the college

presidency. In addition to a strong educational background, individuals must be willing

to pursue advancement opportunities and have the support and encouragement of mentors

and family (Campbell et al., 2010). However, the gatekeeping and hierarchy that

accompanies criteria for tenure and promotion can be alienating (White et al., 2010). As

the women in Montas-Hunter's (2012) study revealed, achieving consecutive promotions

and positions of increasing responsibility led to their current leadership positions:

leadership begets leadership.

Research has also indicated that director-level positions represent a path for ascending into senior-level leadership positions (Biddix, 2013) and that while the most common path to senior student affairs officer (SSAO) positions was through a director position, the path to the SSAO could also come through a faculty position. Senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) most often come from the ranks of functional area directors (Biddix, 2013). Research on college presidents has also focused on their career paths. Using a collective case study of six women community college presidents, researchers found that there was no one career path for these women to their leadership positions; however, the case study revealed commonalities including being motivated by affecting change and enjoying the challenges that accompany their senior-level roles (Campbell et al., 2010). Other researchers have studied the paths of women in senior level leadership. In a study of 43 African American women presidents, Jackson and Harris (2005) reported respondents more often held a doctorate, worked outside of higher education at some point, and previously held a variety of positions before becoming a college president. For senior student affairs officers, their careers paths spanned an average of 20 years and six job changes (Biddix, 2011). For the college presidency, 79% had held previous executive positions and 93% had earned a doctoral degree (Jackson & Harris, 2005).

Competency development. Gonzalez Sullivan (2009) noted that women and minority leaders are often held to standards established by White, male norms and culture and argued that women must arrive at a level of competence, even in new leadership roles, quickly without revealing their perceived skill deficits to meet the higher standards

they are held to. Developing competencies, therefore, becomes the focus of individuals who aspire to fulfill leadership roles. The lag in this competency development might help explain the ongoing underrepresentation of women and people of color from senior-level positions.

Findings of a study of college presidents indicated that some women leaders will place extraordinary expectations on themselves for achieving competence in their professional positions so as not to reveal that they are different from the men in equivalent positions (Gonzalez Sullivan, 2009).   For example, Gonzalez Sullivan (2009) interviewed six women community college presidents about learning needs and stance toward lack of knowledge, learning strategies, and the influence of the college's culture. Participants reported that when they first entered their positions, they connected with others and sought out mentoring from colleagues as a strategy to develop competence (Gonzalez Sullivan, 2009). Other researchers have focused on factors that enabled women of color to be successful in leadership positions (Kamassah, 2010). The participants reflected on the importance of values including trust, honesty, and respect, and motivating and inspiring others in their work (Kamassah, 2010). More specifically, researchers have outlined skills including business and industry knowledge as well as general leadership and communication skills (Turner, Norwood, & Noe, 2013). Researchers have suggested that balancing life responsibilities can facilitate success in developing skills and competencies to counteract workplace barriers to advancement (Turner et al., 2013).

A less-often discussed component of leadership competence is the development of an authentic leadership identity. However, some studies have begun to focus on women's experience developing authentic leadership identities. For example, women in the role of president and vice president developed a leadership style based on competence and trust that sets high expectations for self and others (Gill & Jones, 2013). Women in leadership roles enacted various styles of leadership from authoritative to collaborative (Gonzalez Sullivan, 2009) and valued responsibility, honesty, and respect (Montas-Hunter, 2012). Although women viewed their leadership as transformative, supportive, and student-centered (Gill & Jones, 2013), in some instances their leadership conformed to more traditional leadership characteristics, including use of authority and hierarchy (Eddy, 2009).

In this section, I reviewed research to illustrate the definitions and operationalizations of leadership, discussed diversity and lack of diversity in research, described several paths to higher education leadership, and addressed the perennial issue of competency development for women who aspire to and achieve leadership positions. In the following section, I review literature on women's experiences of the institutional climate, including role conflict, exclusion, mentoring, and supportive relationships followed by a section on women's leadership development.

Institutional Climate

Climate in higher education can be viewed as "a product of cultural assumptions and norms about what are deemed 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' behaviors and verbal exchanges within a specific learning or work environment" (Cress, 2002, p. 391), and a *chilly climate* is defined as "informal exclusion, devaluation, and marginalization" (Maranto & Griffin, 2011, p. 141) from workplace networks based on gender. Institutional climate can be understood as the combination of challenges and supports available to individuals in the higher education environment. Previous research has focused on the influence of the environment for women in the workplace and specifically for women in higher education. In the following section, I review research on some challenges that women experience in the environment including role conflict and exclusion as well as opportunities including mentoring and supportive relationships that influence individuals' experiences.

Role conflict. When women are interviewed or surveyed about career and family, they discuss the challenges of caring for young children and advancing at work (Grummell, Devine, & Lynch, 2009). Having children and maintaining a career can feel like working two full-time jobs (Zacker, 2004), and senior-level women have noted the collision of crucial career development and child-rearing years (Hughes, 2004). Being a senior manager comes with increased workload and role conflict (White et al., 2010). Researchers have focused on variables such as gender, age, family and marital status, and personal strain within the context of ongoing underrepresentation of women in the academic profession (Metcalf & Gonzalez, 2013). Metcalf and Gonzalez (2013) focused

on faculty of different rank at institutions in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico and observed

that women are far more likely to have interrupted their career paths (26.8% of women

versus 4.4% of men) to care for children or elderly family members (Metcalf &

Gonzalez, 2013).

In a study of women's career patterns over 27 years, researchers surveyed 549

women and found that career patterns were significantly related to time planning, role

conflict, and work-to-family conflict (Huang & Sverke, 2006). Moreover, researchers

have found that having family-care responsibilities decreases the application rates for

senior-level positions (Grummell, Devine, & Lynch, 2009). Women continue to provide

more hours of domestic labor than men (2.19 versus 1.34; BLS, 2014a). Yet, on an

average workday, women still work 8.11 hours to men's 8.71 hours (BLS, 2014a).

Learning to balance values and priorities was important for some women (Zacher, 2004),

whereas others chose to take a slower path and rely on the support of partners and family

members (Hughes, 2004). However, not all women have family or access to child care

resources, making the path to leadership more difficult to navigate.

Exclusion. Experiences of exclusion can make it difficult for women to get the

support they need in managing their responsibilities, and research has shown that

organizational culture and structure contributes to a sense of connection or one of

isolation (Gibson, 2006). For women working in highly male-dominated and hierarchical

environments, researchers found that women's accomplishments can have a negative

impact on their performance evaluations (Inesi & Cable, 2014). Specifically, evaluators

gave lower performance ratings to women who had competence levels similar (i.e. very

high competence) to the evaluator (Inesi & Cable, 2014). Moreover, researchers have

reported that women who demonstrate competence and assume leadership positions are

sometimes met with a lack of support (Ballenger, 2010) as well as more harsh evaluations

of their work (Ritter & Yonder, 2004). Gibson's (2006) in-depth interviews with nine

academic women demonstrated that participants working in departments with supportive

environments benefitted by achieving promotion and feeling supported in taking time

away from work to start a family. In contrast, women with experiences in unsupportive

or hostile environments noted that rather than working to facilitate other's successes,

colleagues were overtly critical and interfered with efforts to set goals and achieve

recognition for work done (Gibson, 2006). These negative interactions with colleagues

and supervisors might be the very influences that persuade women to move out of their

jobs, affecting occupational segregation and career mobility.

Researchers studying labor markets, career mobility, and occupational sex

segregation have provided evidence for the existence of systemic and widespread

occupational segregation (Cohen & Huffman, 2003; Maume, 1999). Results of large-

scale data collection studies indicated that women working in male-dominated

occupations are pressured to vacate those positions. Specifically, Maume (1999) found

that as the percentage of men in the occupation increased, women's chances of leaving

their jobs similarly increased; these findings held after controlling for skill requirements

and family characteristics, among other variables. More recently, researchers studied

gender devaluation and gender-segregated labor markets (Cohen & Huffman, 2003).

First, over 90% of variability on earnings differences was attributed to differences across

occupations. Their findings demonstrated that earnings decreased 41% when the occupational proportion was defined as "all women" versus "all men" (Cohen & Huffman, 2003). These findings demonstrate that women's experiences in male-dominated workplaces influence their career mobility as well as their earnings.

The presence of exclusive networks corresponds to occurrences and perceptions of lack of mentoring and lack of opportunities for promotion (Ballenger, 2010), which are damaging for those on the outside of such networks. Theorists and women in leadership have referred to this as a "good old boys network" (Ballenger, 2010); a network that becomes exclusive owing to the concept of homophily, or "the preference for others like oneself" (Maranto & Griffin, 2011, p. 142). Longitudinal research has shown that professional networks are related to increased salary, promotion, and perceived career success (Singh, Ragins, & Tharenou, 2009) and subsequent leadership positions. Gonzalez Sullivan (2009) noted that women and minority leaders are often held to standards established by White, male norms and culture and argued that women must arrive at a level of competence, even in new leadership roles, quickly and silently to meet the higher standards they are held to. As women continue to balance family and career, their paths are longer and slower. This observation helps explain why a recent survey of college presidents showed just over one-quarter (26%) of 1,662 presidents who responded are women (Kim & Cook, 2013). Women's experiences have indicated that gender role expectations affect personal and professional relationships and have consequences for both career advancement and family responsibilities (Shapiro, Ingols, & Blake-Beard, 2008).

Mentoring. There are many influential relationships that affect women's career experiences as well as their progress into leadership positions, and mentoring is one such relationship (or activity) that has been heavily studied and discussed in literature on women's leadership. Mentoring can be an important component for women pursuing leadership positions in higher education for a number of reasons. "Traditional…and emerging perspectives on mentoring… hold that mentoring relationships make a unique and independent contribution to a protégé's career success, above and beyond that accounted for by the protégé's existing skills, talents, and abilities" (Singh et al., 2009, p. 58). In other words, mentoring influences positive career-related outcomes regardless of an individual's personal characteristics.

In a longitudinal study of 236 individuals, Singh, Ragins, and Tharenou (2009) found that mentoring accounted for 16% of the variance in promotion and 19% of the variance in advancement expectations. Additionally, in evaluating a formal mentoring program intended to address underrepresentation of women in senior academic positions, Gardiner, Tiggemann, Kearns, and Marshall (2007) found that protégés experienced increased positive outcomes, such as promotion and retention, compared with individuals in a control group. Of the 35 women surveyed about their leadership experiences, 79% reported positive, supportive mentoring during their careers (Ballenger, 2010). These women revealed that they received mentoring from supportive advisors and informal mentors as well as through formal mentoring programs. Women found mentoring outside of their institution as well as from senior-level leaders within (Ballenger, 2010). Women who had been in academic leadership for over three decades also advised new

professionals to find a mentor (Gerdes, 2003), and all of the Latina women leaders in

Montas-Hunter's (2012) study indicated that mentors made a valuable impact on their

leadership careers. The participants in Gill and Jones's (2013) study of community

college presidents stated that they had been mentored by others, including predecessors,

other administrators, and peers. These studies indicate that mentoring contributes

positively to career progress for women, which can subsequently improve women's

chances of ascending to leadership positions in higher education.

Mentoring was also a topic in women's responses when they discussed challenges

related to mentoring, including lack of mentoring or the scarcity of women mentors

(Ballenger, 2010; Eddy, 2009). In particular, one community college president compared

the lack of mentoring she received relative to what she perceived her male peers were

receiving, and felt that this inequality in mentoring hindered her professionally (Eddy,

2009). Women not only perceive an imbalance in the quantity of mentoring they receive

relative to men, they also perceive a fundamental difference in quality. For example,

Ballenger (2010) reported that women serving as presidents or in other senior

administrative positions in higher education point to the absence of women mentors as

well as the presence of an exclusionary network served as barriers to their advancement.

Supportive relationships. Findings from the studies indicate that women also

rely on a number of supports. In particular, participants value the encouragement and

advice that they receive from others (Montas-Hunter, 2012, p. 329) and this positive

influence and inspiration (Kamassah, 2010) comes from a network of supervisors,

teachers, family members, and friends. In her study, Kamassah (2010) asked South

Asian and African women leaders to identify people who had influenced or inspired

them. The participants discussed current and former supervisors who had shown an

interest in their lives and believed in their ability to be successful. One participant

reflected that her supervisor had taken a personal interest in her professional growth,

encouraged her to attend conferences, and introduced her to people in leadership

positions on her campus. One theme that emerged from Montas-Hunter's (2012) study

affirmed the beneficial effects of positive reinforcement, especially in the form of verbal

persuasion.

In addition to the support of supervisors, women also identified support from

family as a key influence in their success. Participants in both Montas-Hunter's (2012)

and Kamassah's (2010) studies indicated that, in general, family provides essential

support, and participants specifically mentioned mothers and husbands as providing

assistance during challenging times. The participants in Gill and Jones's (2013) study all

attributed part of their success in achieving president positions to the support and

encouragement of their husbands. These women's experiences closely corresponded to

the advice that experienced women leaders provided for new women in higher education:

develop supportive relationships and choose your significant other carefully (Gerdes,

2003). Moreover, Eddy (2009) observed that the women in her study placed a high value

on relationships, which influenced the way these women approached their leadership

roles. These relationships are part of the larger environment and women's experiences

within these influential relationships logically help or hinder their advancement into

leadership positions. Participants in the aforementioned studies also discussed support received from mentors as well as the negative impact of lack of mentoring.

Studies on women in higher education leadership have illustrated the influence of supportive relationships and mentoring as well as exclusion and role conflict. A common theme of these studies includes the role of environmental supports and barriers and their effects on the successes of women in higher education leadership. As the research on the invaluable nature of support and the detrimental nature of barriers accumulates, additional research on women's leadership development has emerged and developed. In this next section I focus on the research on women's leadership development, including leadership development programs and women's identity development.

Women's Leadership Development

Several of the aforementioned studies have examined women's leadership development by analyzing women's career paths and the strategies they employed along those paths (Campbell et al., 2010; Gonzalez Sullivan, 2009; Kamassah, 2010; Montas-Hunter, 2012; White et al., 2010). These researchers have contributed to a fuller understanding of women's leadership development by studying the experiences of women in and aspiring to leadership positions. Some early research on women in leadership gathered data on high-achieving business leaders. For example, Helgesen (1995) conducted diary studies with four women: the chief executive of the Girl Scouts, the founder of a $6 million contracting firm, the executive director the executive development center at Ford Motor, and the owner of television and radio stations in four U.S. cities. This study focused on feminine principles of leadership and differences in

men's and women's leadership and described the interrelatedness and inclusiveness of

women's leadership styles (Helgesen, 1995). Although the participants worked in

business, the findings provide insight into leadership experiences for women. In the

following sections, I review research on leadership development programs and women's

identity development as it connects to overcoming barriers, finding support, and

developing leadership identity.

Leadership development programs. Leadership development programs

represent one way of addressing the underrepresentation of women in leadership. The

goals and objectives of formal programs include (a) developing participants' competence

as well as their confidence and self-perceived leadership potential (Bonebright,

Cottledge, & Lonnquist, 2012; LaFreniere & Longman, 2008), (b) "fitting in and

breaking through obvious barriers" (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002, p. 1) or (c) identifying,

training, and mentoring potential leaders and providing opportunities for networking and

career goal setting (LaFreniere & Longman, 2008).

During the past 25 years, women's leadership development has evolved and

expanded especially in the context of higher education. In the 1990s and early 2000s,

research on women's leadership development focused on women in business. For

example, 61 women managers completed an intensive five-day leadership program then

participated in interviews with researchers. The results of the interviews indicated that

these women emphasize authenticity, agency, wholeness, self-clarity, and connections in

their leadership (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002). The participants in this study were well-

educated, middle-class women (92% holding bachelors' and 92% White; the lowest

salary in the sample was $80,000) employed primarily at Fortune 500 companies

(Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002), limiting the generalizability of these findings. However, the

themes of finding support, setting priorities, and gaining experience resonated with the

goals of leadership development programs specific to higher education that have emerged

more recently.

Within higher education, human resources scholars and practitioners have

likewise begun to focus on programs to facilitate women's development (Bonebright et

al., 2012). A partnership between the women's center and human resources, the

Women's Leadership Institute (WLI), attended by 25 women a year, strives to build a

cohort across employee categories and focuses on self-reflection and vicarious learning.

Topics of discussion include managing competing demands, collaborating and building

partnerships, and leading from multiple organizational levels (Bonebright et al., 2012).

Participants reported positive program outcomes including increased self-confidence,

networking opportunities, and vicarious learning (Bonebright et al., 2012). Additionally,

participants expressed interest in opportunities to implement skills and knowledge, focus

on equity and diversity awareness, and participate in formal mentoring (Bonebright et al.,

2012).

Additional positive outcomes cited in the literature on formal leadership programs

includes networking relationships and opportunities (LaFreniere & Longman, 2008) and

spaces for women to collaborate, network, advocate for change, and receive formal

support (Bonebright et al., 2012). Moreover, researchers reported that participants'

shadowing experience and written resources accounted for 50% of variance in ratings of

self-confidence as well as 42% of variance in thoughts about leadership potential;

additionally, researchers reported that the informal conversations during the institute has

a significant encouraging influence on women considering taking on new responsibilities:

60% reported moving to new positions (LaFreniere & Longman, 2008). However, the

findings of this study, and other similar studies, are limited by the relative homogeneity

of the participants being primarily White (88%) and holders of a doctoral degree (94%;

LaFreniere & Longman, 2008).

These leadership programs are experiential, reflective, goal-based approaches

intended to develop skills and competencies and a network of supports and contacts.

Networking opportunities tend to expand greatly during these programs; however, no

studies have examined that outcome in the long-term. Leadership programs prepare

women by providing opportunities to reflect on aspirations, meet other women doing the

same, and focus on gaining skills and developing competence. Leadership development

programs often help women more concretely shape their aspirations, a struggle women

have previously encountered (Jossleson, 1996).

Women's identity development. Research on women's leadership development

programs directly addresses some of the unique needs of women in leadership, although

the contribution of identity development contributes more in the background than in the

foreground. Additionally, the research on supports and barriers for women in higher

education leadership, while influenced by women's identity development, illustrates

some of the salient identity characteristics women bring to leadership (such as the role of

primary caregiver) but does lacks explicit discussion of how women develop identity and

how that development might influence leadership experiences. In the following section, I review some of the foundational research on women's identity development, and specifically focus on feminist-theory influenced studies. I include a broader discussion of feminist theories and the influence on women leadership experiences in chapter 3.

Understanding women's development would not be possible without the work of scholars in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, Gilligan (1982) identified a discrepancy between women's development as characterized in literature and women's development as they experienced it and helped problematize the notion that women were underdeveloped in comparison to men (Gilligan, 1982). Gilligan's research on women's moral development helped set the stage for future interview-based qualitative studies of women's development. The move to make way for women's experiences resulted in interview and focus-group based studies that foreground women's voices. In the 1970s, researchers in psychology began a longitudinal study of women's development focusing on the ways that women develop knowledge (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). The findings from their study of individual interviews with 135 women recruited from higher education institutions and family agencies provide insight into the experience of knowledge production from the perspective of the individual. Moreover, women develop and possess knowledge in different manners that are influenced by the context of families and schools (Belenky et al., 1986).

Building on that knowledge, Josselson (1996) studied 30 women in their senior year of college. These women—born in 1950, graduated in 1972—were one of the earliest generations intending to build a career as well as a family, and through three

rounds of in-depth interviews conducted over 22 years (Josselson, 1996), their

experiences and reflections provided insights that have been invaluable to researchers

studying women's development ever since. The results of Josselson's extensive research

revealed themes in the paths that women followed throughout their post-college lives.

These paths are characterized by competence, connection, and revision and describe

participants' (a) sense of effectiveness (b) sense of self, and (c) change over time in

competence and connection (Josselson, 1996). Moreover, Josselson observed that the

characteristics of these paths influence how women engage in public goals and define

their interrelationships with family, children, spouses, and friends. Identity development

was connected to making and fulfilling commitments to others and the deepest aspects of

participants' identity are tied with others (Josselson, 1996). Josselson also noted that at

times women struggled to translate their ambitions into achievable goals over time,

whereas others struggled to find role models (Josselson, 1996).

   Identity development in context. Although many studies reviewed in the

preceding sections have accounted for characteristics of the institutional climate that

influence women's leadership experiences, few studies have directly addressed how

context affects identity development. As I will discuss further in chapter 3, scholars have

presented theories of multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwan, 2000) and of

multiple, interrelated, and complex systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that interact with

individuals and influence development. Examining identities in context is important for

understanding the complex and interrelated factors that influence development (Cook et

al., 2005). Moreover, research examining the role of context in identity development

broadens inclusiveness by acknowledging that climate and context can be perceived differently by different individuals and is actively constructed by participants in those contexts (Cress, 2002).

As previous research has indicated, differences in institutional climate, leadership development opportunities, and support influence career outcomes (Maranto & Griffin, 2011; Singh et al., 2009; Whitmarsh et al., 2007). Although scholars have examined personal and contextual factors that have influenced women's leadership experiences (Eagly & Carli, 2007), additional studies that combine analysis of experiences and contexts are needed. Research on women's identity development has provided insight into the unique career challenges that primary caregivers face, and research has illustrated the developmental influence of gender role expectations and the role conflicts that can emerge when women are expected to make both children and career a priority.

Implications for Women, for Researchers, and for Leaders in Higher Education

The research on women in leadership in higher education has grown in response to the underrepresentation of women and lack of diversity in senior-level positions. This research has examined a number of factors, including individual characteristics, institutional influences, and proactive efforts to increase representation of women in leadership. The literature on women in higher education leadership I reviewed in this chapter examined environmental factors including role conflict, exclusion, mentoring, and supportive relationships to develop a ecological understanding of women's leadership experiences in higher education. Additionally, I reviewed literature on

women's leadership development as it related to responding to the institutional climate, and specifically to women's leadership programs and women's identity development.

Many recent studies have used in-depth interviews to gain a deeper understanding of women's experiences, and these studies have found that family, mentoring, and support are important in women's career development. Women's decisions about pursuing leadership positions seem to be influenced by a number of factors (including interests, educational preparation, opportunities, and barriers). Researchers focused on the experiences of women who have achieved senior-level positions have shared the strategies for overcoming barriers. Their retrospective accounts of current reflections provide insight into the experiences of women at the helm of colleges and universities.

Notably, the challenges most often discussed in the research constitute attitudinal and systemic barriers to women's progress; whereas the supports and strategies tend to be individual, relational, or behavioral changes that women can make of themselves. Although the researchers often note the cultural, environmental, and systemic nature of the barriers, few discuss ways to change the system except maybe waiting for the time when women are represented in equal numbers so they can then change the system from within. Unfortunately, even after women achieve equality in numbers, stereotypes that preclude equity with regard to treatment may very well still exist. Future research must also address ways to reduce the negative impact of stereotypes on all marginalized and oppressed groups.

Leadership development programs have strong potential for addressing some of the barriers that influence occupational segregation in senior-level leadership. However,

leadership development programs are exclusive by nature, so that necessarily excludes many women from research. A comparison group study of a leadership development program would add greatly to the extant research.

The research that focuses on how women have been successful in achieving senior-level positions is important but limited. The focus of much contemporary research, like that reviewed in this chapter, has been on senior-level positions and on women faculty who have advanced into administrative leadership. There is much less research on women in mid-level administrative positions and their advancement strategies. Some administrators advance through the ranks via student affairs or administrative roles, so it is important to understand that specific career path. Advising women to model the strategies and behaviors of others' successes addresses a sort of best practices related to career advancement but does not account for institutional or attitudinal barriers held by those gatekeeping the means for advancement. Although this strategic perspective is intended to be empowering to women, it places sole responsibility for change on women and neglects the systemic barriers that remain. Moreover, the findings have not been unified in a meaningful or useful way. There are no meta-analyses. This is important because there are a lot of small sample studies with rich data but few studies that replicate findings among a wider population.

Although all of this information is valuable, what is still unknown are the stories of women who aspired to senior-level leadership positions in higher education but did not realize that goal. What are the leadership experiences of director-level women in higher education? Are they on the path to senior-level leadership positions? What barriers do

they currently experience and how do they manage and overcome these barriers? Answering these questions will contribute insight into how women decide whether to pursue senior-level leadership positions.

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides many insights into the experiences of women who have faced barriers, received support, and taken advantage of opportunities, and who have succeed in achieving senior-level leadership positions. The perspectives of these women can be useful in advising others working toward senior-level leadership positions. However, the extant research has primarily focused on women who have succeeded in achieving senior-level positions offering little insight about the experiences of women who have been unsuccessful in achieving leadership positions or who otherwise do not aspire to those positions. Although there are more potential explanations for the underrepresentation of diverse individuals in senior-level leadership, existing research offers limited insight.

Conclusion

The goal of this dissertation is to contribute to a broader and deeper understanding of the influences on women's decisions about pursuing senior-level leadership positions in higher education. In the following chapters, I will undertake a qualitative, interview-based study of women in mid-level leadership to better understand what influences their career decisions. In chapter 3, I describe the methodology, including the theoretical framework and grounded theory methods guiding this study. I discuss the procedures for data collection and analysis and for evaluating grounded theory. I conclude chapter 3 with a discussion of methodological considerations and my worldview as a researcher.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As the title of this dissertation indicates, this study is about women's experiences in leadership roles in higher education. In chapter 2, I reviewed literature on women in higher education leadership and discussed previous research on women's experiences of the institutional climate and leadership development. Many studies addressed the barriers that women face in career and advancement (Maranto & Griffin, 2011) and recent research has even focused on mid-level women in higher education who opt out of work as higher education administrators to care for young children (Hebreard, 2010). However, few studies have focused on women in higher education who have been blocked from or have opted out of progressive career advancement more broadly, and there are no theories or meta-analyses to help explain this phenomenon. Heeding the call to action to develop more empowering approaches to the generation of knowledge (Lather, 1986) and following the lead of scholars who have engaged in deep, sustained, and groundbreaking studies of women's development (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1996), I have adopted a theoretical frame and methodology that honors the voices of the participants and contributes to a deeper understanding of women's leadership experiences in higher education.

My goal of developing a deeper understanding of the experiences of women working in mid-level leadership positions in higher education also influenced my choice of a qualitative methodology. Qualitative methodology represents a naturalistic view of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and is valued for its interpretative approach "sensitive to the people and places under study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Building on the extant

research, this study seeks to understand women's experiences in mid-level leadership positions and the decisions they have made and anticipate making regarding their careers. Studying the experiences of women in leadership in higher education requires a theoretical framework that considers the interrelationships among identity development, leadership, gender, and career. The grand research question that guided this study was "What experiences influence women's decisions to pursue senior-level leadership positions in higher education?" In the following sections, I outline the theoretical framework guiding this study. Subsequently, I provide a brief overview of qualitative methodology followed by a detailed description of the grounded theory methods including criteria for evaluating grounded theory. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of methodological considerations and my researcher worldview.

Theoretical Framework

In determining which theoretical frameworks would guide this dissertation study, I looked to the literature review and the previous research conducted on women in higher education. Feminist theories have influenced topics and methods of extant research and feminist researchers have emphasized the need to establish credible research that is praxis-oriented and advocacy-based (Lather, 1986). For instance, researchers have begun to focus on the experiences of diverse women in senior-level leadership in higher education (Gonzalez Sullivan, 2009; Kamassah, 2010, Montas-Hunter, 2012). More studies are using interviews to collect data, reflecting the tenets of qualitative methodology and feminist theories that emphasize the voices of the participants and the

reflections of the researcher captured in rich description and theoretically based interpretation of the issue under investigation (Creswell, 2007).

Feminist Theories and Constructivist Paradigms

Feminist theories and constructivist paradigms converge in their shared focus on the factors that shape an individual's representation of reality. For example, constructivist qualitative philosophy emphasizes (a) the relationship between the researcher and what is studied, (b) the situational constraints that shape inquiry, and (c) the socially constructed nature of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). Large-scale and longitudinal studies of women's development conducted in the 1970s and 1980s were influenced by feminist theorists, including Patty Lather and bell hooks, and sought a deeper understanding of women's experiences (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Jossleson, 1996). These researchers interacted with participants in a manner very different from the objective distance and detachment of a survey and did so purposefully to put feminist theory to practice and to contribute to the extant research about development, about women, and about qualitative research.

Contemporary research has also examined women's professional experiences in organizations and higher education institutions (Heilman, 2001; Maranto & Griffin, 2011; Shapiro et al., 2008). Whereas Gilligan (1982) and Josselson (1996) focused on the women's identity development, other researchers have focused on (a) gender bias and organizations and the influence of stereotypes on women's career (Heilman, 2001); (b) the antecedents of a chilly climate including gender inequity and procedural fairness in higher education faculty (Maranto & Griffin, 2011); and (c) gender schemes,

organizational structures, and career development (Shapiro et al., 2008). These studies

not only emphasize the socially constructed nature of reality, by recognizing that women

and men experience gender bias differently, they also illustrate how intersecting aspects

of individuals' identities, including gender, history, class, race, and ethnicity, shape how

reality is represented. Moreover, feminist theory incorporates power and privilege into

dialogue on inquiry and provides a framework for engaging an emancipation discourse

and for investigating distributions of power that marginalize some and reinforce the

privilege of others (hooks, 1984; Lather, 1991).

Identity Development and the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender

Researchers studying feminist theory and feminist educational research helped

shift focus in identity development research. In the 1970s, researchers in psychology

began a longitudinal study of women's development focusing on the ways that women

develop knowledge (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). The findings from

their study of individual interviews with 135 women recruited from higher education

institutions and family agencies provide insight into the experience of knowledge

production from the perspective of the individual. Moreover, women develop and

possess knowledge in different manners that are influenced by the context of families and

schools (Belenky et al., 1986). Guided by the work of Lather (1991), researchers

studying women's identity development critiqued previous assumptions comparing men

and women and offered insight into the different choices that women face as well as the

developmental paths that they forge (Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1996). These paths are

characterized by competence, connection, and revision (Josselson, 1996). Gilligan's

research provided perspective on the experience of relationships for women and

challenged previously held notions about development as aiming toward separation and

individuation.

Research conducted in 1990s and 2000s has focused on women's status

economically (Kemp, 1994), in leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007), and in higher education

(Allan, 2011; Glazer-Raymo, 2008), and researchers have studied the intersection of race,

class, and gender and how multiple identities influence career development for diverse

women. For example, in a study of undergraduate women, researchers developed a

grounded theory of multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwan, 2000). They

described a core sense of self based on dimensions including gender, race, culture, and

religion. Furthermore, these dimensions vary in proximity to the core based on salience,

and multiple identity dimensions can be experienced simultaneously (Jones & McEwan,

2000). Researchers have also studied senior academic women from diverse backgrounds

using several methodologies to examine narrow, stereotypical accounts of women's

leadership to understand the complex and nuanced ways leadership identity is formed for

women (Wilkinson & Blackmore, 2008). Additional research has examined the influence

of demographic dissimilarities on perceptions of fairness and gender equity as well as

multicultural and gender influences on women's career development (Cook et al., 2005;

Maranto & Griffin, 2011).

Class, gender, and the devaluation of women's work has been studied extensively.

It is beyond the scope of this section to fully review the economic theories that describe

the influence of class-based factors in women's career development. However, Kemp's

(1994) work on the socioeconomic position of women in the U.S. provides examples of

the ways that women have been exploited economically. Kemp's analysis views

capitalism as a system holding traditions that devalue, oppress, and exploit (1994). In

this system, wages are equated with value; low-wage workers then internalize

devaluation (hooks, 1984). This economic system also perpetuates underclass groups—

groups that have historically been economically and psychology exploited (hooks, 1984).

With the devaluation of domestic labor comes the devaluation of women who are the

primary providers of domestic labor (Kemp, 1994).

Studying women's leadership experiences involves making a critical examination

of race, class, gender, democracy, and community: representations constructed in

dialogue among those experiencing them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Feminist theory

provides a framework for rigorous examination and critique of (a) the intersection of

race, class, and gender; (b) devaluation, oppression, and exploitation based on race, class,

and gender; (c) practices of meaning making and knowledge construction that perpetuate

oppressive practices; and (d) assumptions that underlie extant social constructions about

women and other members of marginalized groups (hooks, 1984; Lather, 1992).

Examining Systems, Institutions, and Contexts

Research on institutional climate has demonstrated that individuals experience the

work environment differently, and negative interactions with colleagues and supervisors

can contribute to feelings of exclusion (Cress, 2002; Maranto & Griffin, 2011). Studies

have shown that role conflict also contributes to negative experience in the workplace

(Grummell et al., 2009; White et al., 2010). These role conflicts indicate that institutional

expectations compete with personal and family expectations, which negatively impact

women's career experiences. Scholars have examined the role of the organization in

women's career development through extensive reviews of the literature (Ballenger,

2010; Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2005; Heilman, 2001; Shapiro et al., 2008) and

researchers are beginning to study women's experiences of the institutional climate

(Maranto & Griffin, 2011). For example, Ballenger (2010) examined the structural and

cultural conditions that create barriers and opportunities for women's advancement and

found that participants experienced lack of mentoring, exclusionary networks, and gender

inequality. Further, these barriers represent invisible and artificial attitudinal and

organizational biases that inhibit women's advancement, or in the case of mentoring,

provide opportunities for advancement (Ballenger, 2010). To better understand the

influence of the inter-related factors, I use Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human

development to examine the role of systems, institutions, and contexts in women's

leadership experiences.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory provides a framework for examining the

influence of interactions among contexts and systems and how those interactions might

influence behavior. Bronfenbrenner described interactions among (a) characteristics of

settings (micro), (b) interrelationship of settings (meso), (c) external contexts that affect

or are affected by an individual setting (exo), and (d) system-level consistencies and the

beliefs and ideologies that accompany those consistencies (macro); each system

influences and is influenced by the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The *microsystem*

"is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing

person…" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22), including the office, department, or division a

woman works in. The *mesosystem* "comprises the interrelations among two or more

settings in which the developing person actively participates" (p. 25), including the

workplace as well as one's home and community. The *exosystem* "refers to one or more

settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which

events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the

developing person" (p. 25), such as offices of the institution that make policies regarding

affirmative action. The *macrosystem* "refers to consistencies, in the form and content of

lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, exo-) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the

subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology

underlying such consistencies" (p. 26). The macrosystem, as Bronfenbrenner notes,

contains culture and subculture. In summary, a system is any site of interactions between

a person and the environment, and interactions are behaviors and processes nested within

settings and with external contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Contexts and systems are

integral components of hook's (1984) and Lather's (1992) theories and factor

significantly into the realm of a constructivist paradigm.

Researchers have proposed an ecological model of counseling interventions to

expand career development support for ethnically diverse individuals and women (Cook,

Heppner, & O'Brien, 2005); however, there is no empirical support for this model. Other

studies have examined the glass ceiling as a manifestation of organizational bias

(Ballenger, 2010) or have studied the influence of hierarchy and power and the multiple

identities of leaders (Lumby, 2009).

The theoretical framework for this study demonstrates that research and theory building can be emancipatory practices that encourage self-reflection and social transformation (Lather, 1986) and research values the development of understanding, sophisticated reconstructions, vicarious experience, authenticity, and trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Moreover, the frameworks of feminist theories and constructivist paradigms recognize that reality is manifold and conflicting, and understanding reality requires understanding the experiences of individuals with multiple identity characteristics, and to access individual constructions of reality, researchers must elicit them "through interaction between and among investigator and respondents" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 111). In the following sections, I describe the grounded theory methods used in this study and the guidelines for evaluating grounded theory.

Grounded Theory Methods

Grounded theory outlines a process for data analysis that encourages researchers to examine patterns and relationships that emerge from within the concepts. Data analysis, therefore, occurs simultaneously with data collection as well as throughout the data collection process. Coding, memo writing, and refining interview questions are components of the data analysis phase. The data to be analyzed will include audio recordings of the interviews, transcriptions, and journals of my observations. Coding involves labeling segments of data in a manner that concurrently summarizes, categorizes, and accounts for each segment of data (Charmaz, 2006). Moreover, "coding shapes the analytic frame from which you build the analysis" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43).

Grounded theory is a "conceptual analysis of patterned relationships" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 181) that has the properties of being emergent, interpretative, analytical, and contextual (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, grounded theory provides a rigorous structure for qualitative analysis; one that acknowledges and values the mutuality between the participants and researcher. However, grounded theory is not prescriptive; it consists of guiding principles and acknowledges the need for flexibility in implementation strategies (Charmaz, 2006). These guiding principles help establish methodological stability and quality throughout the process of data collection, data analysis, and grounded theory development. A completed grounded theory will ideally display the following characteristics: (a) a close fit with the data, (b) usefulness, (c) conceptual density, (d) durability over time, (e) modifiability, and (f) explanatory power (Glaser & Strauss cited in Charmaz, 2006). In other words, a complete grounded theory should have explanatory power as well as descriptive appeal (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Moreover, this approach is resonant with a constructivist paradigm and feminist theory and provides opportunities to advance understanding of individual experience as well as identity development, which occur within multiple contexts: social, historical, local, and interactional (Charmaz, 2006). These characteristics make grounded theory a good fit as a methodology for this dissertation, which seeks to better understand the experiences of women in leadership positions in higher education.

Developing the Interview Protocol and Selecting a Sample

Data collection involved intensive, semi-structured interviews. The first step in constructing grounded theory is collecting rich data, and "the in-depth nature of an

intensive interview fosters eliciting each participant's interpretation of his or her experience" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). To facilitate collecting rich data, I developed an interview protocol with the informed consent document, first-round interview questions, and a brief form on which participants identified their age, ethnicity, martial status, and other demographic information. The interview questions were designed to elicit description and reflection, and the interviewer's role is to listen, observe, and encourage participants to respond (Charmaz, 2006). I included this information in the informed consent document that I shared with participants at the time of recruitment.

Participants were identified through purposive sampling and were selected strategically as information-rich cases. Because of this approach, the sample was more likely to be homogenous and small; however, this sampling process helped achieve the goal of gaining insights rather than generalizations. Potential participants were identified initially by their professional positions at institutions of higher education. I identified participants from a region in the Upper Midwest of the U.S. that allowed me to conduct face-to-face interviews. Although this strategy limited the diversity of potential participants, meeting all of the participants face-to-face strengthened the interview process.

Inclusion and exclusion. I limited my search to four-year colleges and universities in the region of a major metropolitan area. I began by searching the websites of colleges and universities in a major Midwestern metropolitan area. I focused on the student affairs and student-services related areas including academic advising, residential life, and career development. I checked the staff of these offices, and if the individual's

name and photograph indicated that the person in the director-level position likely

identified as a woman, I added her to my initial list. I also circumscribed my search by

electing to interview women who had been in their positions for a minimum of five years.

This choice was influenced by the consideration of the grand research question: What

experiences influence women's decisions to pursue senior-level leadership positions in

higher education? Specifically, the qualifications necessary for participants to pursue

senior-level leadership positions typically include five or more years of professional

experience. As I identified potential participants, I located information about their

professional experience on the career-themed social media site LinkedIn. Individuals

who use the site often list their current and previous positions, and the site allows users to

provide details about role and length of time in that role.

Recruiting participants. I made initial contact via e-mail and attached my

informed consent document for review. Of the first four women I contacted at three

institutions, all four agreed to participate. For my second round of recruitment, I

contacted four women at three institutions whose information I had located on their

respective institution's websites. Of these four women, two promptly agreed to

participate and we proceeded to schedule initial interviews. In this second round of

recruitment e-mails, two potential participants did not respond after one week, and I then

made follow-up calls. I left voicemail messages asking the potential participants to

contact me but was not contacted by either individual. The third round of recruitment

consisted of contacting two women at two different institutions. Both women agreed to

participate, and initial interviews were scheduled. This recruitment strategy resulted in

eight participants from seven institutions in five different office types Four of the

participants worked at state schools, three at private schools, and one at a research

institution.

Of the eight participants, three were located in major metro areas, three in rurally

located cities, and two in small towns. The eight participants were fairly homogenous on

some characteristics. For example, every participant had a master's degree, although the

degrees were from different institutions. Additionally, one participant had recently

(within a year) earned a PhD, and another participant was currently pursuing a doctorate

and anticipating a 2015 graduation. The two women doctorates were also the two

participants of color; the other six participants identified as White or Caucasian. The

ages of the participants ranged from 39 to 64 with five women in their 50s. The

participants are from families with varied educational backgrounds. Four of the women

are first-generation college students (neither parent had a college degree). In contrast,

two participants had two parents with college degrees. The remaining two participants

had one parent—their mothers in both cases—with a college degree.

Protecting Participants' Identity, Confidentiality, and Anonymity

Eight women were recruited to participate in the interview process. I scheduled

one hour, face-to-face meetings with each of the participants. All of the interviews took

place in the participant's campus office for privacy and participant convenience. Before

each interview began, I reviewed the informed consent document and answered any

questions the participants had about the research and interviews. I obtained each

participant's consent before starting the recording and asking the first interview question.

I asked four main questions in every interview and elicited clarification and elaboration with select follow-up questions. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. I transcribed each interview word-for-word, substituting placeholders or generalized descriptors to ensure the transcripts were anonymous and otherwise contained no information that could identify the participants.

Collecting Data

Data collection began with initial interviews plus a form with demographic questions. I included additional data on institution type and location to enrich the interview data and demographic information. Although the first-round interviews and demographics provided ample data for preliminary analysis, developing robust categories, elaborating subcategories, and refining properties requires theoretical sampling, or purposefully collecting relevant data to saturate the categories (Charmaz, 2006). The purpose of theoretical sampling is to support a focused analysis and is distinct from initial sampling (Charmaz, 2006). Whereas initial sampling provides a starting point, theoretical sampling creates space for elaboration and refinement (Chamaz, 2006). As Charmaz (2006) so poignantly notes, as grounded theory researchers we cannot know our categories until we ask our initial interview questions. Then, once preliminary categories have emerged, theoretical sampling serves the purpose of providing data for conceptual and theoretical development. Increased specificity in category description rather than generalizability is the aim of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2006).

First-round interviews. This grounded theory analysis was guided by a grand

research question: *What experiences influence women's decisions to pursue senior-level*

leadership positions in higher education? The initial interview consisted of questions

generated from the review of the literature: (a) How did you come to be in your current

position? (b) How would you describe your experiences as a woman in a leadership

position? (c) In terms of your career, where would you like to be in five years? (d) What,

if any, challenges or obstacles might influence your goals? (e) What might change in

your career goals in ten years? The eight participants provided 7 hours and 5 minutes of

recorded data that, after transcription, provided 150 pages of interview data for analysis.

Demographic questions. After the initial interview, participants completed a

brief demographic form with the following questions: (a) How long have you been in

your current position? (b) Please list your current academic degree and the date you

earned it; (c) Are you currently pursuing an additional degree? If yes, which degree? (d)

Please list your age; (e) Please describe your ethnicity; (f) Please describe the

socioeconomic status of your family of origin (i.e. parents/guardians); (g) Please list the

highest degrees completed by your parents or guardians; (h) Please list the careers your

parents/guardians currently occupy or held when they retired; (i) Do you identify as

having a visible or invisible disability? (j) Please provide your relationship status (single,

married, partnered, divorced); (k) Do you have children? If yes, what are their ages and

do they still live at home? I asked participants to provide this background and

demographic after they finished responding to all of the first-round interview questions.

This timing was selected intentionally to provide an opportunity to discuss the content of

the questionnaires during the second-round interview, if needed, without being unduly

influenced by the questions before the first-round interview began. The responses to

these questions provided additional information about participants' family and

educational backgrounds as well as their responsibilities as parents or marital partners.

Second-round interviews. I conducted a second round of interviews after all of

the participants had been interviewed and after preliminary data analysis and formation of

preliminary categories. The purpose of the second round of interviews was to ask

questions to seek specific data—to engage in theoretical sampling—to further refine the

emerging concepts (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, it is not uncommon in grounded

theory to engage in a third round of interviews, if necessary, as well as to use literature to

triangulate the findings. A key part of the process of data collection and analysis in

grounded theory is returning to the participants to develop a richer understanding and to

learn more about the participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2006).

Member checking. The process of member checking serves several purposes in

constructing grounded theory. Specifically, a grounded theory should (a) make sense to

participants and to others who share their circumstances, (b) offer interpretations that

people can use in everyday life (Charmaz, 2006). More broadly, member checking

provide a method of verifying the emerging theory. I conversations had with six

participants regarding their impressions of the initial grounded theory. I conducted

member checking by contacting all of the participants via email requesting their

participation in a 30-45 minute telephone call during which time they would reviewed a

draft of the preliminary grounded theory and a summary of the categories, subcategories,

and properties. During the process of member checking, I asked several follow-up questions included confirming dates of bachelor's degrees, master's degree field and number of years at institution and in current role. This step helped clarify relevant details and contribute to in-depth data collection. I discuss the results of the member checking in chapter 5.

  Coding and memo writing. Initial coding involves using a language of action Charmaz (2006, p. 48) describes initial codes as "provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data." Focused coding, the second major phase, uses the most frequent and significant earlier codes, to categorize the data (Charmaz, 2006). "Theoretical codes specify possible relationships between categories" developed through focused coding, are integrative, and helping you tell an analytic story that has coherence (Chamaz, 2006, p. 63). Coding, which broadly consists of selecting labels for segments of data that portray what that segment represents, occurs at three levels: open coding of broad categories of similarities and differences, axial coding that helps subcategories and examine relationships, and selective coding where the emergent categories are shown in relation to a core, grounded theory category. The purpose of coding is to order, compare, and refine data. Memo writing is a process that encourages engagement with the data in a manner that facilitates definition and interpretation of the data (Charmaz, 2006).

  Before I began my first round of coding, I conducted and transcribed all interviews for the round. I started with word-by-word and moved to incident-by-incident initial coding. During the first round of coding, I wrote memos about the themes I saw emerging and noted other similarities and differences that I wanted to follow-up on.

After each transcript was coded, I returned to my memos to guide my round of focused

coding. During this round, I reread the transcripts for examples to support the

preliminary categories. In this round of coding, I focused the categories on those

supported by the data. After focused coding, I returned to the transcripts again for a

round of axial coding to develop the connections and relationships among the properties,

subcategories, and categories. The process of axial coding allowed me to re-examine the

data for links and to clarify the analysis of the participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2006).

Evaluating Grounded Theory

Credibility is a criterion often discussed in relation to evaluating a grounded

theory study (Charmaz, 2006; Shenton, 2004). Establishing credibility requires taking

precautions as well as providing evidence of rigorous methods. Charmaz (2006) argues

that the characteristics present in a credible and trustworthy grounded theory include

originality, resonance, and usefulness. In addition to using established methods for data

collection and analysis, I enhanced the credibility of this research by keeping detailed

documentation to provide an audit trail. I engaged in peer debriefing with two other

members of my cohort as part of an doctoral advising group led by my faculty advisor. I

also debriefed individually with my advisor as I conducted my interviews and throughout

the coding process. In the following sections I discuss trustworthiness in grounded

theory research and outline the processes I followed to help ensure credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Trustworthiness

Ensuring trustworthiness and the specific aspects of trustworthiness requires engaging purposefully both in the preparation and the process of research and in the interpretation and reporting of the content generated by the inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry, having at its foundation constructed realities, relates credibility to how adequately the researchers have represented the constructions of reality determined by the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, ensuring credibility involves strategies including prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and member checks to examine and re-examine the conclusions the inquirer has drawn and assumptions the inquirer has based conclusions on. This study used prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and member checks to ensure credibility. Qualitative researchers face no shortage of measures for ensuring trustworthiness in methods and the attendant products of inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) segment trustworthiness criteria into four main components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I will discuss each of these components below then end this section with a description of the steps I took to ensure trustworthiness in this research.

Credibility. At its core, credibility is a standard of practice in naturalistic inquiry that ensures a researcher is engendering representations of participants' lived experiences that are neither unduly burdened by the researcher's prior assumptions and biases nor suffer from inaccurate or incomplete descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ensuring credibility involves in depth engagement with participants and in the context of the phenomenon, active examination of potential misperceptions or value-based judgments,

and purposeful analysis of potential alternative explanations. In other words, credibility is an assurance that the inquirer has thoughtfully and carefully avoided fitting the participants and their experiences into presumptive notions of the phenomenon. As a component of trustworthiness, credibility represents the most nuanced concept, and researchers can take a number of steps—prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, member checks, triangulation, negative case analysis—to bolster credibility.

Prolonged engagement serves to build trust between the researcher and the participant and to help identify distortions and misinformation originating from the researcher or participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I ensured prolonged engagement with the participants and with the data by conducting two rounds of face-to-face interviews plus a follow-up telephone call during member checking. I also engaged with the data in a prolonged manner. Specifically, I began collecting data in January 2014. The interview process extended 6 months. During that time, I was also coding and memo writing and engaging with the data. I completed the member checking in November 2014 and completed the final draft of this manuscript in February 2015. Complementary to the process of prolonged engagement is the experience of peer debriefing, provides opportunities for the inquirer to engage in a cathartic exercise to clear the mind of emotions that could be negatively affecting judgment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My primary peer in this case is my dissertation advisor, who provided feedback on the grounded theory development as well as perspective on my reactions to the research. I used peer debriefing to probe for potential biases and to expose the influence of my values (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Not unlike peer debriefing, member checking also tests the representations that I identified and developed to help verify my intentions and to allow the participants to correct errors and inaccuracies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During member checking, I contacted all of the participants by email inviting them to participate, and I scheduled six telephone conversations. I sent each participant via email a brief document describing the preliminary categories, subcategories, and properties that emerged from the data after collection and coding, and I asked for their overall impressions and for their comments the way the theory fit or did not fit with their experiences and if they wanted to add anything to the theory. I describe the results of the member checking in chapter 5. These steps allowed me to collect data to support my claims, make systematic comparisons between observations and categories, and then put forth evidence to support my claims, techniques recognized as necessary for ensuring trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability. As a concept, transferability is the applicability of findings from one context to another and has been presented in contrast to external validity or generalizability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a practice, transferability relies on providing a description of the content and context of the inquiry that is detailed enough to make a judgment about transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve a basis for transferability, I collected and provide background data on the participants and institutions to provide context and described the phenomenon to allow for comparisons (Shenton, 2004). However, although a researcher can provide "thick" description that allows for a judgment about transferability to be made, precisely what constitutes that description will vary and requires distinguishing among relevant and irrelevant

descriptors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed out that the

burden of transferability lies with the inquirer engaging in the transfer but relies on the

initial researcher to provide the data to make the judgment. Transferability requires

researchers to engage in what Lincoln and Guba (1985) have termed "thick description."

Providing thick description requires a level of descriptive data that one would evaluate as

sufficient for making a judgment on the similarity of content and process from the

original context to the potential one (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To help ensure

transferability, I have documented and described the research process, including data

collection and analysis procedures and the participant recruitment strategies.

Dependability. Establishing dependability also requires more direct methods of

examination to meet standards of rigor, including auditing the process and the product of

the investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability, also relies on in-depth

methodological description to facilitate the replication of the study (Shenton, 2004) and

addresses the consistency of a research process and outcome, and consistency can be

increased by a careful accounting of the steps taken and decisions made throughout a

research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The goal of dependability is to take steps "to

help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences

and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the

researcher" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Dependability may be the most abstract component

of trustworthiness, but one cannot have transferability of confirmability without it.

Confirmability. The last element of establishing trustworthiness, confirmability,

enlists techniques including triangulation, diagrams and audit trails, reflective journaling,

and other forms of scrutiny (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). To enhance the

credibility of this study, I kept detailed records of the research process along with records

of both analyzed and raw data to ensure that a rigorous audit could be completed during

the research as well as after. I provided raw data and preliminary analysis to my advisor

and submitted subsequent analyses and memos for scrutiny. I also have the scrutiny of

my dissertation committee to help ensure credibility. I conducted selective literature

reviews after each round of interviews, and I used member checking as a form of

triangulation. The steps that I have taken to ensure credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability could likely be enhanced and will improve with

practice; however, I undertook them rigorously to demonstrate my respect for the

participants' contributions.

Methodological Considerations

All researchers encounter limitations regarding methodology, and this research is

no exception. Qualitative research methods, by focusing on in-depth interaction between

research and participant and the emergence of theory over time, necessitates a smaller

sample size and precludes data collection over long distances. Therefore, the results of

this research will have less generalizability to the larger and more geographically diverse

populations. Additionally, as a key component of the research, I will influence the

process and outcomes both unintentionally and by design. I can strive for neutrality in

my interpretations, but there are very definite limits on my objectivity. Given the

constraints of my population and sample, my worldview and potential for bias, and how

those two factors will influence the data I examine and interpret, I can aspire to the highest standards, but I will likely fall short.

The participants for this study will be recruited, in part, to provide information-rich cases for analysis and based on particular criteria. These two techniques for identifying participants necessarily reduces the heterogeneity of the sample and therefore reduces overall generalizability of the results. Fortunately, generalizability in qualitative research—while a noble standard to aspire to—is often seen as less valuable than transferability, which can be achieved through adequate description of the details of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). However, the focus of this study—educated women in leadership positions in higher education—comes with the risk of perpetuating careerism. In other words, focusing on promoting women into senior-level, high-paying jobs means focusing on well-educated, middle-class women rather than on all women (hooks, 1984). Although the women in this study had diverse family backgrounds, they had all achieved master's degrees and most had held their positions more than 10 years, resulting in a group homogenously middle-class by education and position.

Researcher Worldview

After examining my theoretical framework and grounded theory methods, I hope the reader will have some sense of my researcher worldview. However, the preceding sections do not fully allow for addressing several factors necessary to make an evaluation of the grounded theory presented in chapter 6. The practice of bracketing provides additional information about the researcher's background and personal thoughts about the

issue under investigation. This exercise and the information it produces allows for added

transparency in the research process and added context for evaluating the findings, and

provides the researcher an opportunity for self-reflection (Creswell, 2007). As a woman

working in higher education, my interest and investment in this topic is more than

superficial. I am passionate about the topic of women in higher education leadership

because it is resonates with my experiences and my aspirations. As I began to study

grounded theory in 2011, these words resonated with my research identity: "We stand

within the research process rather than above, before, or outside of it" (Charmaz, 2006. p.

180). I pursued this research topic because I want to facilitate positive change in the

institution of higher education, but as a White woman, I cannot separate my experiences

from my racial privilege. However, I can be forthcoming about the ways in which my

perspectives and values might have influenced this study.

I developed this topic as a doctoral student in a counselor education and

supervision program beginning in 2010. At the time, I aspired to work in student affairs.

As a mid-30s woman, I was looking for examples of women who had been successful

doing what I aspired to, directing a student affairs office. And I found many amazing

role models for career success. As a middle-class White woman, I had common interests

and values with a number of professional women. However, there were not many women

working as directors and pursing a doctorate or many directors with a doctorate. I

wondered what that meant for my career. I engaged this question by reading a lot of

research and theory, and I eventually decided to study the experiences of women in

higher education leadership. By focusing on women in mid-level leadership, I chose a

narrow population with which I share several important characteristics, including level of education and professional field. Moreover, I decided to interview women and to better understand their experiences over the course of multiple interactions. I purposefully selected the methodology that views the relationship between the knower and the known as connected and interprets the findings as reality created throughout the progress of the investigation. The recognition that the inquirer plays an active and influential role in the processes and outcomes of research illustrates the interrelatedness of researcher and participant and the potential for misunderstanding and bias to negatively influence the outcomes of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although my personal worldview is a component of this research process, the theoretical framework and grounded theory methods provided resources for respecting participants' multiple, parallel realities constructed in context and influenced by history and identity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the methodology, theoretical framework, and methods guiding this study, taking guidance from previous research and developing the theoretical framework and methods in a manner congruent with and complementary to the topic under investigation. I selected a qualitative methodology, a feminist-constructivist-ecological theoretical framework, and a grounded theory method to guide this study. I acknowledged my contribution as a researcher and articulated relevant methodological limitations. In the following chapters, I describe and analyze the data gathered in the first- and second-round interviews, present the grounded theory, and discuss the implications and methodological limitations for this research project.

Chapter 4: First-Round Interviews

The first-round interviews were scheduled during the first three months of 2014. I completed the first interview in January 2013 and the eight and final first-round interview in March 2014. The audio recorded during the first-round interviews totaled 7 hours and 5 minutes, resulting in 150 pages of transcripts for analysis. Each participant responded to the questions "How did you come to be in your current position?" "How would you describe your experiences as a women in a leadership position?" "In terms of your career, where would you like to be in five years?" and "What challenges or obstacles might influence your goals?" Depending on each participant's responses, I followed up with the question "How might your goals change in 10 years?" I elicited clarification and elaboration with select follow-up questions.

In constructing grounded theory, categories and subcategories emerge and evolve through the process of coding, categorizing, and sorting the data. After transcribing all of the interviews, I completed a round of initial coding, reading the transcripts and assigning labels to segments of data. I also began writing memos about emerging similarities and differences in the participants' experiences. After rereading the transcripts during focused coding, I tested my preliminary categories against the data and began to label, define, and describe the subcategories using the language of the participants.

A component of this grounded theory analysis includes engaging in a review of the literature to provide triangulation with the categories, subcategories, and properties. Reviewing the literature provides an opportunity to clarify ideas, make comparisons, begin a theoretical discussion, and extend extant literature (Charmaz, 2006). In

constructing grounded theory, the goal of the literature review is to establish and defend

an ideological position (Charmaz, 2006).

In the following sections I present the preliminary categories, subcategories, and

properties. Two categories describe the emergent data: **developing a career identity** and

navigating the institutional climate. The subcategories that describe **developing a**

career identity are *identifying a path*, *gaining experience and confidence*, and

contemplating change. The subcategories that describe **navigating the institutional**

climate are *engaging opportunities* and *meeting with resistance*. The two preliminary

categories used to describe the subcategories and properties are interrelated insofar as the

experience of developing a career identity occurs within the context of navigating the

institutional climate. Moreover, through the process of navigating the institutional

climate, participants were developing their career identities. In the following sections, I

examine how the categories are related and in what ways they vary. Through this

analysis, I develop the subcategories and illustrate the properties with excerpts from the

participants.

Developing a Career Identity

The first category **developing a career identity** is composed of three

subcategories. The first subcategory, *identifying a path*, describes participants' career

experiences and the process of (a) identifying interests related to education, career, and

aspirations; (b) integrating values such as service, reciprocity, and advocacy; (c)

prioritizing family; and (d) locating aspirational models. Additionally, **developing a**

career identity is described by two more subcategories, *gaining experience and*

confidence and *contemplating change*. Each of these subcategories will be described and illustrated in the following sections.

Identifying a Path

In reflecting on their paths to higher education and to their current positions, the participants identified turning points or the experience of a realization when they had found a career of interest to them. I described participants' experience of *identifying a path* with the properties ***identifying interests, integrating values***, ***prioritizing family***, and ***locating aspirational models***. For instance, Helena recalled that she got involved on campus … "in what I didn't know at the time was called student affairs." Dana began her career in residential life before shifting to career development, and Beth began as an advocate and activist before taking her director-level position. Helena, Ana, Camille all transferred from their first undergraduate institution before going on to pursue their master's degrees. Ana, Beth, Camille, Gwen, and Alice held jobs outside of higher education before and during graduate school. Dana, Faye, and Helena each entered their master's programs immediately after graduating. The participants' experiences represented both diversity and commonality among their experiences.

Participants described varied experiences ***identifying interests*** and pursuing those interests. For example, two participants were residence hall directors before moving into career development, one worked as a woman's advocate and later became director of a women's center. Although all of the participants have a master's degree, they are in various disciplines. Ana, Gwen, and Dana pursued master's degrees in student personnel and student development to be able to pursue jobs working with college students.

I graduated with my undergrad in Psych …I really didn't know what I

wanted to do…applied for those positions that were bachelor's required,

master's preferred and knew I was getting, not getting very far in the

process because I didn't have a master's, and then started looking at

programs and realized that there was a program in student affairs and that

it was at [the school], and so that's kind of how that went. (Gwen)

Gwen recalled that after graduating from college, she worked in retail for a year

before applying for jobs at the local university. She decided to pursue a master's degree

once she learned that she could work professionally with college students. Similarly,

Ana completed college and worked part-time as a personal trainer, basketball coach, and

in retail before exploring possibilities for master's programs. Alice came to her career a

bit different, channeling her travel interests into a career in international education.

At this point… [I] didn't realize the field of education abroad or

international was actually a profession. Ah so then I ah realized it was

through a job ad for a study abroad advisor at [small, private college], and

thought I can do that. It sounds great. (Alice)

Alice translated her interest in travel and education abroad to develop a 20 year

career in her field. Dana talked about her passion for not only her profession but also for

helping college students navigate college and early career decisions. Camille was a high

school guidance counselor before starting her master's degree and working with college

students in a higher education position.

I really got to meet other Native folks like myself who were either new

professionals or who were working on their doctorate but working in

student affairs…from that point on I just really decided that I wanted to

have a career in higher education. (Helena)

Helena went on to say she would work as a faculty member or as an

administrator, but at the time she was leaning toward teaching, if she were to make a job

change. *Identifying interests* included outside-of-work interests.

I love what I do, um but I also have a lot of other interests. And so

I…that's why people are like "Why don't you have your PhD?" And I'm

like, "Um, I don't know that this is what I want to do the rest of my life.

(Ana)

Dana talked about enjoying her kids while they were young and so deciding not to

pursue a doctorate. Alice expressed her desire to garden and cook and read, interests that

are cultivated outside of work hours.

Earlier in my life I was thinking do I want to be a dean, do I want to try to

go for that? Do I want a PhD? And I always came back to I decided to

have kids so I, I wanted to enjoy my kids and I wanted my kids to enjoy

me while they were growing up. So, I never felt to sad about that. For me

it was sort of like, nope, this is what I've got to do. (Dana)

I thought that for me it was you know kind of again this is as a woman, I

wanted to learn how to garden, I wanted to work on my house, I wanted to

read, I want to cook. I wanted to do all these other things and that um that

for me in order to get the doctorate, because I didn't want to teach, was

not that important. (Alice)

The property *identifying interests* describes a process of identifying aspirations

both in career and in their personal identity. This process of identifying interests is

shaped by participants' aspirations as well as values. The next property, ***integrating***

values, describes participants interests in building relationships and supporting students.

Their reflections indicate that they hold specific values and incorporate those values into

their work.

So, it was a dream position that allowed me to actually build relationships

in a community and do that work at a community level. And at a campus

level....I love this work, and, and I'm pretty good at it. (Beth)

I want to somehow um cultivate some kind of professional capacity to

support Native students um because I saw how um professors and

administrators were very…certain ones were very integral to my survival,

my institutional survival, um and I wanted to be that for students. (Helena)

If I can help a student to become more self-confident, interview well, you

know advocate for herself, understand her skills and talents, and see

herself in a position in leadership, I'm doing good work. That's good

work. (Dana)

Integrating values also describes participants' experiences of power, obligation,

and purpose.

I have power in my situation, and I have an obligation. I felt it when I was

younger, but I feel it even bigger now, in that how I treat the people who

work for me and, and um how, how I can foster their development and

their um work and their career, but also to make sure that work is not um

that it also works with their personal lives. (Dana)

I feel that God put me here for a purpose, and I think that purpose is to

mediate for my students and to advocate for my students, and to let them

know that somebody does care. Um, I give them the respect that I expect

them to give me back, and they do. (Camille)

For Ana *integrating values* happened over time. She reflected on the lack of

integration between her career identity and her personal identity, especially in relation to

her spiritual values and beliefs, whereas Helena described the interrelatedness of her

internal framework for the spheres of her life.

I had to go through my own evolution, com…integrating my spiritual

beliefs, my church involvement, my involvement in a, in my world to

make that kind of work. And um and it's been an evolution, of sorts, that

impacted me in a really negative way in some ways when I was even in

my 30s. (Ana)

This isn't compartmentalized from the other spheres of my life. You know

so this same politic for living is um the same kind of internal framework

that I have as a mom, as a wife, as a director, as a scholar, as a human

being. (Helena)

The third property of identifying a path is ***prioritizing family***. The first two

properties described participants' experiences identifying interests and integrating values,

whereas ***prioritizing family*** describes career decisions participants' made in relation to

their families. Several participants talked explicitly of the time conflicts that occurred

while they were raising their children. Gwen and Dana both decided to work less than

full-time when their children were young, and this influenced the decisions they made

about certain positions.

> I applied for a, I think it was 75 percent time, maybe it was 50…it wasn't
>
> full time, so it was a better fit for me with my daughter…with our
>
> daughter. (Gwen)

> A lot of that has a lot to do with family situations where women are just
>
> saying, you know what, I can't be on-call 24 hours. I can't do that so I
>
> can't take that assistant dean job. (Faye)

> I said I don't want a director job, because I think as a director you need to
>
> really be able to put in long hours when you need to….I can't work full-
>
> time at home and full-time at work. I don't do that well. (Dana)

Faye's observation about women moving to a dean position reflects what happens

when career expectations collide with family responsibilities. Ana talked about

relocating after several successful years at an institution so that she would live in

proximity to her siblings and parents. Early in her career, Gwen left a position and

relocated with her young daughter and husband in pursuit of better job opportunities.

I would have stayed there, I liked [that school] a lot, but this job came

open, and my whole family lives here…. I'm close to all of them and I feel

like I play a big role in their life. I mean I think all kids kind of need other

adults besides their parents to kind of relate to. So it's been an important

thing for me to be here, and it's been really awesome. (Ana)

The decision really for me to leave that position was based mostly on my

family because…there really wasn't anything for my husband at that time

to be gainfully employed. (Gwen)

Because it does come at a cost. you know and that um you know serving

in these types of roles um and you know it's not just um time away from

family you know because these you know student and the people we

engage with from the time were in office I mean they get the best parts of

us. (Helena)

The property ***prioritizing family*** describes the challenge of achieving some sense

of balance in the time participants dedicate to family and career. Helena reflected that the

time away from family comes at a cost, and Alice commented on the purposeful decision

making that accompanies balancing a two-career couple and aging parents: "We make

very specific decisions based on family and personal um while still remaining committed

to our, to each of our respective careers."

The fourth and final property of *identifying a path* is ***locating aspirational***

models. Aspirational models were people who provided messages of support and

perspective, modeled work-life balance, and shared values of commitment to others. For

these women, *locating aspirational models* was crucial for their early and middle career
development.

> We had a director who I absolutely loved. She was a strong woman and
> um very supportive of work-life balance and great mentor and role model.
> (Gwen)
> I also had a long time boss for 16 years who hired me who just retired 3
> and a half years ago who was a fantastic female leader. And I think she
> really did integrate a number of those things: work-life balance, caring,
> um perspective. (Alice)

> You had all these different um individuals in there who um were not
> stingy with what they knew, who were very giving, um with um with the
> information that they've um been able to cultivate. (Helena)
> Alice and Gwen both commented on the importance of a model for work-life
> balance, and Helena emphasized cultivating information from supportive individuals.

> So it came down to some very simple messages around um not only
> knowing the field but then also that sort of commitment and care and um
> wanting to see the best experiences the students could have. (Dana)
> Each of the participants mentioned influential individuals who provided support

and encouragement throughout their careers; however, the property *locating aspirational*

models describes identifying more experienced others who hold similar values, have

some common experiences, and understand the unique challenges of the work

environment. Participants had experienced times when they lacked aspirational models

especially for things like developing leadership skills. Gwen realized that she had to

develop her own leadership identity rather than adopt someone else's. Ana had a similar

experience in that she aspired to maintain joy and happiness in her work, and she viewed

most of the women leaders in her environment as unfriendly or aloof. Several of the

participants did not have early role models at home or from their parents either. Ana and

Dana talked about being first-generation students so not having an example in their

parents.

> I think initially it was like, I want to be a leader like fill in the blank. And
>
> it wasn't until I realized that I could never be that person—especially
>
> because some of those people were males—I would never be a leader like
>
> that person. (Gwen)
>
> It's been hard to find good women leaders to look up to. There aren't a lot
>
> out there, I think. (Ana)
>
> I was also a first-generation college student from a farm. So I really didn't
>
> have any mentoring from that standpoint. (Dana)

During the interview, Dana talked about her early experiences searching for a

college major and ruling out a couple of areas before finding a faculty mentor. Because

her parents had not attended college before her, she had to look to others for guidance.

Dana's experience illustrates the need for women to locate aspirational models early.

The four properties that describe the subcategory *identifying a path* illustrate the complex

nature of participants' early experiences **developing a career identity**. The next

subcategory, *gaining experience and confidence,* describes professional experiences,

opportunities, and building career confidence.

Gaining Experience and Confidence

The second subcategory of **developing a career identity***, gaining experience and*

confidence, describes two interrelated experiences: professional experience and

confidence in one's abilities. The properties of this subcategory are ***gaining professional***

experience, ***receiving sponsorship and encouragement***, and ***building confidence***. Beth

and Gwen talked about professional development experiences that contributed positively

to their later careers. The first property ***gaining professional experience*** describes

participants' experiences of professional development gaining through early work

experience, committee service, and professional associations.

> I was an advocate. Um, and I did a um a weekly support group for three
>
> years at [the women's center], and that again, that was like a part of my
>
> amazing professional growth. (Beth)

> I was on the women's committee here, ah women's committee for a long
>
> time and was really mentored and surrounded by good women leaders.
>
> (Alice)

> I think that because my actual position here was, on the organization chart,
>
> was really not a leadership role that some of my leadership experiences
>
> really came out of professional associations. (Faye)

The property ***gaining professional experience*** describes engaging in professional

development surrounded by mentors and peers. The second property, ***receiving***

sponsorship and encouragement describes the presence of supportive others that

provided access to professional development opportunities.

> My boss was actually a part of um the National Association for Student
>
> Affairs, um Student Professional, of NASPA, and um she submitted a
>
> proposal um for a joint conference…one year, and that's when I really um
>
> got to meet other Native um folks like myself. (Helena)

> And at a dinner at one of these events, he actually got down on his knees
>
> next to may chair and said, "You can do this. I will help you. When they
>
> ask, you raise your hand. You can do this." If he hadn't done that, I'm sure
>
> I wouldn't have. I'm sure I wouldn't have, because like I said I was new,
>
> there were some um older men who were pretty um had pretty big
>
> personalities in the group. (Faye)

In Faye's experience as a young professional, she being asked to volunteer by a

career counselor she knew from college influenced her decision about taking on the role.

Camille's reflection also highlights the importance of supportive and influential allies.

> It's not so much what you know but who you know and when you know it.
>
> So they, they have helped me a lot with knowing where to be in the right
>
> place and the right time. (Camille)

Alice also attributed some of her early professional opportunities to more senior

professionals: "One of the reasons why I was able to get involved with the field so early

on was really through their sponsorship and encouragement." A product of participants'

successful early experiences describes the property ***building confidence***. Participants

described receiving positive feedback about a performance or ideas and feeling more confident in taking on new responsibilities.

I remember that was the first time when um I spoke about what um my research interest was—which was Native women in higher education—she said, oh, that sounds exciting. We're going to have to talk about that some more. And I mean I had never heard that response from anybody else up until that point, and so it just made me um feel good about this topic that I wanted to develop in some way. (Helena)

Once that experience was completed and I got positive feedback from the folks involved on the committee, I felt like, okay I did that now I can probably do some other things as well. (Gwen)

It just built my confidence….when you have people giving you those opportunities when you don't tend to see that in yourself that you're capable of all of this, it's really awesome. (Ana)

For these participants, **building confidence** provided encouragement to try new things. This property describes both the boost to feelings of competency that participants experienced as well as the openness to taking on new tasks in the future. And, because they had built confidence through successful experiences, they also developed valuable professional skills.

The second subcategory *gaining experience and confidence* is described by the properties **gaining professional experience**, **receiving sponsorship and encouragement**, and **building confidence**. This subcategory demonstrated the importance for participants

of developing skills and experiences early in their careers, because these early

experiences prove influential in future decisions.

Contemplating Change

The third and final subcategory describing **developing a career identity** is

contemplating change. This subcategory describes participants' experiences weighing

choices about stability and change in their careers in relation to their goals and potential

opportunities. As the participants considered plans, goals, and opportunities for the

future, they reflected on their current positions as well as their aspirations for the future.

The properties ***weighing pros and cons***, ***thinking long-term***, and ***considering future***

opportunities describe this subcategory.

In contemplating career changes, the participants engaged in a process of

weighing pros and cons. This property describes participants' reflections on factors that

influence their decisions about staying or moving on from their current position. The

process of ***weighing pros and cons*** revealed a tension between the advantages of staying

at an institution where they have already served for many years.

> I really do feel comfortable where I'm at…The advantages of staying in
>
> my current position making other positions less attractive…from a
>
> practical standpoint. (Beth)

> Just after 20-some years, making a change, starting a new job, I can't even
>
> imagine what that would be like. And I'm in a place where I pretty
>
> comfortable with what I'm doing and to have to learn something new and
>
> the unknown you know there are certainly pros and cons to what I'm

doing now but at least I know what those cons are and I'm okay with

them, but I don't know those about the others. (Gwen)

As Gwen pointed out, she is intimately familiar with the costs and benefits in her

current environment. Leaving for another position would require her to get to know a

different environment. As the participants weighed pros and cons and reflected on their

long-term goals, they talked about being comfortable in their current positions. However,

they also discussed opportunities that might convince them to make a career change in

the future.

The second property, ***considering future opportunities*** describes both what

participants would be willing to do or change about their jobs as well as the future

aspirations they hold for their professional and personal lives and illustrates the thought

participants put into opportunities they would consider. For example, Beth talked about

moving from the campus level to the system level but still providing advocacy for

women's equality. Gwen, on the other hand, describes a broader notion of using her

nearly 20 years of experience to lead in certain circumstances.

Is there a place in um in the system office ah for someone like me to ah be

part of a team that really monitors, looks at, supports, provides technical

assistance for equal opportunity um women's advancement ah, ah work-

life balance you know ah those kinds of things? (Beth)

I know enough about that and have been around long enough that I think I

could provide some leadership there if ever sort of the situation presented

itself. (Gwen)

The property ***considering future opportunities*** also describes participants' plans to stay at their institution for the foreseeable future. For example, Faye and Beth talked about having teenagers who will attend college soon, and the tuition benefit that comes with their job provides an opportunity to save money on college for their kids. For some participants future opportunities are limited. For Alice to take a new position in her field, she would likely have to relocate not only her job but her home and her partner's career. Additionally, Ana and Gwen reflected on financial and heath care responsibilities that limit the opportunities they consider.

For the two participants with doctorates, the property ***considering future opportunities*** looked different. Holding a terminal degree opens more opportunities for teaching and leadership roles. Helena and Camille both recognize that they can pursue faculty positions or senior-level administrative positions. As Helena reflected, "I think that I'd either like to move up in administration or teach, but I think I'm leaning more toward teaching." Camille, on the other hand, has more specific aspirations for her career.

> I'd like to end up as a president of a community college. And then
>
> probably from there retire but do some consulting. The best place
>
> that…you can get in a leadership position is at a community college. So,
>
> and I've never really wanted a four year anyway. Um, community college
>
> was where I went…And so community colleges um have always been um
>
> kind of in my heart. (Camille)

The last property of the subcategory *contemplating change* is ***thinking long-term***. Of the eight participants, six are in their 50s or 60s. Their career plans are necessarily different at this stage because they are thinking more about retirement than about establishing their careers.

> Well, part of it is you're hitting somebody who's in her 50s, so the trajectory looks very different than it did 20, 30 years ago. I think for me for the foreseeable future, I'll probably stay put. Part of it is also I like career. Career's a really interesting field. There's lots of variety, things keep changing. (Dana)

> So again back to that big life perspective. And neither of us are that driven that we want to uproot all of that in order, especially because we're in our late 40s, in order to make a career move. (Alice)

The property ***thinking long-term*** along with ***weighing pros and cons*** and ***considering future opportunities*** describes the subcategory *contemplating change*. This subcategory captured participants' reflections on short- and long-term goals and the barriers they perceive in accomplishing their goals. Whereas the first two subcategories in **developing a career identity**, *identifying a path* and *gaining experience and confidence*, described participants early- and mid-career experiences, the subcategory *contemplating change* reflects participants' thoughts on their futures. The category **developing a career identity** emerged from the participants' descriptions of their educational and professional paths to their current positions as directors on college and university campuses and describes an ongoing, lifelong process. In the next section, I

present the second category, **navigating the institutional climate**, and describe the

subcategories and properties of *identifying opportunities* and *meeting with resistance*.

Navigating the Institutional Climate

The category **navigating the institutional climate** is defined subtly yet strongly

by the choices the participants made as they engaged in the activities captured in the

category **developing a career identity**. As the participants spoke of their experiences as

leaders in higher education, they revealed instances and ongoing practices of negotiation

and navigation. The category describes the career choices these participants have made

in response to opportunities and resistance. In the first-round interviews, participants

talked about their experiences as women in leadership positions as well as possible

challenges or obstacles involved in meeting their future goals; however, the emergence of

this category, like developing a career identity, was informed by all of the first-round

interview questions. The subcategories describing navigating the institutional climate are

(a) *engaging opportunities* and (b) *meeting with resistance*.

Engaging Opportunities

The first subcategory, *engaging opportunities*, is described through the properties

identifying early career opportunities, ***earning promotions***, and ***developing skills***. This

subcategory is related to the subcategory identifying a path, described in the first

category. The first property, ***identifying early career opportunities***, describes

participants' experiences securing their first professional position after graduate school.

[A local liberal arts college] at the time had a position for the director.

And their salary was quite low…and I had had an assistantship and done a

half-time position…so the salary wasn't important to me. I just went, "No,

I want it." I was single. Give it to me. I don't care. (Dana)

It was called a student services assistant, but it was the person in charge of

all the clubs, all the everything. And when I interviewed, I found that they

were…this place was like…the best place ever. It was like, here you want

to do student development? We've never had anyone do it. Come on in.

And I'm like, it was like a playground. I stayed there for nine years

because I loved it so much. (Ana)

Dana talked about taking a director position early in her career even though the

salary was low, whereas Ana reflected on the experience she gained of being in charge of

student activities. These early leadership experiences were fundamental to navigating the

institution and gain promotions.

Had I not gained that experience then I wouldn't have had the experience

to be able to apply for the position here when it came available.…and I

feel like only from that experience have I been able to come up with sort

of this um knowledge and knowledge base and um…it, that's just very

exciting for me to have that and it's something that only experience can

give you. (Gwen)

The second property *earning promotions* is closely related. After having gained

early experiences, these women were qualified to earn promotions. Many of these

promotions occurred within their institution. For example, Helena, Faye, Alice, and Ana

each talked about being promoted from within their institutions.

I was hired initially as an assistant director…and about two months into

my job, the director left the position and then I was moved into the

director's position. (Helena)

[My positions] were just probably every two years or so. So administrative

secretary, administrative coordinator of something, something, you know,

and then um assistant director of international education, director of short-

term off-campus programs, then director [of current office]. (Alice)

Our dean of students left for another position, so the director of the career

center went as interim dean. That's when they asked me to be interim

director. (Faye)

I got promoted twice there. Yeah, so I was there nine years. So I got two

promotions and I kind of ended up with my own campus…and we started

up another campus. And um so that was a really cool opportunity. (Ana)

Gwen was also promoted from assistant director to director after a long search

process. And Dana moved into the director position after a number of years working at

her institution. Camille had job changes during her tenure at her institution but not all of

them have been promotions. Neither Beth nor Ana had been promoted since arriving at

their institutions although they had received previous promotions.

The final property is ***developing skills***. This property describes participants'

reflections on identifying opportunities for ongoing growth and development to help

navigate the institutional climate. Beth, for example, has over 25 years of professional

experience but lacks the opportunity to develop skills sets she identifies as important.

>I think at this stage in my career, I don't know that it would be really
>
>helpful. I guess that's what I'm thinking. I think I feel like I need more
>
>skills sets, um, and can survive with a master's degree. (Beth)

Other participants considered adding to their academic credentials. Dana shared that she at times considers pursuing a master's degree in a complementary field; however, she stated that she thinks it would fulfill her personally more than benefit her professionally, and recognized the time and energy need to engage in academic study was a deterrent for her. Camille talked about the leadership certificate course she was currently taking in addition to her doctoral studies. She elected to take on the added coursework "so that when that time comes, I've got the expertise and the certificates and validation…" (Camille). She wants to make sure she has the experience and education she needed to meet her future goals. Alice, on the other hand, addressed the need for more formal leadership training that would help her develop management skills.

>And I also think that leadership and hardcore leadership training and how
>
>do you…how are you a leader and how do you manage across and up and
>
>down and lead. Which managing and leading are two different things
>
>within higher ed. (Alice)

The property ***developing skills*** includes formal and informal training in technical and leadership skills. Participants varied in their ideas about whether additional education and credentialing is required or not, and several participants talked about gaining skills in areas outside of their current field. The subcategory *engaging opportunities* describes participants navigating the environment by identifying early

opportunities, earning promotions, and developing skills. The next section discusses the

second subcategory in **navigating the institutional climate**: *meeting with resistance*.

Meeting with Resistance

Whereas the first subcategory describes *engaging opportunities*, the second

subcategory describes participants' experiences *meeting with resistance* in the process of

navigating the institutional climate. The properties that describe this subcategory are

navigating a hierarchy, ***experiencing devaluation and exclusion***, and ***experiencing***

blocked opportunities. In reflecting on their experiences in higher education leadership,

the participants described instances of feeling excluded from a male-dominated

environment, experiencing resistance and hostility, as well as facing obstacles throughout

their careers that influenced the opportunities available to them.

The first property ***navigating a hierarchy*** describes participants' experiences of

working in a male-dominated environment that they at times described as a good-old-

boys network. Alice and Gwen talked both about breaking into a male-dominated

environment and about progressing through the ranks in the presence of exclusionary

networks.

> We had a director who had been here for 30 years, and recruiters, male
>
> recruiters in organizations who had been there 30 years and so it was a lot
>
> of that we're going to golf together and all that kind of stuff. And so it was
>
> a little odd I think um trying to navigate. It was uncomfortable trying to
>
> navigate that as a young woman. (Gwen)

As I've progressed through, through the ranks and through the hierarchy, um gender does matter and I think again it's one of those things you see um the men playing golf. …There are certainly some old good old boys networks here. (Alice)

The second property of **meeting with resistance** is *experiencing devaluation and exclusion*. This property describes a sense of shunning, devaluation, and silencing.

I can definitely speak to how um not just being a woman but even having a degree um a doctoral degree has been received. I've been on the receiving end of shunning from our some of our [board] constituents, in particular, men. (Helena)

I was friends with this guy that was at my church, and he goes "[name redacted], don't ever get your PhD cause no guy will ever want to marry you." I mean, really? That's the kind of messages I was getting from people. And but I was at least smart enough to recognize that it was awful. (Ana)

It's like, you know, we're expendable….And in fact in one example he said "you know well we would we would cut the women's center because it's not core ah to the work of the campus." (Beth)

They're all men. And I absolutely feel that they cannot hear my voice, and they're angry because I'm—because I and my team—are producing at a high level. And rather than being held up as a model, we're dismissed. (Faye)

Participants reflected on experiences of being silenced or dismissed, as was Faye's experience.

> It wasn't until I got to higher education where being a woman became a
> problem. And where I'm, I was okay as long as I was in a subservient
> role….As soon as I got to the point where I was sure of myself and who I
> was as a person and as a female and as a woman leader, um things got a
> little…bit tight. (Camille)

The property **experiencing devaluation and exclusion** indicate that gender-based institutional expectations do exist and that they are subtle and unconscious. Beth recalled "…experiencing someone being condescending that I think would not respond in the same way, I know would not respond in the same way to another male director."

> And it's not something that I think we consciously think about all that
> often. I mean I think about it sometimes um in those moments where I
> think I see like a contrast maybe between a woman in a leadership role and
> a man in a leadership role. (Gwen)

> You can you can see sometimes the, the ah the differences based on
> gender. And again not all the time. They're not these obvious examples.
> They rarely will be. (Beth)

The quotes from Beth and Gwen illustrate that these experiences are subtle and sometimes difficult to identify. The third property of *meeting with resistance* is ***experiencing blocked opportunities***. This property describes the barriers to change or advancement that are present in the institutional environment. Alice reflected on a

blocked opportunity that felt like a personal issue whereas Camille reflected on the

limited opportunities for change or advancement in her current institution.

> And so there would have been an opportunity for advancement and then
>
> that was…I learned um and also experienced the fact that that was um that
>
> my candidacy would not be successful. And I don't think that's about
>
> woman or man, I think that's completely personal. (Alice)

> And when I applied for that position, I got that, I received about three
>
> different phone calls from folks saying that [her former supervisor] had
>
> called the institution different folks to tell them that I wasn't qualified and
>
> that they shouldn't hire me. (Helena)

> But I've already hit that glass ceiling. There's nothing else…I mean I've
>
> gotten two other, I've gotten two degrees since I've been here and the job
>
> hasn't changed, for the most part. The uh, salary hasn't changed for the
>
> most part. So, you know what…if I stay here, I'm at that ceiling. (Camille)

For other participants, ***experiencing blocked opportunities*** involved unsuccessful

attempts for professional advancement. For some participants, these obstacles involved

personal concerns such as financial stability or having consistent access to health care.

> I don't feel as free to move on because of financial considerations. And
>
> also um I'm in a position in my life where I need health insurance and
>
> transitioning health insurance could be an issue for me. So that's always a
>
> concern too. (Gwen)

So those are a couple of obstacles. Um…yeah, I mean and I also have

some health issues that I constantly am battling, and as I get older I'm sure

they're not probably going to get easier. (Ana)

Participants' experiences ***navigating a hierarchy***, ***experiencing devaluation and***

exclusion, and ***experiencing blocked opportunities*** describe the subcategory *meeting*

with resistance. This subcategory, along with *engaging opportunities,* describes the

category **navigating the institutional climate**. Both categories were explored further in

the second-round interviews. In the following section, I briefly review current

scholarship on women's career experiences, leadership experiences, and the career

environment. I use the literature to provide triangulation for the preliminary categories.

Triangulation

The first category, **developing a career identity**, was supported in the literature.

Researchers have previously taken an ecological view of career development for women

(Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2005), one that recognizes that development is an

interaction among systems (Betz, 2002; Whitmarsh et al., 2007). Moreover, these views

acknowledge that traditional models of career have been developed on and for White,

able-bodied, heterosexual men and might be an ill fit for individuals whose career

development is influenced by gender and ethnicity and shaped through interaction with

others (Cook et al., 2005).

The subcategory *identifying a path* also received support in the literature. For

women, career development has been influenced by the lack of planning for a path to

leadership and by choices working mothers make that affect their careers (Hughes, 2004).

The lack of a clear path to leadership and family unfriendly policies serve as barriers to leadership positions (Moses, 2009). Moreover, a lack of career planning affects *engaging opportunities* as well as *earning promotions*. Women in higher education often do not plan to be in senior management and only considered it after being invited to apply for positions (White et al., 2010). This experience connects to *gaining experience and confidence* and specifically to *receiving sponsorship and encouragement*. Additionally, these women received key support from senior colleagues, family, and friends during their career transitions (White et al., 2010).

The experience of *integrating values* and *prioritizing family* also emerged in narratives of women's career development (Hughes, 2004; Zacker, 2004). Hertneky (2010) studied the experiences of women college presidents specifically related to the role of balance in leadership identity and found that participants value relationships and authenticity and seek a holistic approach to life. Women working at mid-career report that something will invariably fall by the wayside when attempting to balance raising children, earning an income (because not all women have the option to not work), and completing a doctorate (Zacker, 2004). For example, 26% of women faculty interrupted their career to care for children or elderly family, compared to 4% of men (Metcalf & Gonzalez, 2013).

The constrained choices women face are related to *navigating a hierarchy* and *experiencing blocked opportunities*. Restrictive policies and criteria traditionally applied in evaluating workers for promotion alienate women (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; White et al., 2010). Furthermore, researchers have indicated that long work hours make

it difficult to achieve balance with domestic responsibilities (White et al., 2010). Making

career development more difficult, critical career development and critical child

development years occur simultaneously (Hughes, 2004). Women can feel impeded by

the values and expectations based on male norms, and family obligations move women

off the career track (Bornstein, 2008).

During the time that women are developing a career identity they are also *locating*

aspirational models with whom to interact. Some women have reported finding "no

concrete examples of women balancing active career and family" (Hughes, 2004, p. 105).

However, positive mentoring experiences, diversity, and affirmative action were cited by

participants as opportunities (Ballenger, 2010). Mentoring and leadership training were

key for success in environment that was at times inhospitable because of sexism and

racism (Moses, 2009).

The presence of supportive relationships, professional networks, and role models

have proven crucial to the success of women leaders of color (Kamassah, 2010), and the

absence of these resources connects to **navigating the institutional climate** and to

engaging opportunities. As researchers have noted, invisible and artificial barriers and

attitudinal and organizational biases inhibit women's advancement (Ballenger, 2010).

The lack of mentoring and exclusionary networks result from structural and cultural

conditions that create barriers and opportunities for women's advancement (White et al.,

2010), which are related to *meeting with resistance* and specifically to ***experiencing***

devaluation and exclusion. A study of 91 women college presidents reported that 56%

of respondents have mentors; however, many more (71%) reported that their mentors

sought them out (Brown, 2005), again supporting the relevance of *receiving sponsorship and encouragement*.

Researchers have studied women's experiences of a chilly climate and found that women perceive exclusion in male-dominated environments (Maranto & Griffin, 2011) and that the criteria for promotion to leadership positions can be written in a manner that excludes women from consideration (Grummell, Devine, & Lynch, 2009). This research indicates that *experiencing devaluation and exclusion* and *experiencing blocked opportunities* occurs for women serving in senior administration positions as well as faculty positions in higher education Grummell et al., 2009; Maranto & Griffin, 2011). Women respond to these characteristics in the institutional climate by *developing skills* through professional development and informal conversations with colleagues (Sermersheim & Keim, 2005) or by developing a more traditional masculine pursuit of career goals (Skelton, 2004).

Discussion

The experience that resonated most strongly after the first-round interviews was the pursuit and negotiation of balance. Participants talked about making specific early-career choices to strike a balance between career identity and family identity. Their educational and professional pursuits were ambitious and directed, and their family commitments provided a hub around which they developed and negotiated their career aspirations.

The category, **developing a career identity**—like other aspects of their identities—is viewed as a growth process characterized by experience and reflection.

These early career experiences were integral to the process of *identifying a path*. For

participants ***identifying interests*** developed represented a unique component of

identifying a path. Some followed passions, others happened upon their field somewhat

by accident. However, they steadily moved forward in their careers. Participants'

experiences ***integrating values*** was likewise unique, also the prevailing themes in

participants' reflections included the value they place on relationships, on connecting

with and supporting others, and on ***prioritizing family***. Although ***integrating values*** and

goals was unique to each participant, the themes of relationships, connection, priorities,

and balance were shared.

Developing a career identity also included *gaining experience and confidence* in

the presence of supportive individuals, including supervisors, colleagues, and family. For

many participants, as their careers progressed, and as they established longevity at their

institutions, they have fewer opportunities for finding mentors. The participants

discussed ***locating aspirational models*** and from mentors and supportive peers both

within and outside of their institution. The participants reflected on supervisors, advisors,

and colleagues who provided support, encouragement, perspective, and opportunities at

key points in their careers, typically at transition points and the experience of ***receiving***

sponsorship and encouragement. Participants reflected on their excitement for and

engagement in their work. This passion drew the attention of supervisors and mentors

who provided opportunities to *gain experience and confidence*. With the support of these

influential others, the participants engaged opportunities for ***gaining professional***

experience through leadership on committees and in their professional associations.

They recalled ***building confidence*** after receiving positive feedback and feeling confident

enough to take on the next opportunity.

In reflecting on their career aspirations, participants were thoughtful in

contemplating change, especially as they begin to think about the next phase of their

careers. The participants who have worked for twenty-plus years are beginning to think

about retirement. However, for many, their jobs are connected to health and income

benefits that they cannot yet give up. Some have children in college or preparing for

college and others have a chronic illness requiring ongoing health insurance coverage.

This experience ***weighing pros and cons*** and considering included acknowledging

constraints as well as possibilities. Accompanying this was the experience of ***thinking***

long-term, which influence participants' aspirations for career change. All of the

participants articulated their expectations when ***considering future opportunities***. For

some, they wanted to live in proximity to family, keep their benefits, or have career

opportunities for their partners. Some participants would consider a job change within

the university system, however, most participants expressed the undesirability of

relocation. One participant is anticipating leaving her institution after she completes her

degree and reflected that she does not see any future opportunities at her current

institution.

As participants gained experience **navigating the institutional climate,** they had

experience ***engaging early career opportunities*** including attending graduate school and

taking on new assignments and responsibilities as they emerged in their jobs. *Engaging*

opportunities as they were presented, created opportunities for ***developing skills*** and

earning promotions. Early successes were often connected with promotion opportunities. At some point in their careers, seven of the participants had experience *earning promotions* from within, from an assistant director to director. At that point, promotion opportunities changed. In more recent career experiences, participants focused on *developing skills* that would help them do their current job more effectively and maintain their passion for the work they do. Career opportunities will be somewhat different for the two women with doctorates. Their terminal degree allows them to compete for senior-level positions. None of the other women have plans to begin a doctorate, so this circumscribes some of their opportunities.

Although these women have ascended the professional ladder from their first post-Master's degree positions to directors of student affairs offices by *engaging opportunities,* they recognize that at some point their advancement will be blocked. *Experiencing blocked opportunities* was common to the participants, although the manner in which this occurred throughout their careers differed. Lack of a terminal degree is a very real factor in an environment that often promotes faculty into administrative positions. For some of the participants, *navigating a hierarchy* involved acquiring longevity at their institutions, if not yet in their positions. Five of the participants had been at their institutions for 20-plus years. The remaining three for 15, 10, and 2 (at the time of the interviews) and in their positions from one to eight years for six of the participants. Only two participants have held a single position at their institution.

Navigating the institutional climate was also characterized by *experiencing devaluation and exclusion*. Participants were reprimanded for being outspoken, independent, assertive, and well-educated. Participants also recalled times when they stood up as leaders to advocate for themselves or others and faced criticism. This criticism included being called harsh and attacking, being deemed unmarriageable for having a doctorate, and telling women that if they wanted change, they should form their own group. Participants also recalled receiving implicit and explicit messages conveying a lack of support, sometimes from direct supervisors and also from senior administrators. Participants also reflected on *experiencing devaluation and exclusion* when they were told their program funding would be cut, that personnel would not be replaced, and that their department would be restructured the face of budget shortfalls. These instances of *meeting with resistance* are also related to *experiencing blocked opportunities* for the growth and development of their programs and staff.

Conclusion

The categories **developing a career identity** and **navigating the institutional climate** emerged after the first-round interviews. After reflecting on the preliminary categories, subcategories, and properties, it was clear that role models, mentors, and supporters have been a key feature of their professional leadership development. However, the sources of participants' current role models and sources of support was less sure. Because of participants' prominent references to the availability and lack of mentors and role models in their early career, I followed up with a question about past and current mentors and role models as well as sources of support and encouragement.

Similarly, the category **navigating the institutional climate**, while describing

participants' past experiences, lacked a deeper understanding of women's current

experiences.

       To further explore experiences of opportunities and resistance, I asked

participants what they would like to change about the environment as well as for advice,

given their years of experience, they would give to women starting out. Specifically, I

asked participants the following questions in the second-round interviews: (a) Who are

your role models? (b) Where do you go for support and encouragement? (c) What would

you change about the environment to make it better for women? (d) What advice would

you give to a woman just starting out in your field or a similar field? In chapter 5 I

discuss participants responses and how they influenced the change and development of

the categories, subcategories, and properties.

Chapter 5: Second-Round Interviews

In chapter 4, two categories and five preliminary subcategories emerged to describe the first-round interview data. The subcategories (a) identifying a path, (b) gaining experience and confidence, (c) contemplating change, (d) engaging opportunities, and (e) meeting with resistance emerged to describe participants' experiences **developing a career identity** and **navigating the institutional climate**. The purpose of the second-round interviews was to engage in theoretical sampling to complement the process of comparing, refining, and ordering the data (Charmaz, 2006). All eight women interviewed during the first round agreed to participate in second-round interviews. I scheduled one-hour face-to-face meetings with each participant and travelled to their offices to complete the interviews. I conducted the interviews in May and June 2014, and transcribed in July and August. The second-round interviews produced 5.5 hours of audio and 67 pages of transcripts.

After triangulation and discussion of the first-round interviews, I identified areas in need of further exploration. In the first-round interviews, all of the participants discussed the influential people in their lives who provided role modeling, mentoring, and support. Participants reflected on the importance of *locating aspirational models* and *gaining experience and confidence* as they identified supervisors, peers, colleagues, and family who provided opportunities and guidance, which enhanced confidence and affected their develop in their early careers. These experiences seemed critical to **developing a career identity**. However, there was little mention of current role models and mentors.

To further develop the category **navigating the institutional climate** I included

two questions to elicit participants' insights into institutional barriers and the strategies

women can employ to overcome them. I asked participants "Who are your role models?"

and "Where do you go for support?" "What would you change about the environment to

make it better for women?" "What advice would you give to a woman just starting out in

your field or a similar field?" I used the data collected in the second-round interviews to

elaborate and refine the emerging grounded theory of women's leadership experiences in

higher education. In the following sections, I discuss the properties that emerged from

the second-round interviews and how the refined properties supported or modified the

preliminary subcategories. I examine the relationships among the properties and describe

the contexts that emerged and that encompassed the categories and subcategories.

Developing a Career Identity

The first category, **developing a career identity**, evolved after the second-round

interviews were coded. The subcategories that emerged after the first-round—*identifying*

a path, gaining experience and confidence, and *contemplating change*—evolved into

broader and more descriptive subcategories after the second-round interviews. After the

second-round interviews, the subcategory *identifying a path* evolved into *maintaining a*

career path to better describe participants' experiences throughout their careers.

Additionally, the subcategory *contemplating change* and the properties **weighing pros**

and cons, thinking long-term, and **considering future opportunities** did not re-emerge

after the second-round. A new subcategory *locating aspirational models* emerged from a

more developed understanding of a preliminary property in chapter 4. In the following

sections, I present the three subcategories that describe **developing a career identity**.

These subcategories are *identifying a path, gaining experience and confidence*, and

locating aspirational models. I will discuss each subcategory and the emergent

properties

Identifying a Path

After the second-round interviews, the subcategory *identifying a path* re-emerged,

albeit very changed. After the first-round interviews, this property describe participants'

early- and mid-career experiences. After the second-round interviews, this subcategory

evolved to describe ongoing experiences of *identifying a path* as a component of

developing a career identity. The three properties of this subcategory are ***achieving***

longevity, ***prioritizing values***, and ***ongoing development***.

Achieving longevity emerged to describe *identifying a path.* Of the eight

participants, six had been at their current institution for at least 10 years, with four at their

institutions for over 20 years. Additionally, only two discussed potential or pending

plans to change position or institution. After the first interviews, only one Camille talked

about anticipating moving to a new institution after the completion of her doctorate.

Already having relocated for her job, Helena also considered relocating again for a

different position but she shared no specific plans. For the other participants, their career

paths seem to be unfolding within their current institution.

Prioritizing values is defined by participants' desire for work-life balance and the

influence of the role of primary caregiver. Two preliminary properties of *identifying a*

path—***integrating values*** and ***prioritizing family***—evolved and the property ***prioritizing***

values emerged to describe the changes in the two properties.

> Figuring out—in your own way—ways in which to protect your home
>
> responsibilities, or your responsibilities to yourself or your own self-care,
>
> to advocate for that. (Helena)

> So make your professional life important, but don't make it the important
>
> thing. Um you've got to have a life outside. You've got to have um,
>
> you've got to enjoy what you're doing. Try to make sure you can find bits
>
> and pieces of um what you're doing and make it good. (Camille)

"I actually know my values really well and I live them. I'm committed to

them and I prioritize them." (Alice). The property ***prioritizing values*** describes a

sense of balancing responsibilities that Helena and Camille expressed. For Faye,

prioritizing values includes her decision-making about taking on additional

responsibilities or letting them go.

> Sometimes I'll say this is beyond where I need to go, but I'm going to
>
> chose to do that because I want to or I see value in it. But there are also
>
> times now when I say that's interesting but that's not my problem to solve.
>
> (Faye)

For the participants, *identifying a path* was also characterized by the property

ongoing development. In reflecting on their career interests and aspirations, they talked

about growth and development as endless, in because of changing circumstances. This

property represents the sense participants have that professional development is an ongoing endeavor as well as the sense that development is perpetual across the lifetime.

> Continue to gain skills as you go along….In our areas of expertise, just continue to gain competence in those areas. (Beth)

> If new assignments are offered to you and you think I really don't have the expertise I need in that area, within certain restrictions, I think you should take those things on because you never know. (Gwen)

> I'm still learning every single day and I've been doing it for 20 years. The players change. So you never really get there. (Gwen)

> We're never done. It's an ongoing process… I've been personally good at this in some cases and bad at it in others. (Beth)

After the second-round interviews, the subcategory *identifying a path* was supported with the properties **achieving longevity**, **prioritizing values**, and **ongoing development**. These properties evolved from the first-round interviews to describe both past experiences as well as present and future aspirations.

Gaining Experience and Confidence

The subcategory *gaining experience and confidence* re-emerged after the second-round interviews. More specifically, the properties **receiving sponsorship and encouragement** received support and a new subcategory, **gaining perspective,** emerged. Similar to the evolution of identifying a path, after the second-round interviews *gaining experience and confidence* evolved to focus on past experiences as well as participants'

contemporary experiences. The first property ***receiving sponsorship and encouragement***
was again prominent in the participants' reflections.

> It's not just the experience, it's getting, it's my boss walking out of the
> region update meeting saying you should be the region rep for [the
> association]. And all of a sudden she provided access to that. (Alice)
> The president at [a local college], she is an amazing woman. She has, just
> in this last year, she has helped me realize some things that I hadn't looked
> at as far as my career path goes, and how to realistically go for it and go
> after it. (Camille)

Camille found support and encouragement in an aspirational role model, which
provided her valuable career insights as well.   For Alice having access to leadership
opportunities was an important resource for *gaining experience and confidence*.
Receiving sponsorship and encouragement comes from others, however it also describes
how individuals sought out resources, training, and ongoing relationships.

> When I came here I, no one told me to do this, I just did it on my own.
> When I talked to people, and I asked people to have coffee, and I asked
> those people, what do I need to do to be successful. What do I need to
> know about the culture? What do I need to know about working here?
> Best think I ever did. (Ana)
>
> I've been to two leadership programs…one is a [system-wide] leadership
> program, which one of my role models or mentors told me about had
> suggested that I go to. (Camille)

But what I did informally, and I could have done much more, it's like

nurture continued relationships with elders. Whether you call it mentoring,

I think it's so important professionally in terms of having these pathways

into jobs or connections or networks. (Beth)

Beth, Camille, and Ana reflected on experiences that were important during their

career development. Building relationships, asking for feedback, and attending programs

are integral to *gaining experience and confidence* over time. A new property that

emerged to describe participants' experiences and reflections on getting feedback,

information, and insight from others. This property, ***gaining perspective***, described the

subcategory *gaining experience and confidence* and is also connected to *setting*

boundaries.

I think maybe in the more naive days, I thought we were all working

toward the same goal. And we would make decisions based on what was

best for achieving those mutual goals, which for us would be we are trying

to serve students. (Alice)

Is this your problem to solve? Or is it not? But somebody should deal with

it? But is it in your box? And to gain some awareness of that….Not that

you can't be helpful to other people, but to more consciously make the

decision. (Faye)

For Alice, gaining perspective referred to becoming aware of conflicts over goals

within her institution; whereas Faye discussed gaining awareness of responsibilities. For

both participants, decision making is part of ***gaining perspective***. For other participants,

gaining perspective means seeing themselves in a position to provide opportunities to others.

> Now it's up to me to make sure the same opportunities I have, I make sure
>
> other people have them too. (Camille)

> We were talking about nominating women, nominating people. Always
>
> thinking about that. And we're trying to do that for ourselves, but we're
>
> also trying to nominate the next generation. Who are we nominating? Who
>
> are we trying to get on that council? (Dana)

> So they've definitely have paved a lot of the way for me to do the work
>
> that I do. (Helena)

Participants' gaining perspective on their early opportunities and their desire to provide for others what they had received during their careers is connected to *locating aspirational models.* After the second-round interviews, the subcategory *gaining experience and confidence* focused more specifically on previous experience and how that shapes career identity. The final subcategory describing **developing a career identity**—*contemplating change*—did not re-emerge, but the properties related to setting priorities, thinking long-term, and looking for opportunities emerged in other subcategories. Additionally, a third subcategory, *locating aspirational models*, evolved from a property in chapter 4.

Locating Aspirational Models

In the first-round interviews, participants' reflections indicated that role models were an important piece of **identifying a path** and of *receiving sponsorship and*

encouragement. The influence of their mentors and role models was infused throughout

their experiences developing a career identity and navigating the institutional climate.

Because of the key role these individuals played in their careers, in the second-round

interviews, I asked participants about their past and current role models. As a component

of **developing a career identity**, *locating aspirational models* describes participants'

reflections on the presence or absence of mentors and role models at different times in

their careers. Participants' reflections contributed to an expanded description of the role

of mentors and aspirational models. This subcategory includes the properties ***finding***

prospects, ***connecting***, and ***evolving needs***. For participants, role models came from a

variety of places and relationships. The property ***finding prospects*** describes sources of

models as well as the functions they fulfilled for participants. Participants named family,

specifically grandmothers and mothers, as role models.

> I think definitely my first teachers were my parents and grandparents, so I
>
> consider them my first role models. (Helena)

> My grandma was definitely one of my role models. She worked in
>
> education, she was a teacher….She taught for a little while then had a
>
> family, so she stopped teaching because that was kind of the way the
>
> world worked then. Just a really positive influence in my life and I think
>
> about her a lot in terms of what she taught me about being a person in the
>
> world. And being a member of a family, and those kinds of things too. She
>
> was a great woman. (Gwen)

As a working/middle- or maybe lower-middle class, first-generation

college student, I didn't know anyone like that. I did not have examples of

strong, independent, smart women. So they were pivotal then. (Beth)

In addition to mothers and grandmothers, participants identified supervisors and

advisors in their early careers. Gwen recalled a woman director who served as a role

model, and Beth recalled women faculty and advisors during college and graduate school.

A former director here in the office, she was never one to mince words or

not pursue something she thought she should. Just to listen to her and

observe her, and even follow her path was once she left here, just a really

strong woman example. (Gwen)

There are a couple of people here at the university that have helped me get

through the last 23 years. So I go to them when I really need to close the

door, or to cry on somebody's shoulder, or to just vent. (Camille)

Seek a consulting team, mentors, whatever you want to call it….

Perspective is one of the hardest things to gain, especially when you are

young. So finding people. If you don't have it, finding people who can

help you gain some kind of perspective. (Faye)

Conversely, some participants reflected on the difficulty of ***finding prospects***.

Role models were defined as people who get the challenges of the institution and the

specific field, understand self-care and practice work-life balance. Ana, for example, did

not immediately find role models, and when she did, it was someone she stayed in touch

with over a distance rather than someone in her immediate environment.

It took me a while to find any role models that I wanted to be like or to

emulate in any way. It took me several years to find that. I met a woman at

a conference once and she was a VP for student affairs at a small private

school. So we stayed in touch and she ended up being a mentor, just a

confidant that I could meet with and talk about stuff. And she was really

good. (Ana)

There's a connection without you saying anything. Sometimes you know

how you have a visual connection with somebody and you

understand…somebody else is saying something and you look at

somebody and both of you were thinking the same thing but neither of you

have to say anything, that kind of connection. (Camille)

Participants' experiences ***finding prospects*** is also related to the property

connecting. As Dana reflected, it can be difficult to intentionally find role models and

mentors, they often come in when they are not expected and develop more by

happenstance than planning. Several participants discussed role models as women who

are older, and someone they have a longer standing relationship with. Additionally,

connecting is described by what Beth described as a "combination of chemistry and

mutual respect." Although some participants did not elaborate on what constitutes a

connection, Dana emphasized respect and kindness, and Camille articulated the

importance of a visual connection.

Another property of *locating aspirational models* is ***identifying peer support***.

Participants discussed how over time, peers had taken the place of traditional role models

and mentors. Participants especially noted the importance of having other director-level women or others on same administrative level who understand the nature and constraints of the work. Peers provide support, encouragement, perspective and the opportunity for participants to reciprocate.

> They are in my division. They get it. They get the challenges. (Ana)

> Peers are fabulous, and in fact at this point in my life, peers are perfect. But 20 years ago, they needed to be, and maybe I shouldn't call them elders, but I need older more experienced women to help me, who I think maybe has some promise or potential or had some advice. (Beth)

Beth's comment about role models and sources of support illustrates the evolving nature of what she needed in her career. After 20-plus years in higher education, Beth realizes that peer role models are plentiful, whereas she benefitted from more experienced role models when she was herself developing her skills. Many participants have worked in environments with few women, therefore *locating aspirational models* proved challenging for nearly all of the participants. The scarcity of choices likely has long-term influences on a woman's career development.

> I've reached out to women here to see, to have lunch and stuff and that's been super helpful. And there have been people here who I've really learned some things from. But they're really not people in this field or even in student affairs, they're in other administrative roles. Higher up then I am. (Ana)

The importance of peers was prominent in part because of the participants'

current position. Directing a functional area results in fewer peer colleagues and

consequently in locating people who understand both the nature of their work as well as

the demands of their lives. They may find other directors on campus who understand the

workload, but no other director would understand the nuances of the field.

> I do think it's important to have mentors and role models who aren't on
>
> the same campus as you. You also need to have some at your worksite too.
>
> But beyond that so you can connect with people who are in different
>
> organizations and environments. (Gwen)

> I still look to people outside of my institution for mentorship. This is a
>
> small institution that I'm working at, and I have to remember that my
>
> colleagues and my support system too is only a phone call or email away.
>
> (Helena)

Participants spoke at length about the presence and absence of role models as well

as about the characteristics that describe their role models and the functions they serve in

their lives. *Locating aspirational models* was supported after the second-round

interviews and rose in prominence to become a subcategory of **developing a career**

identity.

Navigating the Institutional Climate

In the first-round interviews, the category **navigating the institutional climate**

provided important information about participants' early- and mid-career experiences and

the opportunities and choices they made to get to their current position. The second-

round interview was conducted to gather additional data to focus and refine the

preliminary categories developed in chapter 4. In chapter 4, **navigating the institutional**

climate is described by two subcategories *engaging opportunities* and *meeting with*

resistance. To further develop this category, I asked participants to talk about what

changes they would make to the environment to improve it as well as what advice they

would give to someone starting out. After the second-round interviews, two

subcategories emerged to describe **navigating the institutional climate**, *setting*

boundaries and *meeting with resistance*.

Setting Boundaries

After the second-round interviews the subcategory *setting boundaries* emerged to

describe participants' experiences **navigating the institutional climate**. *Setting*

boundaries incorporates properties from the preliminary subcategory *contemplating*

change, which did not re-emerge after the second-round interviews. *Setting boundaries*

describes core components of **navigating the institutional climate** including ***dedicating***

time, ***setting limits***, and ***managing expectations***. These properties describe the manner in

which participants navigate the institutional climate in the present.

The property ***dedicating time*** refers to participants' experiences setting

boundaries about workload, time management, and priorities. Ana reflected on the style

of hierarchy she has worked with and how she modified her approach in her current role.

There are times you're going to have to work really, really hard. You're

going to have to work 60 hours a week and that's just the reality of it. And

I also think where when you don't have to you shouldn't. And that goes

back to the boundary thing. (Alice)

Setting boundaries but knowing you have to deliver, that you do what the

boss asks of you, but not that you have to kill yourself doing it or lose

your health over it. (Faye)

I really like my work, don't get me wrong, but I can't do it 24-7. I like to

have downtime. I like to have time with my family. I like to read. I like to

watch movies. (Dana)

We talk about work-life balance, but it's also balancing that and being a

professional and knowing sometimes you need to give a little more,

especially at first before you've had a chance to establish yourself. And

especially if, someone once said to me, if you're good, then a lot of people

are going to come to you for a lot of things. (Gwen)

Dedicating time refers to giving time at work when necessary as well as knowing

when to pull back from work and give time to other areas of life. The property ***setting***

limits also describes *setting boundaries*. For example, Faye discussed setting limits on

work so you do not take on uncompensated work, and Gwen framed her experience in

terms of knowing when to take on projects and when you say "no."

Learn to say no, but also learn to say yes. There's a time and a place for

both and it's sometimes tricky to know when those are. But I think they're

both important. Because sometimes you need to do more than is asked for

you and sometimes you need to back off. (Gwen)

My policy now is, if I get email from my boss it's the first thing I read. If I

get a text or email, it's the first thing I read because they know what they

need, and I'm part of that vision, and if they need something from me and

they can't do their job because I'm not doing what they've asked me to do,

that's not good. (Ana)

You have to set your boundaries. I have started saying that to women

younger. And that's the reverse of what we're trained in the work world.

Because whatever the boss asks, by golly we better do it. Whatever they

ask, I'll be there, I'll do it, I'll stay longer. But I think the work world has

changed and I think everybody talking about that, about setting your own

boundaries but understanding you have to deliver, you have to do your

job. But also saying but that doesn't mean I have to kill myself doing it. I

don't have to lose my health over it. (Faye)

The experience of *setting boundaries* and the property **setting limits** reflects being

flexible and negotiating priorities as well as knowing when to say "yes and when to say

"no." The last property of *setting boundaries* is **managing expectations**. This property

describes developing critical detachment from work issues as well as setting boundaries

on how much care one give to needs in work environment.

The work here is intense and long and there is not a lot of money to go

around. And the general expectation is for people put in a lot of hours

because we serve a lot of students in high need. And we're also a tuition

driven institution. With that come a lot of expectations around doing a lot. (Dana)

The students and the programs and the services and your colleagues get the best parts of you because you're here the majority of they day. And by the time you return home and return yourself to your children or when you enter your home space, you might just have a miniscule amount of energy and just love to give. (Helena)

This is most decidedly unbalanced in that women are expected to make children a priority and tend to earn less, which maintains the system; people are still expected to make work primary if they want to ascend. (Faye)

Managing expectations also describes developing critical detachment from work issues and recognizing the limits in the environment, as Faye noted. For the participants, navigating the institutional climate involves *setting boundaries* including ***dedicating time***, ***setting limits***, and ***managing expectations***.

Meeting with Resistance

The second subcategory of **navigating the institutional climate**, *meeting with resistance*, was supported after the second-round interviews. The properties ***experiencing blocked opportunities*** and ***experiencing devaluation and exclusion*** were supported and two new properties, ***developing resiliency*** and ***calling for change***, emerged as an evolution and development of the property ***navigating a hierarchy***, which did not re-emerge.

In chapter 4, ***experiencing blocked opportunities*** described participants' experiences feeling blocked from advancement by lack of opportunity or by experience of exclusion. After the second-round interviews, this property evolved to describe the intersection of the professional climate and their personal needs, especially for flexibility. ***Experiencing blocked opportunities*** also involves getting to know the work environment and listening to others before deciding to make changes. Faye articulated the conflict that arises in **navigating the institutional climate** and being a primary caregiver.

> I had a daughter who was recovering from an eating disorder, and I just
>
> went "no."….I didn't want to try to juggle that [a director position]. So for
>
> me it was being very clear about what I wanted and also my limitations. I
>
> also didn't make as much money and I also didn't actively pursue director
>
> potions for a long time. Because for me it was about how do I put as many
>
> things together as I can that are really important to me and give me
>
> satisfaction. (Dana)

The blocked opportunity that Dana reflected on was the barrier to advancing in her career while raising children. She had made the first step of having children and a professional career, but because of the consuming nature of both raising children and advancing her career, she decided early in her career to postpone advancement so that she could incorporate different interests into her life. In this way ***experiencing blocked opportunities*** related to ***prioritizing values***. Faye discussed the scheduling constraints of raising children and maintaining a work schedule.

When my kids were younger, I used to think what a luxury to stay at work

past 4:30 or whatever time. I had to leave because I had daycare

and…You have to go….This is most decidedly unbalanced in that women

are expected to make children a priority and tend to earn less, which

maintains the system; people are still expected to make work primary if

they want to ascend. (Faye)

I still get amazed at how few women are in director positions, because our

whole office is women….I am a little surprised when I go to these

conference that it's still predominantly men in my field. (Ana)

Faye and Ana, in their reflections, illustrate the blocked opportunity and a

potential consequence. Faye could not stay late at work because she was primarily

responsible for her children's care, so she likely missed out on opportunities to develop

skills and receive guidance for advancing her career. Ana, on the other hand, works

mostly with women in her office, although she noticed her field is skill male-dominated.

As a director, she has fewer peers who are women, which might reflect the slower, longer

path women take to the directorship. As, Faye reflected, the immediacy of her children's

needs came during a time in her career when she also had to make decisions about

advancing her career, a concern several of the participants discussed. Two of the six

women who have children still have children at home, so their careers have been affected

differently since their kids finished college and left home. ***Experiencing blocked***

opportunities related to time and schedule constraints was not uncommon for the

participants, although not all spoke of this conflict.

The property ***experiencing devaluation and exclusion*** describes participants'
experiences being criticized for being assertive as well as vicarious experiences seeing
other women face criticism for their behavior.

I was actually in a situation where…the men that I worked with told me
that I was attacking, that I was harsh and attacking. And I don't believe I
was harsh or attacking, I think I was being direct and specific. (Faye)

I still think we have to remember how to balance out how to be taken
seriously but also how to be a joyful person without coming across as this
angry domineering, assertive, person. I just think that it's okay to still
maintain traits you want to maintain despite people's…I think you have to
be careful. You have to figure it out. (Ana)

Even though I was given the time to do [the leadership program] once a
month, as part of training, to me it should have been training that was
supported by the university or my department, or both. (Camille)

We've had a chronic case for the past ten years of not having the resources
to support the program that we have right now and we've been
consistently unsuccessful in obtaining more resources particular human
resources in order to meet the current size of the program or to expand.
(Alice)

Two participants reflected on ***experiencing devaluation and exclusion*** within the
institution specific to their faith and spiritual-cultural traditions. One participant spoke of
feeling marginalized because of other's assumptions about her religious beliefs; messages

about women she received while attending a religious university for graduate school.

This same woman reflected that at her current institution, she does not speak freely about

issues of faith with students because of institutional norms. She further reflected that her

work with students is hindered because of this expectation. Another participant spoke

about practicing American Indian rites and traditions at a predominately White

institution. Although her position and expertise are related to American Indian affairs,

the institution had no spiritual accommodations for her family rituals that take place on a

calendar different from the Christian-based holidays. Although she did not make a direct

connection to her institution, she provided examples of exclusionary practices, such as

being left off a directory listing and undergoing changes to reporting structure, that seem

to show some conflict between her role and the administration.

> I think I need help in continuing to name what I'm going through…and
>
> actually my family really helped me as a grad student name my
>
> oppressions but also name the sorts of beautiful things that can emerge
>
> from those experiences. (Helena)

The property ***developing resiliency*** emerged to describe participants' experiences

finding people, identifying resources, and developing skills to cope with the challenges of

the institutional climate. Participants discussed things like inner strength, coping skills,

and supportive others as being integral to ***developing resiliency***.

> Look for supportive souls who you can learn from and also will challenge
>
> you sometimes and support you. That's what I would say. And also be
>
> aware of what are different needs in your life at different times. (Dana)

To have a resource to teach us the professional coping skills around

managing and around managing yourself during that time without having

to burden it on your family, so we're not taking it home. (Ana)

I think we need to be really, really strong. And it can be demonstrated on a

hundred different ways, not that there is one prototype. But we need to be

really strong and have integrity in the ways in which we are doing our

work and be able to resist some of the gender crap that comes our way.

(Beth)

The property **developing resiliency** is connected to **identifying peer support** and

gaining experience and confidence. The final property of *meeting with resistance* is

calling for change and describes a sense of security in speaking up and taking on

responsibility and is connected to **achieving longevity**.

I can say it because I've been here longer, I have a greater sense of

security than perhaps other people in the room. (Faye)

I understand what it really means to stand up, you know that act of

standing up when nobody will, that act of speaking up when nobody will,

the act of being vulnerable. (Helena)

We have to get the skills and language about how to say…this is how I'm

going to keep you accountable, to get language around how do you do that

because we just weren't raised with it. (Ana)

For some participants, **calling for change** is not easy. Ana expressed the desire to

develop language and skills around asking for change or advocating for one's program or

one's needs. After the second-round interviews, the category **navigating the**

institutional climate was described by *setting boundaries* and *meeting with resistance*.

In the next sections, I describe the relationships among the subcategories and properties

as well as the contexts that provide a framework for understanding women's experiences

of leadership in higher education.

Relationships Among Categories, Subcategories, and Properties

In previous sections, I have constructed and refined the categories and

subcategories and illustrated the properties with quotes from the participants.

Constructing a grounded theory of women's leadership experiences in higher education

involves developing the properties that are grounded in the participants' experiences. In

this section I will discuss how the properties are interrelated and interdependent. For

example, as participants' experienced developing a career identity, their values

influenced their paths, and their role models influenced their paths. The categories and

subcategories and the interactions among them are illustrated in Figures 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3.

The relationships I discuss in this section are (a) the subcategory *setting boundaries* and

property ***prioritizing values***, (b) the subcategories *locating aspirational models* and

gaining experience and confidence, and (c) the subcategory *setting boundaries* and

property ***experiencing blocked opportunities***.

Setting Boundaries and Prioritizing Values

Participants reflected, throughout both interviews, on the need for balance. The

notion of balance and the influence of *setting boundaries* to achieve that balance involved

incorporating one's priorities in decisions about career and family.

Figuring out—in your own way—ways in which to protect your home

responsibilities, or your responsibilities to yourself or your own self-care,

to advocate for that. (Helena)

What do you need to do in your personal life and professional like to live a

life that's balanced and not out of whack in either area. (Ana)

So make your professional life important, but don't make it the important

thing. Um you've got to have a life outside. You've got to have um,

you've got to enjoy what you're doing. Try to make sure you can find bits

and pieces of um what you're doing and make it good. (Camille)

Learn to say no, but also learn to say yes. There's a time and a place for

both and it's sometimes tricky to know when those are. But I think they're

both important. Because sometimes you need to do more than is asked for

you and sometimes you need to back off. (Gwen)

I think people go, I'm not willing to live that way, and I think the work

world is going to have to start thinking about that. Because what

compensation would be worth losing your health? What compensation

would be worth, like in her case, she saw her teenager not thriving. What's

going to replace that? (Faye)

The participants' reflections capture the essence of the relationship between

setting boundaries and ***prioritizing values.*** In each quote, participants addressed the need

to actively participate in the ongoing negotiation of the important points of life. No one

gave specific examples except in terms of responsibilities to children and family and need

to have a rich life outside of work. Participants' experiences of establishing and

balancing priorities emerged as they described *identifying a path* and **developing a**

career identity and characterized their experiences making career decisions and

navigating the institutional climate.

Locating Aspirational Models and Gaining Experience and Confidence

Participant's reflections on the influence of aspirational models conveyed the

important role they played in participants' *gaining experience and confidence.*

[My advisor] definitely provided the kind of training that I needed in the

job I have now to know how to push back against an institution but to do it

a politically graceful way. (Helena)

And they were role models intellectually, academically, but also gave me

example of ways that I wanted to be. And ways that as a working/middle-

or maybe lower-middle class, first-generation college student, I didn't

know anyone like that. I did not have examples of strong, independent,

smart women. So they were pivotal then. (Beth)

Helena's comment illustrates the experience she gained from watching her

advisor navigate the politics of the institution, which Helena found key to her

professional development. Similarly, Beth sought aspirational models as she developed

her early intellectual and academic identity, which was key to her development as a

strong, independent woman. Her reflection indicates that without the presence of

aspirational models, she might not have gained the experience and confidence she needed

to be successful.

Setting Boundaries and Experiencing Blocked Opportunities

As participants reflected on *setting boundaries* to honor their priorities and values,

they also identified ways they faced ***experiencing blocked opportunities***. Most notably,

participants' discussed their experiences *setting boundaries* around how much they

worked during the years they were raising children.

> I also didn't make as much money and I also didn't actively pursue
>
> director potions for a long time. Because for me it was about how do I put
>
> as many things together as I can that are really important to me and give
>
> me satisfaction. (Dana)

> This is most decidedly unbalanced in that women are expected to make
>
> children a priority and tend to earn less, which maintains the system;
>
> people are still expected to make work primary if they want to ascend.
>
> (Faye)

In addition to Dana's and Faye's experience, Gwen also made the decision early

in her career to work part-time, although not all participants had that option. Although

not all participants reflected on experiencing blocked opportunities because of *setting*

boundaries related to children and child care, they all noted instances of *setting*

boundaries that were met with resistance.

In the first-round interviews, participants reflected on their early career

experiences and their future aspirations; whereas in the second-round interviews, they

discussed career and personal role models, sources of support, changes to improve the

environment, and advice for women entering the field. Their careful reflections on these

questions revealed more about how these women have developed and continue to develop

their career identity and navigate the institutional climate.

Context

It is important to consider participants' backgrounds in describing and

understanding the contexts that influence women's experiences of leadership in higher

education. For example, some of the personal and environmental conditions that affect

the categories, subcategories, and properties include access to education, access to role

models, and access to opportunities. Additionally, recognizing that change and

development occur over time both in individuals and institutions provides key

perspective for understanding women's leadership experiences in higher education is

furthered by understanding the contexts that inform those experiences.

Paving the Way

As a context, ***paving the way*** describes the interaction between the categories

developing a career identity and **navigating the institutional climate**. As the label

implies, paving the way refers to participants' experiences developing professionally and

personally with limited access to role models.

> I don't know that anybody knows how to do it well: to work and have kids
>
> and a house. Somebody said it to me, how do you do it? And I think, not
>
> very well. And I think everybody is like that. You do the best you can. The
>
> most helpful thing I heard somebody say is you make the most loving

decision you can at the given moment, because you've got a lot of

demands. (Faye)

I didn't work full time. I worked ¾ time, .83, and I always worked close to

their school and home. I've been very lucky, I know, that I've been able to

coordinate that over the years…(Dana)

It's a new frontier basically for them. They're treading water and trying to

make sure there is solid ground underneath them and trying to help those

of us that are coming behind them…And now it's up to me to make sure

the same opportunities I have, I make sure other people have them too.

(Camille)

Camille describes both women leaders in higher education who have encountered

the difficulties of navigating in a male-dominated environment as well as women who

aspire to be. ***Paving the way*** refers to the absence of women who have come before them

and have successfully balanced career responsibilities and family responsibilities.

Additionally, it refers to participants' reflections on forging a path for other women who

will occupy leadership positions in the coming years.

We were talking about nominating women, nominating people. Always

thinking about that. And we're trying to do that for ourselves, but we're

also trying to nominate the next generation. Who are we nominating? Who

are we trying to get on that council? (Alice)

The group of women I've surrounded myself with, we all come from this

place of "we want you to get further, let's help each other get to that

space."…So they've definitely have paved a lot of the way for me to do

the work that I do. (Helena)

I have learned and been able to take pieces of all these really amazing

talented women that I have worked with…. And to just continue to grow

and to learn and to do the best work I can. (Beth)

The context ***paving the way*** includes locating people who are able and willing to

provide guidance and opportunities and learning from those people rather than waiting

for supportive others to find them. Participants recognized the need to intentionally

encourage others, especially women, to aspire to more leadership positions even though

role models and others who can help build those key skills are not always available.

Like you said we don't promote ourselves the same way that men do and

we tend to devalue ourselves a little bit, and so if we encouraged each

other more so that it's that support you were talking about it sounds like it

comes back to that, if we could support each other more and encourage

each other more, maybe we would have a little more opportunity in the

environment. (Camille)

It's been a titanic battle to really change the culture, the organizational

culture, the mindset of students, the mindset of the institution of how they

perceive or may have misperceived the center, the people, the students,

and I can see that shift happening, but it is taking a lot of time. (Helena)

When you're required to set a boundary or be tough, we don't necessarily

know how to do that. We have to get the skills and language about how to

say, this needs to stop and I need you to do this, or this is how I'm going

to keep you accountable, to get language around how do you do that

because we just weren't raised with it. (Ana)

Politically there are thing that I am sitting on until later in the fall because

politically I wouldn't be able to achieve my goals or results right now,

because of the political environment, which is not having support. (Alice)

The context *paving the way* illustrates the impact of participants' backgrounds

and especially the role modeling they received or did not receive regarding being

assertive, promoting themselves, or negotiating changes. Although they might not have

had the role modeling as they grew up or at the beginning of their careers, the participants

have recognized the need to develop certain skills and abilities to be successful in the

environment. *Paving the way* provides context for developing a career identity and

navigating the institutional climate and is connected to the participants' family and

educational background. Although the participants are well-educated, half have parents

who did not attend college and many entered higher education as the first generation of

women to raise families and develop their careers.

Ongoing Development

The context *ongoing development* describes the change that occurs at the

institutional and individual level. This context surrounds individual career and identity

development and institutional climates and environments. As participants reflected on

their years in higher education and the insights they gained, they emphasized the

importance of taking one's time to get to know the organization and recognizing that

developing skills and competencies are important across their careers.

> Be patient with yourself and the organization. You really can't get to
>
> know the organization even in a one-year period of time. I'm still learning
>
> every single day and I've been doing it for 20 years. The players change.
>
> (Gwen)

> Once you're new somewhere, take the time and learn stuff before you start
>
> thinking you can make these radical changes and think you know it all.
>
> (Ana)

> Continue to gain skills as you go along. We're never done. It's an ongoing
>
> process. In our areas of expertise, just continue to gain competence in
>
> those areas. I feel like in some ways I've been personally good at this in
>
> some cases and bad at it in others, but I think it's really important to take
>
> risks. (Beth)

> I'm still learning….that learning curve never ends. And that's really what
>
> I realize now more so than I did when I was younger. Even though I knew
>
> there was a lot to learn, I have a different sense of what that means. And I
>
> think I'm more open to it. (Dana)

The context ***ongoing development*** captures the experience of growing and

learning as well as changes that occur in career identity as participants acquired longevity

and expertise in their positions and institutions. This aspect of ***ongoing development***

reflects the mechanisms participants used to cope with the challenges of the environment.

As I become one of the more senior directors of the student affairs group,

that makes it more challenging to because a lot of the people just haven't

have the experience to draw on for that. And so that makes a difference

too. (Gwen)

I have learned over they years to be more careful of what I put out there.

So I'm very cautious. I need to put on a happy face. And what I lean

toward now is be realistic and positive. So when a thing's come at me, I

say we can certainly do some things around that. Let's try this. So it's

really reframing things. And that works pretty well. (Dana)

And you have to keep it confidential, and still try to deal with that

employee. And it's very stressful, very emotional, very draining. So to

have a resource to teach us the professional coping skills around managing

and around managing yourself during that time without having to burden it

on your family, so we're not taking it home (Ana)

The context ***ongoing development*** illustrates the perspective that participants'

have gained over their years working in higher education and takes a lifespan view on

women's experience in higher education leadership.

The thing I find interesting about myself now is that I now have a

framework that I don't take it. There would have been a time in my life

when I would have burst into tears and had been immobilized by that kind

of thing. But now I'm really happy to have the framework and tools.

(Faye)

One of the ways I've described the past four years that has happened to me

is that I've hardened. I've had a professional hardening. And I think that

maybe a tougher skin. (Alice)

Because if we didn't go through hard times, I think that we wouldn't know

how to hone our ability to respond to those kinds of, the different kinds of

adversities in a way that doesn't compromise who we are. (Helena)

Finally*, ongoing development* captures the wisdom that participants gain from

persevering through the challenges. The contexts *paving the way* and *ongoing*

development provide a description of the elements of participants' experiences that are

embedded in the individuals, circumstances, and environments. The preceding sections

described the relationships among the categories, subcategories, and properties as well as

the contexts surrounding the categories. In the following section, I discuss the results of

the member checking and triangulate the categories with a brief literature review.

Triangulation

After the second-round interviews, I engaged in triangulation through a review of

the literature as well as through a process of member checking. The process of member

checks serves several purposes in constructing grounded theory. First, member checks

provide a method of verifying the emerging theory, and second, they allow participants

comment on their overall impressions of the themes and clarify components that might

not fit with their experiences. These two processes provided an opportunity to examine

the trustworthiness of the data analysis. The subcategories, when examined from a

distance, demonstrate the strategic and purposeful nature of the participants' career and

leadership experiences. Gaining experience and confidence is ongoing, as are identifying

opportunities and making career decisions, although sometimes the best decision is

maintenance rather than change.

Member Checking

The process of member checking serves several purposes in constructing

grounded theory. Specifically, a grounded theory should (a) make sense to participants

and to others who share their circumstances, (b) offer interpretations that people can use

in everyday life (Charmaz, 2006). More broadly, member checking provide a method of

verifying the emerging theory. I conversations had with six participants regarding their

impressions of the initial grounded theory. In this section I describe the member

checking process and results.

I conducted member checking by contacting all of the participants via email

requesting their participation in a 30-45 minute telephone call during which time they

would reviewed a draft of the preliminary grounded theory and a summary of the

categories, subcategories, and properties that I provided by email the week prior to the

conversation. I scheduled and completed phone conversations with six of the eight

participants. After giving each participant time to read the grounded theory description

or confirming that they had time beforehand to read it, I asked each participant about her

overall impressions of what she read.

At the time I scheduled the member checking telephone calls, I provided the

participants a brief summary of the preliminary theory as well as an outline of the

preliminary categories, subcategories, and properties. Overall, the six women who

participated in member checking mentioned several aspects of the preliminary grounded theory that resonated with their experiences and when asked about their impressions, they identified both general impressions as well as specific aspects that fit with their experiences. The following quotes are from notes typed during the conversations.

I thought it was all accurate. (Dana)

Nothing was surprising. (Faye)

A lot of it sounded like what we talked about. (Ana)

There was far more that fit with experience. (Gwen)

On every page there were sections that felt true, that resonated with me.

It's definitely my experience that was represented. (Beth)

Participants' impressions of the preliminary grounded theory provided insight into the subcategory *identifying a path*. Four of the six participants commented about their career paths, especially early experiences. For instance, Gwen commented that her career path was not something she planned out in a structured way. Rather, she commented on looking for opportunities that offered an optimal fit. Likewise, Faye observed that the fit of a job or situation changes based on where you are at; with respect to other areas of your life. The experience of *identifying a path* resonated with participants because it was part of the process of **developing a career identity**.

I had plenty of enthusiasm, passion, ambition, good work ethic, but I did

not have a path laid out or a position specified. (Beth)

Part of the reason I went to graduate school was because I did not know

what I wanted to do. I started with general ideas then experiences helped

focus my direction. (Faye)

Gwen specifically mentioned that for her *identifying a path* was an evolution in

terms of identifying aspirations. Additionally, Ana reflected on the importance of

influential people in helping her identify a path; something she felt she could not do

alone. During the member checking, the participants also commented on the subcategory

gaining experience and confidence; however, they emphasized the importance of

developing skills rather than the development of confidence.

The confidence information is interesting. I think confidence can be a

byproduct of that [gaining experience], but there are other things you can

gain through experience like skill articulation and skill development.

(Dana)

The whole confidence thing seems less important. It seems like a distance

outcome to the other things like gaining experience, professional

engagement, and positive and negative feedback. (Alice)

In terms of *locating aspirational models* and ***gaining perspective***, participants

commented on the importance of going outside of their institutions to colleagues for

support. Beth commented on the importance of looking for support and staying

connected, like Alice, who talked about the necessity of skills and opportunities to

develop those skills to be successful.

Another place of note is piece about career development and support and

encouragement and the influence of outside opportunities. (Beth)

It has been a struggle to find role models that achieved that balance or

attempted that at all. It would have been wonderful to have that. (Gwen)

How do you obtain the skills to navigate and continue to be successful?

There is a lack of formal opportunities for developing those soft skills of

navigating within certain areas. (Alice)

What resonated with the participants during the member checking was the tension

between needing to gain experience and develop skills and finding supportive others who

could provide opportunities for that professional development. Additionally, in reflecting

on the preliminary grounded theory, participants spoke about *meeting with resistance* and

navigating the institutional climate.

The category **navigating the institutional climate** and the subcategory *meeting*

with resistance resonated with the participants during member checking, and several

commented on their experiences. Gwen drew attention to the barriers and ***experiencing***

blocked opportunities as she has navigated the institutional climate. Dana reflected on

her response to resistance, specifically being resilient and staying positive, which has

become a vocation component.

It is important to know that you have to navigate it and that there is an

institutional culture to navigate. (Alice)

The piece about boundaries and resistance sometimes even hostility or

frustration, it is absolutely true for me. And I continue to look for support

in places and integrate my life in healthy ways, and I am aware of staying

connected to support systems and friends and family. (Beth)

Having experienced blocked opportunities, the power of the word felt

good to see. It gives voice to some of the frustrations that linger in the

background. (Gwen)

Being resilient and the presence of barriers and/or limited resources. In

higher education we are working at capacity with limited resources,

dealing with realities of budgets, and other environmental constraints.

(Dana)

Participants' responses to the preliminary theory revealed a good degree of

correspondence with their experiences as well as some directed observations about the

categories, subcategories, and properties. Participants noted that *identifying a path* is not

always clearly planned out. Also, *gaining experience and confidence* is necessary for

career development, but it can be difficult to find opportunities. Finally, participants

acknowledged facing blocked opportunities, including lack of resources and other

constraints, and reflected on the benefits of developing resiliency. In the next section, I

will review literature to provide context and triangulation for the categories,

relationships, and contexts.

Literature Review

Research specific to women's career development is extensive, and recent studies

have examined women's experiences as administrators and the influences of factors

including supervision and performance appraisals (Corral, 2009; Donohue-Mendoza,

2012), parenting and career (Bailey, 2011; Hebreard, 2010), and the role of satisfaction

and morale on turnover intentions (Rosser, 2004). These studies are similar in their

attention to influences on career development in higher education. Although they vary in

some details, together they provide insight into women's experiences in mid-level

leadership. The literature review, accompanied by the member checking, provides

triangulation for the categories, subcategories, and properties and their relationships and

contexts.

Researchers have examined the influence of career support and recognition of

competence—from supervisors and senior managers (Corral, 2009; Donohue-Mendoza,

2012), which resonates with the property *receiving sponsorship and encouragement.*

For example, in a study of supervision and the career advancement of mid-level

administrators participants responded to interview questions about the supervision

relationship and how that relationship functions to promote career advancement

(Donohue-Mendoza, 2012). Results indicated that through the supervision relationships,

mid-level administrators receive encouragement and learn about the institutional culture,

and their supervisors provide support in navigating the gatekeeping functions of

administration (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012). Likewise, Corral (2009) reported findings

from interviews with 14 mid-level women that indicated performance appraisals provided

opportunities to (a) discuss and set goals, (b) develop skills, and (c) follow up on goal

achievement. Moreover, the structured, formalized appraisal processes facilitate

discussion about career development and enhancement (Corral, 2009). This research

indicates that relationships with supervisors provide key opportunities for *gaining*

experience and confidence through the process of setting goals and developing skills

necessary for career advancement.

Other studies have examined how women negotiate responsibilities of family and

career (Bailey, 2011; Hebreard, 2010). In interviews about their roles as administrator

and mother, participants strategies they use including defining boundaries, managing

time, focusing on family, and caring for self (Bailey, 2011) providing support for *setting*

boundaries, ***setting limits***, and ***prioritizing values.*** Women working in mid-level

positions at times decide to opt-out of the workforce during early childrearing years.

Hebreard (2010) studied 17 administrators and mothers to examine their decision making

regarding opting out of their professional positions to care for their children. Participants

discussed compromises and tradeoffs as well as lack of support and inflexibility in the

workplace as motivating factors in their decisions (Hebreard, 2010), again illustrating the

influence of *setting boundaries* and ***prioritizing values***. Furthermore, the presence of

compromises and tradeoffs, and women's decision to stop working as a way to manage

the compromises and tradeoffs, describes ***experiencing blocked opportunities*** and

meeting with resistance.

Career mobility can also be negatively affected by ***experiencing blocked***

opportunities (Rosser, 2004). In a national study of 1,966 mid-level leaders in higher

education, Rosser (2004) tested a model for predicting turnover intention based on

satisfaction and morale. Results indicated that career support and recognition of

competence had the largest influence on satisfaction, which moderated the effect of

morale on turnover intention (Rosser, 2004). Taken together, these studies indicate that

receiving sponsorship and encouragement in the form of positive supervision and

constructive performance appraisals can affect career development, influence morale and

satisfaction, and affect women's decisions about remaining in or moving on from their

positions.

In reflecting on their paths to their leadership positions, women recognize that

their careers were influenced by a lack of career planning (Paine, 2004; White et al.,

2010). For example, rather than setting and following a single path, Paine (2004)

describes a series of choices, experiences, and crossroads that revealed themselves over

time. Experienced mentors can assist in these decisions and also help overcome obstacles

to further promotion (Bornstein, 2008). In a study of chief academic officers, Dean

(2009) reported that 82% of participants had mentors over their careers who offered

planning, career connections, and a catalyst for their advancement. Moreover,

participants in several studies indicated that they had been invited to apply to positions by

senior managers (Brown, 2005; Moses, 2009; White et al., 2010), indicating the

importance of supervisors, mentors, and role models ensure women are *receiving*

sponsorship and encouragement.

Locating aspirational models is difficult for many women, especially as they

advance in their careers. For instance, in a study of women college presidents, 71% of

participants reported that their mentors sought them out (Brown, 2005). Moreover, Dean

(2009) studied chief academic officers and found that while 82% of these women had

mentoring over their careers, only 47% reported current mentoring. This makes sense

when compared with the sources of these mentors: 57% identified the president and 23%

other senior administrators as a mentor (Dean, 2009). Because mentors are most often found in more senior colleagues, as a person ascends the levels of the institution, mentors become more scarce. Lack of mentors means lack of role models and support as well, which is an experience shared by women who have navigated the path to senior-level positions (Bornstein, 2008).

Discussion

The literature review offers support and added context for the participants' leadership experiences in higher education. *Developing a career identity* emerged as an ongoing process for these participants; a process in which identifying role models, negotiating priorities, and paving the way factor heavily into their experiences. *Gaining experience and confidence* played an important early role for all of the participants. Earning promotion to a director-level position requires specific and direct leadership experience. Some participants obtained this experience through individual efforts; however, most of the women had leadership development opportunities presented through a supervisor or mentor (where a mentor is a more senior colleague or advisor who offers guidance from experience to a new professional or graduate student). It was through these supervisors, advisors, and mentors that participants experienced ***receiving sponsorship and encouragement***. Although gaining confidence was an important component of developing a career identity, it was viewed as one of several outcomes possible and not as an assumed byproduct. Not all participants benefitted from supportive and encouraging supervisors and mentors, and not all work environments held

these opportunities. This lack of opportunities is also connected to ***experiencing blocked***

opportunities and ***experiencing devaluation and exclusion*** discussed below.

Locating aspirational models was a key component of the participants'

experiences. The value of influential others cannot be understated. Not only do

aspirational models provide support and encouragement that builds resilience, they offer

access to opportunities for professional development and advancement. They contribute

to learning and knowledge, training, perspective taking, and offer encouragement and

opportunities to reciprocate (reciprocity allows for women to develop new skills in a

supportive environment). Role models influence expectations, help define and manage

boundaries, connect to networks, gain experience, take risks/face challenges, navigate

struggles, reduce marginalization and isolation, keep joy. Role models are integral to

women's attempts to resist the marginalization and isolation they have experienced in

their career journeys. ***Identifying peer support*** became more important as participants

gained longevity in their careers.

Finding prospects and connecting. Women look to different people for different

functions as role models. Sometimes role models are people they aspire to emulate, so

those role models must be relatable. Many women see role models only in older, more

experienced people and others see role models in those who have characteristics they

admire or want to develop in themselves. As their careers progressed, participants talked

about the need to more actively seek out role models. This need was due in part to the

scarcity of people familiar with their specific areas as well as with the institution and

their personal experiences. As researchers have indicated, being a mother and an

administrator is an experience beset with challenges (Bailey, 2011; Hebreard, 2010) and

having a role model or source of support who understands those unique challenges is

integral to navigating the institutional climate.

    As the participants shared insights about their career paths, their reflections

indicated that they put effort into balancing the demands of their careers with their

interests and priorities outside of work. The participants talked about their passion and

enjoyment for their work alongside the need to enjoy other aspects of their lives,

including family and leisure. ***Setting limits*** became a strategy for incorporating their

values, aspirations, and responsibilities into their careers and referred to knowing how to

establish priorities at work that accounted for their responsibilities. Additionally,

participants recognized that the perfect work environment does not exist, that work takes

time and family takes time, and compromise is a part of life. While they remain

committed to the work they do, they also recognize that they must take time away from

work, which helps them maintain enjoyment in their professional lives. Integrated into

their efforts at managing limited time and maintaining their values, many of the

participants acknowledged that family has been and continues to be a priority. These

reflections further illustrate participants' experiences ***gaining perspective***, ***dedicating***

time, and ***managing expectations***.

    In the process of *navigating the institutional climate*, participants made choices

about how they wanted to dedicate their time and efforts. Early career experiences

coincided with raising children for six of the participants; therefore, ***dedicating time***

described time constraints that occurred while providing primary care for children while

working a 9 to 5 schedule. As one participant reflected, parents cannot leave kids at the

bus stop: children are priority. More precisely, primary caregivers must have a flexible,

and often part-time, job. For participants who made career choices—and compromises—

to negotiate the responsibilities of career and family, their lack of options contributed to

experiencing blocked opportunities for their career development. Although some of the

blocked opportunities were temporary, as in the form of part-time positions during key

childrearing years, those barriers undoubtedly influenced career path and career identity.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the categories, subcategories, and properties from the

second-round interviews and described the relationships and contexts among them.

Further, I elaborated and refined the categories of the grounded theory and specified them

through triangulation. I used both member checking and a literature review to provide

that triangulation. In chapter 6, I present the grounded theory of women's leadership

experiences in higher education and discuss the limitations and implications of this study.

Figure 5.1: Illustration of the category *developing a career identity*.

Developing a Career Identity

Identifying a Path

Achieving longevity
Prioritizing values
Ongoing Development

Locating Aspirational Models

Identifying prospects
Connecting
Evolving needs

Gaining Experience and Confidence

Receiving sponsorship
and encouragement
Gaining Perspective
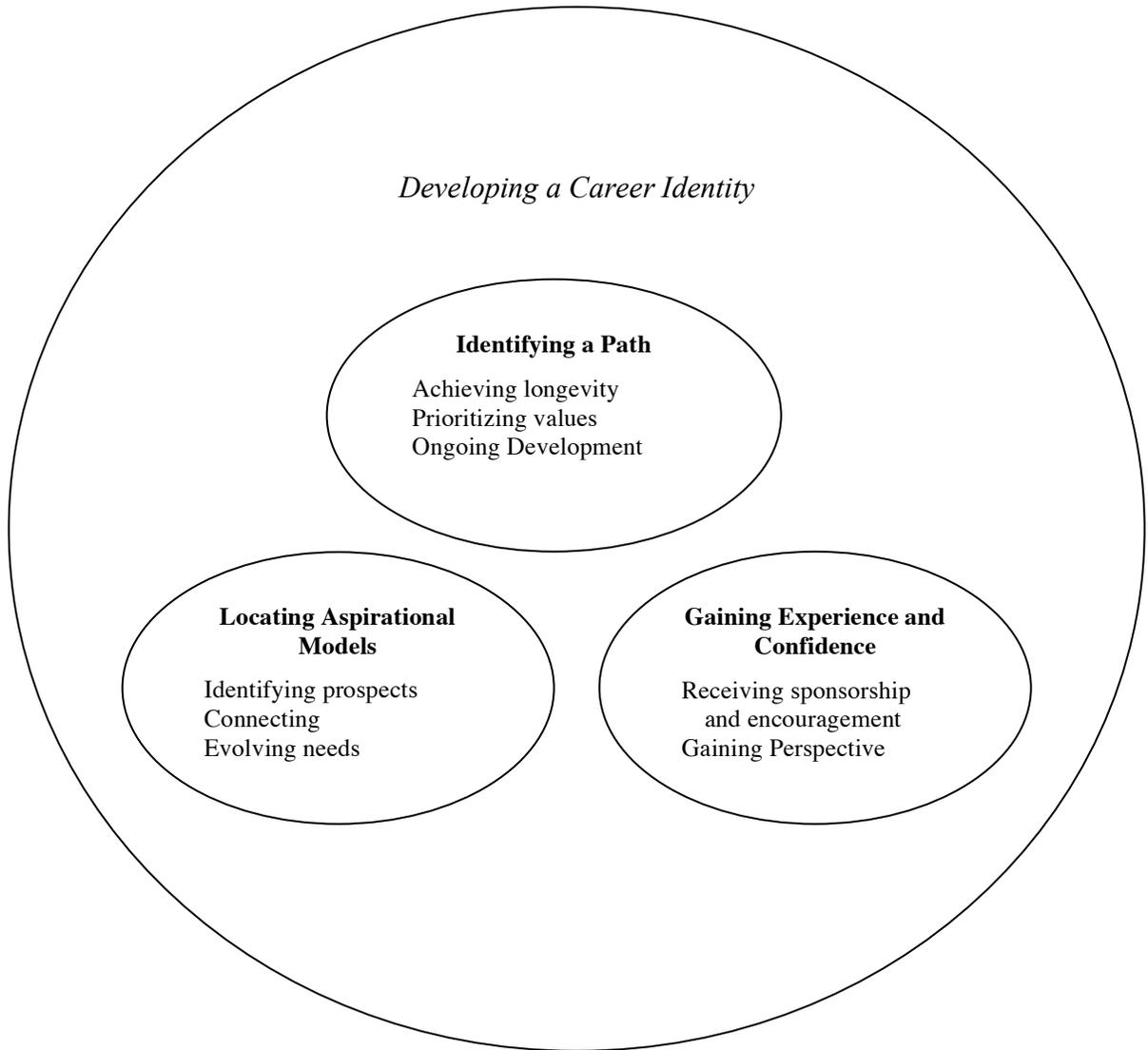
Figure 5.2: Illustration of the category *navigating the institutional climate*.

Navigating the Institutional Climate

Setting Boundaries

Dedicating time
Setting boundaries
Managing expectations

Meeting with Resistance

Experiencing blocked
  opportunities
Experiencing devaluation and
  exclusion
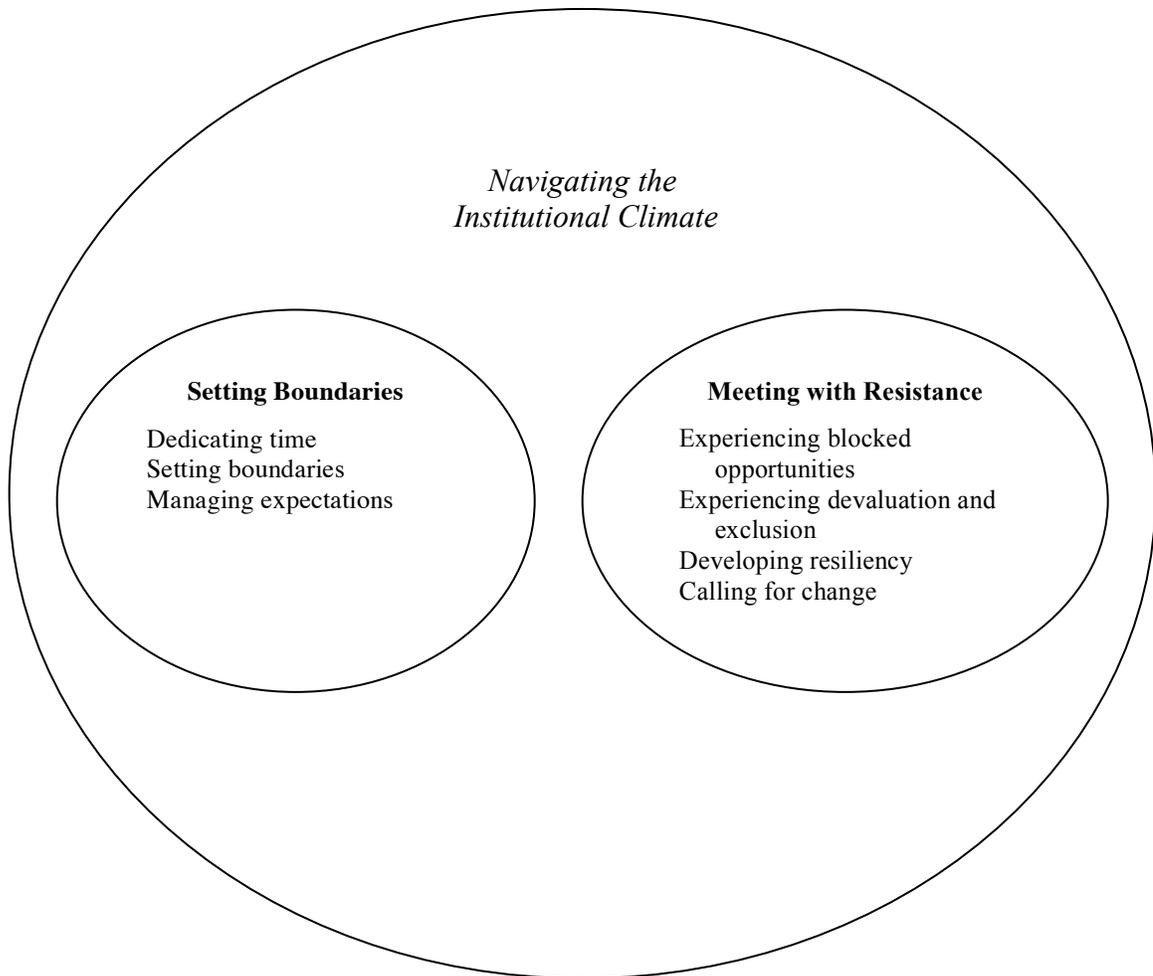Developing resiliency
Calling for change

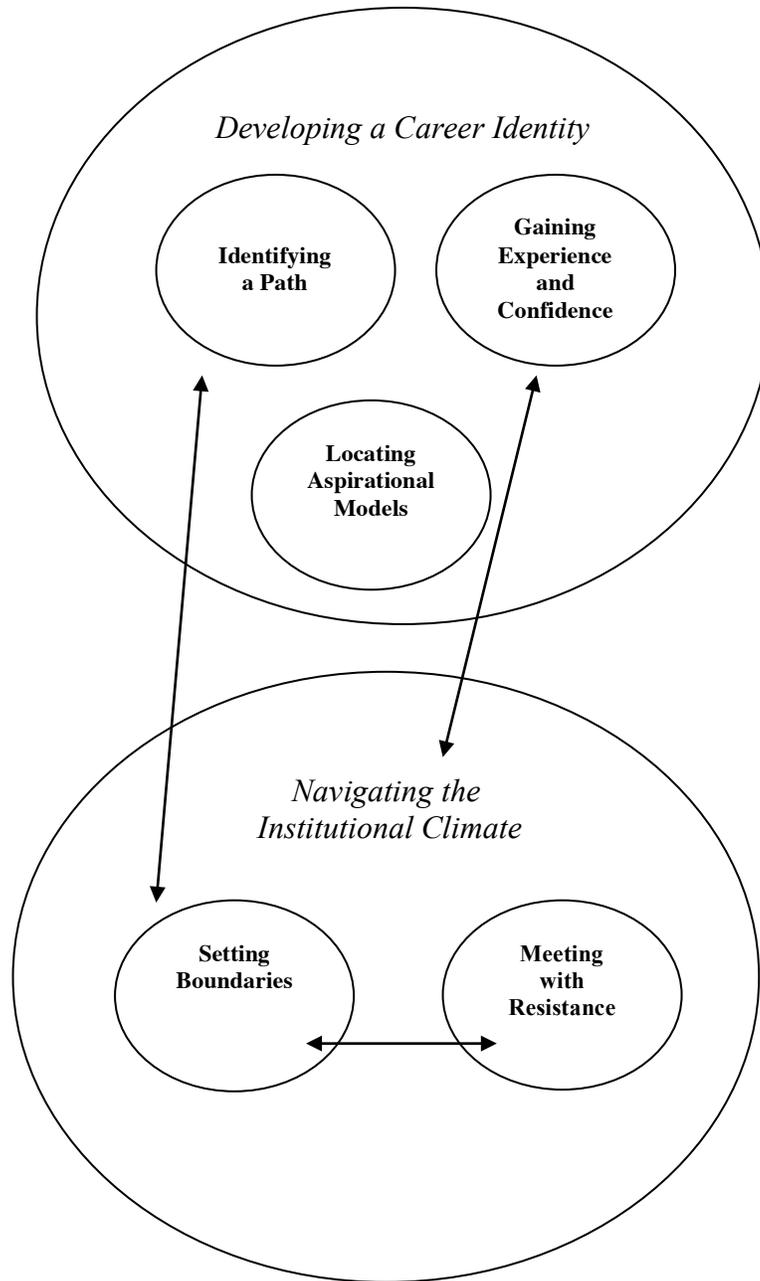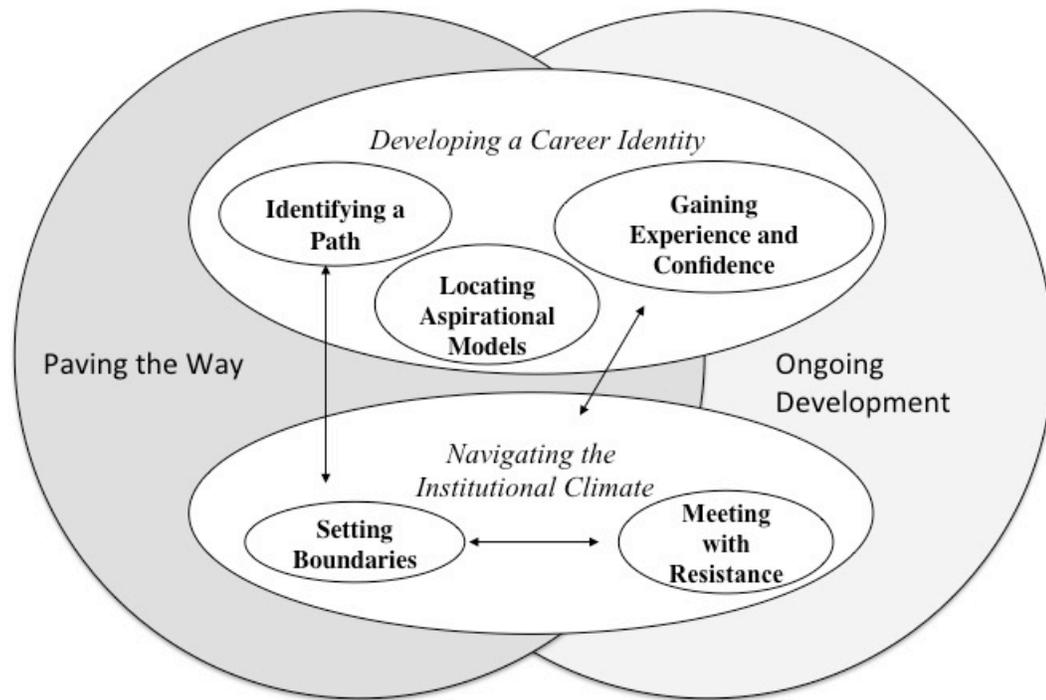Figure 5.3: Illustration of relationships between categories and subcategories.

Figure 5.4: Illustration of contexts *paving the way* and *ongoing development*.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Women serve as leaders in higher education across many levels of the institution.

In presenting this grounded theory, I describe women's experiences as leaders at the

director-level in student-focused areas including career development, international

programs, multicultural student services, student conduct, and women's centers. In

addition to describing experiences, I present this theory to explain patterns in women's

experiences as leaders in higher education. In the following section, I present my

grounded theory followed by a discussion of the limitations and implications of this

research.

A Grounded Theory of Women's Leadership Experiences in Higher Education

Women's leadership experiences in higher education represent a composite of

many interrelated aspects of individual identity and career environment. Previous

literature has examined these factors independently, concealing the inseparability of

personal and professional identities in higher education leadership for women. Internal

and individual influences including career aspirations and expectations interact with

external sources of support and encouragement in the environment. The interactions

among internal aspects and external influences create opportunities and challenges that

women must negotiate. For the participants in this study, their leadership experiences in

higher education have been shaped by the dual processes of paving a way for themselves

and engaging in ongoing development during the lifespan of their career.

Women's career choices have been influenced by and are intertwined with family

across the lifespan. For the participants in this study, family of origin was a source of

support, guidance, and role modeling; however, parents could not always provide guidance or role modeling regarding college or career. The women who identified as first-generation college students noted the challenges related to choosing and developing a career path without instrumental guidance from their parents. Moreover, participants with children did not necessarily have a role model in their mothers for balancing career development and child development. In thinking about their career options, women with children had to consider how their jobs worked with their family responsibilities. For participants providing primary care for children, their jobs—and their supervisors—had to accommodate the hours that children need care. Rather than pursuing advanced experiences or education, participants sought positions and supervisors that provided flexibility and that were inclusive of their interests, values, and priorities.

As primary caregivers, women's career choices are uniquely affected by their family priorities and responsibilities. At times in their careers, participants' opted out of full-time work to care for children and only pursued advancement and promotions when it best fits their family's needs. The participants who did not have children also made specific career decisions related to their family, one choosing to relocate to be closer to her family and one deciding against relocation to maintain proximity to her aging parents. In establishing these priorities, participants recognized that work and family compete for time and primacy, and they learn to set boundaries at work that best serve the needs of their family and career. Overall, the participants in this study spoke of developing a holistic perspective and lifestyle that incorporated many of their values and interests.

The pursuit of advancement opportunities was also influenced by geography and relocation. Several participants were motivated by the opportunity to relocate and live closer to family; whereas for others, relocating deterred women's pursuit of advanced career opportunities. Once in their director-level positions, participants reflected on the implications of uprooting their households for a job change, even a desired or needed one. These implications include parting with their homes, moving farther from family, and requiring a job change for their partners or husbands. For the participants in this study, they decided that these changes were not worth change or advancement in their careers.

From a distance, participants' career aspirations might be seen as lacking planning or judged as unintentional; however, this is far from the reality of women's experiences. They engage purposefully in negotiating a career in which they develop their professional identity and that provides flexibility and priority for their family responsibilities. In their early careers, participants did not necessarily aspire to leadership roles, and their early positions did not have formal leadership responsibilities. Although they may have started their careers with more general aspirations, as they developed professionally, their career goals shifted and they began to consider director-level positions.

Women do not always actively seek out director-level positions but pursued advancement when opportunities emerged at a time when their family responsibilities were such that they could commit more time and energy to work. More often than not, participants moved up from within their institutions. Only two participants moved into their director positions from outside of the institution, the other six women started at an

assistant director or other administrative position and subsequently sought out or were asked to apply for their current positions.

In reflecting on their leadership experiences in higher education, the participants in this study spoke of their choices surrounding pursuit of advanced degrees. As they identified and refined their professional aspirations and formed their career identities, all of the women found a master's degree program that complemented their interests and contributed to the advancement of their career paths. Some participants pursued their master's degree because doing so helped them explore their interests and shape their path. Others engaged in advanced study of an area of interest, which eventually facilitated their career development but was not undertaken specifically to acquire a position.

Several factors influenced participants' decisions about pursuing a terminal degree. Participants spoke of their professional goals and personal interests, and most of the women weighed the pros and cons of the credential against the time commitment and decided that their careers were better served by engaging in ongoing development through professional associations and informal education rather than by pursuing additional formal education. As is the case throughout their careers, the time investment necessary for advanced degree completion competes with their primary caregiver responsibilities and substantially impacts their work-life balance. For most of the participants, these costs were not outweighed by the benefits of the credential. This was especially true for the participants who determined that they did not aspire to a faculty position, which for them was synonymous with a doctoral degree.

The two women who did decided to pursue a terminal degree as part of their professional development were different from the other six in several ways: they had received their master's degrees most recently, they were the only women of color, and they were the participants who spoke most concretely about changing institutions to pursue other positions. However, these two women were also quite different from one another. One had been recruited into her doctoral program because of her area of specialty, and had recently graduated. Moreover, she was the only participant who contemplated moving into a faculty position. The other participant had been at her institution for 23 years and pursued a doctorate at her institution after many years working there and aspired to end her career as a community college president. Although their fields were somewhat different, both women had positions in a branch of multicultural student services. Throughout their careers, the participants' career intentions and aspirations while unique have not been strikingly different. Rather, participants' career paths have been influenced by their interests and experiences and their commitments to their values and priorities. Their career paths have developed over time and in relation to the available opportunities and supports in the environment.

Participants' spoke of the long-lasting impact of the support and encouragement they received from key individuals with whom they interacted in educational and professional contexts. Moreover, participants' needs regarding mentoring and role modeling change over the span of their careers. At crucial junctures during the process of exploring and identifying a direction for their education and career, participants had advisors, professors, and supervisors with whom they developed valued professional

relationships. These valued others expressed genuine interest in their personal and

professional development and offered encouragement and guidance. This guidance

influenced their decision to attend graduate school and apply for early professional

positions. Moreover, these valued advisors provided access to professional development

opportunities and leadership experiences. It was through these experiences that

participants gained confidence, which helped shape their career aspirations.

Early in their careers, having more senior supervisors and mentors was necessary

for career development. Not only did they receive guidance about college, career, and

graduate school from outside individuals, they also learned how to balance family and

career in a way their mothers did not. For some participants, locating senior women who

understood the challenges of career advancement and were willing to provide guidance

and support was quite difficult. Women colleagues and senior leaders often lacked

shared values or the experience of balancing work and family responsibilities. Although

some participants identified male supervisors who had been supportive in their early

careers, as they attempted to balance work and family, they perceived a fundamental

difference in the relationship with male supervisors or mentors.

In the absence of more senior women in the environment, participants turned to

peers both within and outside of their institutions to provide perspective and advice and

offer support and guidance during turbulent times in the institution. Moreover, as women

gain experience and establish expertise, their professional peers become valued sources

of ongoing development. In addition to the professional development opportunities that

peers provide, they also serve as emotional resources during times of challenge and

change. These perspectives are valuable because they come from colleagues in similar

positions who understand the nuances of their field.

Participants also spoke of peer relationships as opportunities to provide insight

and guidance to others. This reciprocity—repaying the kindnesses they had received

from people in the environment—was a notable component of participants' career

aspirations. Reciprocity was a motivating force for the participants in this study

beginning early in their careers and extending to their current roles and relationships.

Their values and priorities included supporting students and providing guidance to those

in need. The participants reflected on the support and guidance they received throughout

their development and noted that they wanted to provide that for others who might need it

the way that they did. Participants' desire to reciprocate—or pay forward—the support

they received illustrates the centrality of this support to their development. Without the

support and guidance of others, these participants might have followed a different path.

Although every participant identified at least one person who had been integral to

their career development, they also noted the scarcity of supportive others at certain

points in their careers. The environment has a significant impact on the availability of

influential others, and the availability of senior women clearly decreases in male-

dominated environments. Participants spoke of the lack of suitable role models and how

this scarcity affects expectations and aspirations and impacts how they negotiated career

and family. When these role models were present, women learned how to develop

professionally while maintaining their family priorities. As women grew in their careers,

the scarcity of role models became more pronounced. The presence or absence of

supportive senior women to aid in navigating the institutional climate was notable for all participants.

As heads of their functional area, they have few peers in their institution who understand their circumstances and the challenges they face as professionals and as women. Women in leadership positions in higher education must navigate the institutional climate actively and tactfully. When models for navigating the climate are not available in the immediate environment, women have to look outside of their institution for support and perspective. In the absence of senior-level leaders to provide guidance, opportunities, and role modeling, women look to peers for perspective, advice, and guidance. Additionally, peers help women engage in professional development and negotiate the challenges of the higher education environment.

Participants recognized the ongoing development that occurs individually and within institutions is a key part of their professional identities, and several have entered a phase of their careers and lives when they begin to think about retirement. They continue to find meaning in their work but also stay motivated by non-career related goals and strive to find balance between work and personal time. They stay committed to their current position while being open to certain opportunities for advancement or change. The participants in this study identified the need to engage in ongoing growth and development as a way to cope with the changes that occur in the higher education environment. Although many are in their middle-late careers, they spoke of their commitment to remain engaged in their work, which has begin to focus more on providing mentoring and role modeling for women who are beginning their careers in

higher education. As they reflected on stability and change, they reflected on the value of

resiliency and perspective, hard earned over many years in higher education.

Implications

The grounded theory of women's leadership experiences in higher education

describes the findings from interviews with eight women serving in director-level

positions in higher education. Guided by the grand research question "What experiences

influence women's decisions to pursue senior-level leadership positions in higher

education?" Through the analysis of the interview data to examine participants'

experiences, making connections between systems both local and global (Charmaz,

2006). This process of defining and conceptualizing the relationships between

participants' experiences and the events of their careers has implications for future

research as well as for recruiting diverse women into senior-level leadership in higher

education.

Developing and refining theory to inform practice. As institutions implement

changes to enhance equity on their campuses, researchers should evaluate these practices

to determine which are successful and which are not. Although research on women in

higher education leadership is growing, little exists on how widespread these experiences

are. Researchers should focus on a broader understanding through meta-analyses and

literature reviews and well as theory and conceptual development. Future research

should focus on how common these experiences are at different institutions and for

women with different backgrounds in education, and different demographic

characteristics. Examining experiences of women who are mothers and those who are

not might also provide key information about how parenting is viewed at the institution and how that interacts with career development. In addition to examining the experiences of women, future research should also evaluate specific institutional practices that influence women's career development. This research would also contribute to a better understanding of how to recruit and retain diverse individuals in senior-level positions.

Recruiting women to senior-level leadership in higher education. If stakeholders in higher education want to make positive change in an effort to recruit more diverse individuals into leadership positions at all levels, they should purposefully and carefully examine the manner in which the work environment interacts with the family. The division of labor model is outdated and marginalizing, and a work culture that expects anyone to prioritize work over family, health, and well-being is also out-of-sync with modern quality of life expectations. Moreover, the principles and practices of androcentrism and gender polarization persist in the higher education environment and continue to influence leadership opportunities for women.

Encouraging everyone within an institution to practice work-life balance and having supervisors willing to model that behavior is an important change at the institutional cultural level. However, recruiting women into higher education leadership does not come in a one-size-fits-all model. Individuals and institutions have different needs and expectations, and the fit between the person and environment is crucial. This research, and much like it, demonstrates that advancement is often accompanied by sponsorship from someone in a more senior-level position (Dean, 2009).

Finally, as long as senior-level positions require a terminal degree, recruiting women into those leadership roles also means recruiting women into doctoral programs. The expectation that senior-level administrators hold a terminal degree (in many instances) is an institutional norm that will always limit the pool of applicants. Moreover, everyone with a terminal degree is not going to want to pursue a path to senior-level leadership. Pursuing senior-level positions requires continual advancement and job change. These women tended toward longevity within their institutions, which affords stability within the community, family, and in relation to partners and children.

Limitations

There are certainly several researcher limitations that affected the process and results of this study. My personal connection to the research topic and the intersections of my identity inspired this research. I am passionate about women's career development because I, too, experience it. However, my perspective as an educated White woman also influences how I approach the research. Although I recruited my participants randomly within a metro area, they were quite similar—White (75%) and over 50 (62%). Of the eight participants, six are White women, five are in their 50s, six have children, all have a master's degree. Because of the small and homogenous sample, I cannot say whether the categories describing the leadership experiences would hold true for women in different parts of the country or world.

The findings are limited by the career stage, ages, and generation of most of the women. I purposefully recruited participants with at least 5 years of professional experience, and most of the participants had more than 20 years of experience. Had

participants been at an earlier career stage, they may have discussed changing positions or institutions more. The findings might be different for women who are in an earlier phase of their careers, and adding those individuals' perspectives would add to the theory.

Although there were points of diversity among the participants, this was a largely homogenous group, especially in terms of education. Each of the women had a master's degree, and two had or were expecting a doctorate. Although this level of education is expected, and necessary, for individuals in higher education leadership, the experiences of the participants as mothers and relationship partners might not describe the experience of women working in a different field. Moreover, the experiences of the participants who had a terminal degree were not as well represented as if there had been more than two. These participants were not only the only women of color, they were also the only participants with specific intentions of moving out of their current positions.

Conclusion

Through this study, I sought to examine the leadership experiences of women working in director-level positions in higher education and to better understand their decisions related to pursuing senior-level leadership positions. The grounded theory describes women's experiences developing their career identities and navigating the institutional climate. The findings suggest a number of changes that institutions could implement to enhance career development for women as well as notable areas for future research. Although not without methodological limitations, the findings could benefit staff, supervisors, and human resources managers.

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Informed Consent Document

Introduction
You have been invited to take part in a research study on women's leadership experiences in higher education. You have been identified as a potential participant because you are a woman working at a higher education institution in a leadership role. Laura Maki, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling and Student Personnel at Minnesota State University, Mankato is conducting this study as part of her dissertation research supervised by Professor Jennifer Preston, Associate Professor in the Department of Counseling and Student Personnel at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Please read the information contained in this document carefully before agreeing to participate in this research.

Purpose
The purpose of the research is to learn about the leadership experiences of women in higher education. We are interested in learning more about how women view their leadership roles and experiences during their careers. We also want to learn more about the things that might influence women's decisions to take on leadership positions in higher education.

Procedures
If you consent to participate in this research project, you will participate in two to three individual interviews each lasting approximately one hour. The first two interviews will be conducted face-to-face, and the third interview, if needed, may be conducted via telephone. The interviews will take place in a quiet, private or semi-private, convenient location in which you feel comfortable. During the interview, you will be asked a few general questions about your current position and your career path as well as the experiences and relationships that have influenced your career. At the end of the interview, you will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire. During the second interview, which will take place three to five weeks after the first interview, you will be asked several additional questions related to the first interview and follow-up questions related to the demographic questionnaire. You have the right to end the interview at any time or to decline to answer any of the questions.

Risks and Benefits
There are minimal risks to you as a participant in the interviews or in the research study. The primary risk is emotional stress. Talking about personal experiences can be difficult for some. The researcher supervising the study is a counselor educator and licensed counselor and the interviewing researcher is a doctoral student in counselor education. In the event that you should become distraught, the researchers have the skills to manage that in the moment, and can provide proper referrals if needed. There are no direct benefits for participants in this research. There is one indirect benefit to you as a participant, and that is that often times sharing feelings and ideas can be insightful. You may learn something about yourself or your community by participating. Or, you may simply feel better for having shared these ideas. It is also possible that you will not feel anything and that your participation will not have any indirect benefit to you. It will, however, benefit other college women by helping university professionals better meet the career needs of women on campus. The interviews will be audio recorded. The researchers will take precautions to keep the recording private and confidential, including listening to the recording only in private and destroying the recording once the transcription is made and checked for accuracy.

Initials _____

Confidentiality
The records of this study will be kept private and confidential. Anything you tell us will remain confidential. In any sort of report of the study, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. We are not asking for your address or phone number, and your name will be left off of all data and a pseudonym will be assigned to you. All data that is collected including the transcription made from the audiotape, as well as the consent forms, will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers for this study will have access to the records. The audiotape will be destroyed once the transcription is checked for accuracy.

Voluntary Nature of Study
Participation in this research is voluntary. You may discontinue participation any time before the data collection is complete without penalty or loss of benefits. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato nor will refusal to participate involve a penalty or loss of benefits.

Post-Interview Participation
We invite you to participate in a post-interview review of the themes that emerge from the interviews and data analysis. Again, this review process is completely voluntary. If you are willing to participate, we would contact you via email to send you a summary of the themes. Please indicate your willingness to participate in the post-interview review process by providing your email address here:_____

Contact
The researchers conducting this study are Laura Maki and Dr. Jennifer Preston. You may contact the researchers at any time. Laura Maki can be reached at laura.maki@mnsu.edu or at (651) 442-8216. Dr. Preston can be reached at jennifer.preston@mnsu.edu or at Minnesota State University, Mankato at (507) 389-5837. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), contact: MSU IRB Administrator Minnesota State University, Mankato, Institutional Review Board, 115 Alumni Foundation, (507) 389-2321. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you at the time of the first interview.

I have read the above information and understand participation in this research is voluntary and I may stop at any time. I consent to participate in the study.

_____
Signature of participant

_____
Date

_____ _____
Signature of researchers (PI and advisor)

_____
Date

Interview Questions

First-Round Questions

How did you come to be in your current position?

How would you describe your experiences as a women in a leadership position?

In terms of your career, where would you like to be in five years?

What, if any, challenges or obstacles might influence your goals?

What might change in your career goals in ten years?

Second-Round Questions

Who are your role models? Where do you go for support and encouragement?

What would you change about the environment to make it better for women?

What advice would you give to a woman just starting out in your field or a similar field?

Demographic Questions

How long have you been in your current position?

Please list your current academic degree and the date you earned it:

Are you currently pursuing an additional degree? If yes, which degree?

Please list your age:

Please describe your ethnicity:

Please describe the socioeconomic status of your family of origin (i.e. parents/guardians)

Please list the highest degrees completed by your parents or guardians:

Please list the careers your parents/guardians currently occupy or held when they retired:

Do you identify as having a visible or invisible disability?

Please provide your relationship status (single, married, partnered, divorced):

Do you have children? If yes, what are their ages and do they still live at home?