DOING AND UNDOING LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE PERFORMATIVITIES OF WOMEN LEADERS

A Dissertation
by
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Abstract

DOING AND UNDOING LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE PERFORMATIVITIES OF WOMEN LEADERS

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This work problematizes the status quo of leadership in higher education by disrupting the normalization of leadership discourse. Judith Butler's feminist poststructural theory of performativity is used alongside poststructural theories of power and discourse to critique conventional notions of leadership in order to open up understandings of leadership that are broader and more inclusive. Using qualitative data and a *thinking with theory* methodology for analysis, this study serves a dual purpose. First, this study exposes the discursive conditions of higher education that subject women leaders to power and discourse and narrow the possibilities for their subjectivities. Second, it examines the ways in which women leaders use agency to negotiate their subjectivities through performative acts of resistance and compliance.

This analysis illuminates the historical, structural, and discursive conditions that restrict the ways women are allowed to show up in leadership spaces in higher education. Additionally, this analysis exposes higher education as a mechanism and leadership as a strategy dedicated to the preservation and maintenance of a leadership status quo that is white and male normed. Feminist poststructural theory enables the examination of the ways women *do* and *undo* leadership in order to loosen up rigid subject positions. This theoretical *undoing* of leadership in higher education opens leadership up to new meanings and doings and enables a discussion of possibilities for the *redoing* of leadership.

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Finally, my sincerest thank you to the women who bared their souls for this dissertation; learning alongside you was an honor and privilege. I hope I made you proud.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to those who made me who I am today.

To my father, William P. Johnson, whose belief in me has never wavered, not even for one moment. His love, generosity, and stubbornness know no bounds. I am forever grateful that he raised me to be just like him.

In memory of my mother, Joanne “Joan” Johnson, who taught me to love deeply, laugh loudly, read voraciously, live boldly, and adventure often. It is because of her that I endeavor to see the best in others and try not to take life too seriously.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I am in ruins. I did not intend to begin (nor end) my dissertation here; but here I am, so here we are. Everything I thought I knew about leadership has fallen apart in the last few years and I have become *undone* both personally and professionally. Higher education, a place where I once thought people mattered and equity seemed possible, transformed in the wake of the COVID-19 global pandemic (Karakose, 2021). Inequities that existed before the pandemic amplified, and the systems and practices that perpetuate those inequities became more visible as leaders scrambled to accommodate the seemingly conflicting demands of safety and financial solvency (Pellegrini et al., 2020). Higher education has stretched my faith so far beyond its capacity that it hangs by a gossamer thread.

As fear invaded communities across the world and uncertainty overwhelmed our daily lives, higher education experienced an unexpected decline in student enrollment resulting in considerable financial strain. Incited by neoliberal ideology, the pressure to retain students, and thereby tuition dollars, intensified and developed into almost frantic sense of urgency. Campus culture became tense as leadership practices grew more reactive and authoritative, and leaders grew more defensive and less tolerant of any form of challenge. As resources were threatened and decisions began increasingly to serve the financial bottom line, often with little consideration for the most vulnerable employees, higher education became further beholden to potential donors, funders, university and system boards, and local politicians.

Since the March of 2020, my colleagues and I have taken on additional duties, as positions remain vacant. For the good of the team, we often took on projects that fall well outside of our purview. As unprotected, mid-career, mid-level professionals, there has been little room to refuse these extraneous duties because there has been the threat of furloughs, layoffs, and terminations and owe lack the protection of contracts or tenure. Morale has

plummeted among faculty and staff, as administrators continue to grapple with how to address it.

I cannot say exactly when or how I became aware of my ruinous state but focusing on my dissertation was a powerful opportunity during such a contentious time. Thinking with feminist poststructural theory taught me that the world itself is a fruitful and research worthy text, so I began my analysis right here in my ruins (Spivak, 1978). Giving my ruins new purpose as a text, enabled me to see possibility where I would previously have only seen devastation (Lather, 2000). Approaching inquiry in this way promises to "produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently, thereby producing different ways of living in the world" (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 1). I was able to ask new questions with this hopeful and generative lens and open up meaning about the world around me. As I confronted my new and failed realities through intense reflection, writing forced me to carve out new spaces to think differently. The act of writing provided the opportunity for thinking differently about being a woman and a leader, which ultimately led to the *doing of* leadership differently.

I found Judith Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) theory of performativity to be profoundly useful not only for my analysis, but for understanding the *undoing* I experienced by the norms of leadership in higher education. Thinking with performativity reveals social norms embedded in leadership discourse that compel individuals toward an authorized identity of leader. This means that instead of being born a leader, I *make* myself into a leader with every thought I have, decision I make, and word I speak. My *doings* are active engagements with the social world, so I am limited to (and by) the discourses that are available to me at any given moment. My *doings* integrate social norms in the hope of becoming understood, or recognizable, as a leader within my particular context of higher education (Butler, 1990, 2004, 2011).

My *Doing* and *Undoing* as a Leader

The conditions of higher education that I described above made my *doing* and *undoing* as a leader possible. Leadership discourse's authoritative demand called me, and continues to call me, to be a certain type of leader. I comply without much conscious thought in order to become seen and understood as a leader. This process of call and response, which Butler refers to as *interpellation*, is operating constantly.

Discourses provide invisible rules that determine who counts as leaders and what counts as leadership in higher education. These discourses shape who I am able to be, and who I am able to become, as a leader. Social norms embedded in leadership discourse expect me to conform to their demands as both a leader and a woman. The norms of leadership expect me to become a leader who is dedicated, assertive, authoritative, unemotional, and self-reliant. While the norms of femininity demand me to be an agreeable, approachable, caretaker, team player who is skilled at managing emotions. Therefore, I am caught in perpetual tension between the clashing demands of leadership and femininity norms that are motivated by desires that are not my own. A dominant masculine leadership discourse, which mobilizes and regulates these demands, has entrenched higher education in a nearly invisible reality. The opacity leadership discourse creates makes it difficult to recognize and almost impossible to challenge or resist it in any way.

Throughout my career, I have experienced long stretches of recognizability (being seen and accepted) and intelligibility (being understood) as a leader. It is impossible to determine whether my recognizability and intelligibility were because the conditions were less hostile or if I was able to conform to leadership norms more successfully. Conditions of possibility are always shifting and currently, higher education is facing a state of emergency while gravely understaffed and under-resourced. It was within these new conditions and in response to the hailings of leadership. I threw myself into becoming a leader the only way I

knew how. I dutifully drew from the discourses available to me, as well as those I had been absorbing and integrating throughout my career and contorted and twisted myself into an acceptable version of a leader.

I became a good soldier and fell in line. I did all that was asked of me, and more. I showed up, hustled, and produced, often to my own detriment. With fewer resources and less support, I outperformed other offices. I supported my colleagues, convincing them not to quit as I manifested optimism where there was none. Masked and socially distanced, we navigated the constantly shifting COVID safety protocols and administrators' wildly unanchored expectations. I counseled students and encouraged them to persevere, while actively discouraging them from withdrawing or transferring. In return, I only wished for respect, and that my contributions, talent, and expertise be valued and appreciated. Recognizability and intelligibility in this context would make opportunities and resources more accessible to me, such as funding, promotions, and additional compensation.

In the end, none of it mattered. Despite my ambition and achievements, my performativities as a leader were unsuccessful. Administrative leaders overlooked me for opportunities, repeatedly denied me raises, and stripped a budget away to re-appropriate it to a new hire assigned a higher priority initiative. Additionally, my department was relegated to a smaller, less established, and more disconnected division shortly before a slew of funding flooded my former division; funding I was no longer eligible to receive. Despite my best efforts to bend and twist myself into the right type of leader, I came *undone* and slipped from intelligibility as a leader. I was left shattered with no clear understanding of what precipitated my *undoing* as a leader.

I was reluctant to reveal so much of myself in these pages, but my *doing* and subsequent *undoing* as a leader in higher education gave me unique insight into my research and the opportunity to highlight the usefulness of feminist poststructural theory in

educational leadership. Sharing my experience is an agentic act and this agency, my ability to *do* something, meant that I am not, and cannot be, stuck in an unintelligible subjectivity. I am encouraged by Lather (2000) who assures me that although I may be *in ruins*, I am in no way *ruined* or destroyed. In fact, my *undoing* has opened up new possibilities not only for my own *redoing* as a leader, but also for the *redoing* of leadership in higher education overall. There is still much to be *done*, rather there is still much to be *undone*, but somewhere in the space that has been opened up is the possibility for an entire *redoing* of leadership.

My experience of ruin and *undoing* is a site of possibility where new knowledges can be developed, and new regimes of truth can be installed. My story challenges and disrupts dominant understandings of leadership entrenched in patriarchy, white supremacy, and neoliberalism. We are all implicated in the creation and maintenance of the oppressive discourses that produce us as leaders and illuminate the potential impact and damage when the demands of dominant leadership discourse are accepted uncritically.

As a woman in an unprotected position of leadership, this is more than a personal experience; my journey to becoming recognizable as a leader is a political one. As Butler (2004) teaches us, “when one makes those claims [to gender], one makes them for much more than oneself” (p. 16). My experience is about so much more than just me, in my particular institution, it is about all women leaders making meaning about themselves within social institutions structured by dominant gender and leadership discourses. I do not share my ruining as a plea for pity, but as an admission of guilt, a call for resistance, and an acknowledgement of the overwhelming task ahead.

The Purpose of My Study

These experiences ignited a fury inside of me that eventually, and only very recently, transformed into a passionate curiosity. I wonder now, *what does leadership do*? This is the

question I committed myself to exploring in order to understand how power and discourse work for women on pathways to leadership. I shaped my dissertation to addressing those overarching questions, but more specifically, I am curious to understand how power and discourse work to shape how women leaders are able to show up in spaces of leadership in higher education.

As I wrote and thought with poststructural theory, it became a part of what Spivak (2014) describes as my "mental furniture" (p. 77). A veil lifted with my new perspective, revealing reality to be a socially constructed fabrication, compelling me to question everything I thought I knew about the world. My *undoing* within and by leadership in higher education turned my curiosity for understanding the women leaders' conditions of possibility into an obligation to deconstruct and disrupt the dominant discourses and normative categories that attempt to control and constrain how women live their lives (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Dominant leadership discourses continue to produce specific leader subjectivities that perpetuate male privilege and constrain women in ways that maintain power relations and normalizing discourses. Without intervention, women will remain subjugated while the possibilities for their performativities continue to be narrowed and their talents, expertise, and perspectives suppressed.

My intention with this work is to loosen up the rigid subject positions available to women in higher education and open up understandings of leadership. The educational landscape has changed so drastically, particularly in the last few years, that as Morley (2013) claims, we "need new rules for a very different game" (p. 126). Strong and visionary leaders are critical for navigating the uncharted and turbulent waters we face in education today.

In this qualitative, feminist poststructural dissertation, I interviewed three women on pathways to leadership in higher education in order to identify and deconstruct normative

categories and discursive conditions that shape their subjectivities. My analysis exposed how the women's performative practices of *doing* (and *undoing*) of leadership loosened up rigid and normative subject positions within their particular contexts. Using Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) *thinking with theory* methodology for analysis, I plugged in Judith Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) theory of performativity and the interview data and addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant discourses operating in higher education leadership?
2. What normalizations are produced, within dominant leadership discourses, which shape possibilities for subject formation for women leaders?
3. How do women do (and undo) their gender subjectivities through performative practices within and against normalizing, dominant leadership discourses?

These research questions guide my interrogation of the conditions in leadership higher education that make only certain subjectivities possible for women leaders. Using the poststructural theory of performativity and the concepts of recognition, power, discourse, and resistance for my analysis makes visible the power and discourses working within leadership practices to produce women as specific types of leaders. I illuminate how the complex terrain of higher education, which includes unstable power relations, conflicting leadership discourses, and historical and structural ideologies, shape the subjectivities of women leaders as they work to support students and improve outcomes for students, families, and other leaders. These lines of inquiry also facilitate a crucial opening up for a *redoing* of gender and leadership in higher education enabled by the examination of how women get *done* and *undone* in higher education leadership (Butler, 1990, 2004, 2011; Kelan, 2010).

The "Problem" of Women in Leadership

My review of the literature in Chapter 3 demonstrates a paucity in research on women in leadership that reaches beyond contextual factors, particularly for women in unprotected, mid-career, mid-level positions of leadership. While a wealth of research exists *on* and *about* women, little research calls for a rethinking what we know about women the majority of material uncovered employed the "add women and then stir" model (Owen et al., 2021). Previous scholarship on women in leadership is deeply rooted in the gender binary as evidenced by a majority of the research focused on gender difference, describing barriers, and measuring women's progress to positional leadership. A single, essentialized theoretical story was threaded throughout the literature, rooted in white, Christian, patriarchy dating back to the founding of higher education in the United States in the 1800s.

These origins mean that the subordination and exclusion of women is so enmeshed in the processes, practices, and policies of organizations of higher education, it has become a part of the operations of the institution (Acker, 1992; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Frost & Elichaoff, 2014). Therefore, higher education not only reflects the values of male privilege and elitism, but also creates and reproduces gendered substructures of society that promote oppressive binary gender norms (Acker, 1990; Acker, 2012; Stead & Elliott, 2009). These substructures, and the processes, practices, and policies that support them, advantage men by granting them access to positions of leadership and disadvantage women by relegating them to support roles and forming barriers for their advancement.

Poststructural theory critiques conventional research as problematic because it is grounded in a gender binary that is a socially construct and serves to control women by placing them into "normative categories that place rigid structures" on how they live their lives (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 72). Understanding gender as two distinct and unequal

categories has become such a dominant discourse, that it is assumed as common sense knowledge.

Thinking about gender in this way is fixed as a norm within leadership discourse and serves to continually limit the possibilities for women in leadership and reinforce inequalities (Weedon, 1987). These inequalities often manifest as the production of narrowly defined subjectivities for women that disrupt promotion, impede representation, and stifle, devalue, and discredit the contributions of women leaders in the higher education context (Madsen & Longman, 2020).

Centering gender and the gendered subject in research shifts attention away from the discursive context women must negotiate which positions them as an outsider, an 'other,' and a problem to be fixed. This reinforces the notion that women are deficient and inferior while obscuring the oppressive discourses and conditions that make women's subordination possible. This is deeply troubling to me as a woman, leader, and educational researcher because women, as well as others from marginalized and historically underrepresented backgrounds, are positioned as "less than," so they remain othered, outside the norm, and forced to adapt and repeatedly prove themselves as women and leaders. Research that troubles the common sense discourse that sustains the male normed status quo of leadership in higher education is needed urgently, because dominant groups use discourse to subjugate others to maintain power (Bierema, 2016; Sprague, 2016).

Many interventions have been attempted and thus far, all have failed to create appreciable change toward gender equity. Organizations have attempted to advance women in leadership since at least the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Interventions have included implementing more flextime and family leave policies, offering leadership development programs, building awareness and engagement initiatives, revising organizational processes, and increasing mentoring and networking programs and

opportunities (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Mousa et al., 2021). Despite these efforts, women's progress to leadership has been slow. The field of educational leadership needs effective interventions to advance gender equity in leadership and to address the conditions that systematically reproduce deficit discourses (Mousa et al., 2021).

Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) argue for a move to focus inquiry on the gendered social and organizational practices that produce gender-based leadership barriers that maintain male advantage. Women face barriers such as devaluation, exclusion, and discrimination every day in their work. These barriers have a cumulative impact on women, both inhibiting the ability of others to see them as leaders and limiting women's own ability to see themselves as leaders. Literature supports that gender workplace inequity is systemically reproduced and sustained by rigid subject positions and masculine cultural norms within organizations in ways that have negative implications for the social, economic and health outcomes of women (Acker, 2012; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Kelan, 2010; Rowlands et al., 2020).

In the following section, I present statistical information on the prevalence of women in higher education as a foundational understanding of the status quo of leadership in higher education. A deeper understanding of assumptions, structures, values, policies, as well as prior and current possibilities for women leaders, provides a prime location to interrogate the conditions that produced those possibilities. Ropers-Huilman (2010) suggests this deeper understanding can "help us find both meanings and fissures in the discourses within which we operate" (p. 169). Making power and discourse visible enables us to illuminate pathways for *undoing* (resisting) leadership as well pursue the *redoing* (reconfiguring norms and reconstituting discourse) of leadership to open up possibilities for women leaders' subjectivities (Madsen & Longman, 2020; Ropers-Huilman, 2010).

Status Quo of Leadership

Leadership discourse in higher education functions to produce narrow, rigid, and essentialized subject positions that attempt to lock women into certain ways of being as leaders. The uncritical acceptance of "certain common sense truths about men and women" sustains these rigid subject positions (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 486). As a result, subjectivities that conform to norms of femininity are made available to women, shaping them into leaders who are communal, nurturing, supportive, and accommodating (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). These narrow subjectivities disrupt promotion, impede representation, and stifle, devalue, and discredit the contributions of women leaders in the higher education context (Madsen & Longman, 2020). Davies and Gannon (2011) caution that power and discourse shape us into ways of being so alluring that we "actively take them up as our own" and so convincing that we believe that is who we are (p. 312). As educational leaders, ignoring or obscuring the conditions of possibility that produce women leaders normalizes a male dominated leadership status quo with patriarchal, white supremacist, and neoliberal foundations that disproportionately disadvantages women.

Women face barriers to leadership every day that are expected and accepted, including the sexual division of labor, male normed organizational culture, gender discrimination, exclusion from informal networks, and salary inequity (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Meanwhile, a double standard persists that forces women to work twice as hard as men for less compensation and lower prestige while facing higher thresholds for competence, often for less reward (Bierema, 2016; Foschi, 2000). Additionally, women are judged by their accomplishments while men tend to be assessed by their potential for success. This forces women to work much harder to prove themselves, often in areas beyond their scope of responsibility and outside of their expertise.

The prevailing belief in the United States is that gender equity is no longer an issue worth addressing (Kelan, 2009; Mousa et al., 2021). Moreover, the absence of women in leadership is assumed to be a lack of motivation to lead or a natural effect of women interrupting their careers to have children (Parker, 2015). Kelan (2009) proposes that gender discrimination operates implicitly Western economies resulting in an ideological dilemma called *gender fatigue* for women in leadership. Women leaders perceive gender discrimination as a one-time occurrence, or they describe it as being an issue that happens elsewhere or only in the past (Kelan, 2009). While many women experience gender discrimination in their work, they insist on the gender neutrality of their workplace. The fatigue referenced by Kelan (2009) stems from the development of an inability or loss of will to challenge gender inequity.

Women leaders who are responsible for supervising and managing teams report higher levels of burnout, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Research shows that women who manage teams do more for those employees than their male counter parts and are more active participants and leaders in diversity and equity work, yet their work is more likely to be unrecognized and unrewarded. Over 50% of women leaders in this type of position are often or almost always burned out. Many of these women consider opting out of leadership positions or consider “downshifting” their career to make their lives more manageable (McKinsey & Company, 2018).

These experiences have contributed to a pervasive absence of women in leadership. The American Association of University Women describes their data on women in leadership as “stark” because men continue to vastly outnumber women in leadership in *every* sector, including business, religion, government, and education (Hill et al., 2016, p. ix). However, the first study to benchmark women in leadership across multiple sectors was not even conducted and published until 2009. Even then, the report by the White House Project

only examined women in top-level leadership positions in the *C-Suite*, referring to the positions of Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, and Chief Operating Officer (Wilson, 2009). Then in 2013, the Colorado Women's College and the American Association of University Women released a follow up report that extended The White House Project's research from 10 sectors (which included academia) to 14 sectors of the workforce (Longman & Madsen, 2014). The findings show that at that time, women held 26% of university presidencies, 10% of full professorships, and less than 30% of college and university board positions (Hill et al., 2016; Lennon et al., 2013).

The most recent report on the status of women in leadership in higher education is a brief released by the American Council on Education (Johnson, 2016). The brief shows that as of 2016, women occupy only 32% of full professor positions, less than 15 % of presidencies at doctoral granting institutions and 30% overall, only 40% of senior leadership positions, and around a third of college and university board positions. While those statistics show some progress over the last 20 years, women remain both largely outnumbered and significantly out-earned by men at every rank. Women are also less likely to be married or have children and are more likely to have modified their career trajectory due to familial obligations related to child or elder care (Johnson, 2016).

Although every racial and ethnic group at both undergraduate and post baccalaureate levels experienced an increase in undergraduate enrollment with women from historically underrepresented minority groups, including African American, Latino/Hispanic, and Native American, now holding over 60% of all doctoral degrees. While this progress is positive, barriers persist and a pervasive absence of women of color in leadership remains as evidenced by the 5% of women that made up half of underrepresented minority group faculty in 2011 (Smith, 2015). White men continue to comprise the largest portion of administrator and faculty positions, and while there has been

some growth for women and men in all racial and ethnic groups, 80% of college administrators are still white (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

The gender and racial disparity described above is of particular concern because although higher education has been identified as an industry receptive to women leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sulpizio, 2014) and despite the questionably impressive gains by women in education, men have continuously outnumbered women by high margins in higher education leadership since 1950 (Parker, 2015). In fact, even after several decades of progress, women seem to be stuck in middle management positions (Amey et al., 2020; Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Duffy, 2010; Kuhlmann et al., 2017; Tommasai & Degen, 2022).

Smith (2017) suggests that while research shows gains for women overall in higher education leadership, that progress is conditional and varies according to race, employment status, and educational attainment. More research is needed to improve the experiences of women of color and redress their disparate career advancement to senior leadership positions (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Women of color often face an unwelcoming work environment where their merit and expertise are questioned and their bodies are tokenized on committees and in marketing for the sake of diversity (Overstreet, 2019). In light of these statistics, it is safe to say that women still require the protection of affirmative action and anti-bias legislation to combat the gendered barriers and unexplained gender disparity that persist in higher education leadership (Glazer-Raymo, 2008).

The presence of female students has grown considerably in higher education in recent decades. The National Student Clearinghouse reports that as of 2021, the rate at which women are attending college is almost 20% higher than their male counterparts (as cited in Belkin, 2021, para. 2). Women have earned more than 50% of all bachelor's degrees awarded since 1982; more than 50% of all master's degrees awarded since 1987;

one-third of all doctorates awarded since 1979; and more than half of all doctorates awarded since 2006 (Johnson, 2016).

A dominant theory developed about leadership and higher education asserts that a pathway exists for women to ascend to positions of leadership once they complete a college education, which inevitably prepares and qualifies them for the responsibility. The premise of this pipeline theory is that women as students are the majority and it is just a matter of time before women rise to leadership and become equitably represented. This theory is used to rationalize women's absence from upper levels of leadership, suggesting there are simply not enough women in the pipeline or that it will take an only little longer for the pipeline to work. This concept is problematic because it presumes that men and women experience organizational systems in the same way and that the pipeline would free of obstructions, like biased and discriminatory institutional culture (DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014; Johnson, 2016; Kellerman & Rhode, 2014, 2017). The pipeline theory has since been debunked as a myth, with college enrollment data stated above that shows women are attending college at a rate 20% higher than their male counterparts (Kellerman & Rhode, 2014; Johnson, 2016).

While the increased presence of women in higher education as students, faculty, and administrators may be encouraging, this majority status is not evidence that systems of oppression no longer exist, and gender equality has finally been achieved. It only means that strides have been made to make higher education more accessible to women (Glazer-Raymo, 2008). As the population of women in higher education grows, so does the urgency for more feminist leaders to be in positions of influence to disrupt dominant leadership discourse and open up leadership to new ways of leading (Smith, 2017). Because women bring different subjectivities to research, there is much more at stake than the visibility and number of women in higher education leadership. According to The White House

Project, this lack of representation ultimately influences the “scope of research and knowledge that affects us all” (Wilson, 2009, p. 16).

While the preceding information about the status of women in leadership in higher education may be disheartening, encouraging, or both, depending on one’s perspective, my concern rests not with the statistics, but with the unexamined assumptions represented by the data that perpetuate gender inequality. Thinking with feminist poststructural theory guides my inquiry to the conditions of possibility that produce narrow subjectivities for women leaders, rather than the women themselves, as the key to understanding the representation of women in the data shared in the previous section.

Conditions of Possibility

Power relations exist and function to gender us as subjects in all areas of social life, including workplaces (Linstead & Pullen, 2006; Andersson et al., 2022). Women make sense of themselves as leaders within the discursive field of higher education amidst forces that shape understandings about leadership, and who counts as a leader. Developing a clearer understanding of the discursive conditions within which women constitute themselves as leaders is critical for resistance and change because the subordination of women produces certain knowledges that we accept as common sense knowledge and take up as our own. Leadership remains a gendered practice grounded in a historical knowledge generated about ‘men’ by ‘men’ that operates within a social context we cannot escape.

Capitalist societies are structured historically within patriarchal understandings of gender as a binary, which defines femininity in comparison to masculinity, relegating the feminine subject a position of non-identity and that of the “other.” Therefore, as Joan Acker (2012) proposes, the gendered substructures that exist in all organizational cultures assume a natural, substantive biological difference between men and women and masculinity and femininity. This normalized gender logic is embedded within the substructures of society and

organizations that sustain organizational processes and practices that reproduce and reinforce gender inequalities (Acker, 2012). Gendered processes and practices within organizations serve as modes of control that maintain divisions of gender as well as class and race (Acker, 1990; Sallee, 2020). In terms of my study, the gendered substructure of higher education is a mechanism of power serving in a gendering capacity as it works to maintain the sexual division of labor by reproducing masculinity as superior and femininity as inferior. Processes and practices operate as reliable modes of control to narrow the possibilities for women leaders' subjectivities.

Practicing leadership without deep reflection and critical examination reinforces and reproduces the harmful effects of dominant leadership discourse. This way of leading contributes to disparities in the promotion of women to leadership positions, salary inequity along gender lines, voice dispossession, and the persistence of double standards and double binds for women's behavior, competence, and performance (Bierema, 2016; Johnson, 2016; Krause, 2017; McKinsey & Company, 2021). It is the task of feminist poststructural research to disrupt the discourses working through leadership practices that reproduce certain knowledges and meaning that uphold oppressive structures like these because "women are usually on the wrong side of binaries and at the bottom of hierarchies" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 481).

Significance of My Research

The COVID-19 global pandemic has presented higher education with an opportunity to think and do things differently, but I fear the opportunity is being squandered. There has been a subtle shift in discourse about women in leadership since the pandemic began in 2020, from a discourse focused on barriers toward a more optimistic, asset-based discourse directed at organizational accountability and proactive approaches to advancing women in leadership (Mousa et al., 2021). Despite this turn, administrative leaders are reverting to the

way things have “always been done” and relying on “proven” ways of thinking and doing (Zhao, 2020). Additionally, the majority of research remains focused on gender difference, gendered barriers to leadership, and strategies aimed at changing women, rather than strategies for real progress. Leading, thinking, and researching in this way reinforces a status quo that benefits those already advantaged by dominant discourses.

While there is a wealth of literature on women in leadership within various disciplines and sectors, there is a dearth of studies creating space where we can think about and *do* leadership differently. The research available on strategies for the advancement of women in leadership is marginal and directed at the level of the individual rather than institutional (organizational) and systemic (societal) levels of change, making changing the conditions of higher education even more challenging (Mousa et al., 2021). Storberg-Walker and Haber-Curran (2017) call for the use of “women-normed” (p. 2) theories of leadership to stimulate social change. Their contention, drawn from scholars across multiple disciplines, is that the historical absence of women’s perspectives and experiences has resulted in the gendering of all research theory, which serves to reinforce the gender binary and disadvantage women.

My research responds to the need for more research that challenges the gendered nature of institutions and generates a new theoretical perspective to critique common sense knowledge about gender and leadership, including leadership as both a gendered activity and a strategy of control. By moving away from “counting bodies” to demonstrate social progress, we can examine how meaning about women is produced within the culture of higher education (Due Billing & Alvesson, 2000; Kelan, 2010). Therefore, rather than simply contributing to scholarship centered on women and their experiences, my research is a troubling of the status quo that centers philosophy in leadership in order to open up leadership to new meaning and loosen up the categories of woman and leader.

My research is a disruption to foundationalist understandings of identity and language that expose leadership practices and higher education institutions as entangled in power. Through the interrogation of the discursive conditions and normative categories that attempt to constrain women's ways of being, knowing, and doing as leaders in higher education, my research carves out space for a *redoing* of leadership, an entire reconfiguration of norms, discourses, and subjectivities available to women.

Rationale for Feminist Poststructural Theoretical Approach

Feminism provides a theoretical perspective from which to challenge dominant understandings of leadership and facilitate a resistant *rethinking* of leadership in higher education. I incorporated poststructural theory into my study not because it promised to provide deeper understandings of leadership, but because it offers theories and concepts that enable the breaking open of leadership meanings. However, it was not until I was introduced to Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) theory of performativity that I learned that an entire *redoing* of leadership in higher education is possible. Approaching my study through a feminist framework was critical because my intention with this work is to interrogate the conditions that narrow women leaders' subjectivities and feminism is a "politics directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in society" (Weedon, 1987, p. 1).

A feminist poststructural framework enables my deconstruction of how dominant leadership discourses – including masculinity and femininity, excellence, and whiteness– work to reinforce common sense truths about gender and leadership that privilege men and marginalize women. By engaging a *thinking with theory* methodology and *plugging in* (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) theory of *performativity*, I exposed women's everyday experiences as sites of resistance and spaces of conflicting subjectivities as the women constituted themselves within and against dominant discourses in ways that

unsettles the normative category of leader. Conceptualizing gender and leadership as an ongoing process of social construction rather than an identity or property, shifts the "problem" from the woman to the systems, processes, and practices that make women leaders possible in a particular moment. This approach to research can be useful to educational leaders by opening up new realms for critique and theorizing that work towards a world that works for all, rather than a world that works for some. New realms open up for theorizing and critique by conceptualizing gender as an ongoing process of social construction. The interrogation shifts from the person, from gender as an identity or property, to the conditions, systems, and practices that make that person possible in that particular moment.

While I utilized thinking with theory to conduct my feminist poststructural analysis, I would not say I choose it, so much as thinking with theory chose me. I began my research by using qualitative methods of interviewing to gather data and then plugged in various poststructural concepts, theories, and interview data to conduct my analysis. As I embarked on this journey of writing and thinking with theory, I resisted the Interpretivist urge to code, organize, and make "easy sense" of the data and submitted to the emergent approaches of poststructuralism (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). As Jackson and Mazzei (2017) suggested, I plunged in sideways, committing to a nonlinear analysis that was "always in a state of becoming" (p. 728). Heeding the advice of St. Pierre (as cited in Guttorm et al., 2015), I continued to "do the next thing" as I navigated my ongoing state of evolution.

I looked for guidance as I co-read with many theorists. Ultimately, Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) theory of performativity was the most productive. I put performativity and its concepts to work in order to trouble "what counts as knowledge and reality and how such knowledge and reality are produced" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017, p. 720). In terms of my

study, I troubled the discursive conditions and normative categories of higher education that shaped and authorized women's subjectivities.

Dissertation Organization

In this introductory chapter, I provided an introduction to the historically bound common sense discourse of women as the "problem" in leadership, explained its relevance and significance, identified the applicable research questions, rationalized my theoretical approach, and discussed how my research contributes to the larger body of knowledge in this field. The remaining chapters provide the information necessary to contextualize, rationalize, and distinguish this dissertation, while providing a provocative framework to reshape how we think about and do leadership in higher education.

In Chapter 2, I provide a comprehensive description of poststructuralism and Judith Butler's theory of performativity. I also explain how I put concepts of power, discourse, recognition, and resistance to work in my data.

In Chapter 3, I present a review of literature on gender and leadership as well as the relevant dominant discourses I encountered in my research. This includes the discourses of leadership, masculinity, femininity, whiteness, and excellence. I also identify social norms that work to authorize particular subject positions for women in leadership.

In Chapter 4, I describe the *thinking with theory* methodology and analysis I used to interrogate the discursive conditions and normative categories place rigid structures on how women live their lives (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

In Chapter 5, I present my analysis on how dominant leadership discourses shape and authorize subjectivities for women leaders in higher education. I also examine how women constitute their performativities within the discursive conditions of their particular contexts.

Lastly, in Chapter 6, I present my conclusions and discuss the implications of my findings on educational leadership, then propose directions for future inquiry.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the argument that the possibilities for women's subjectivities are constrained by the discursive conditions that work to subjugate women and keep them contained to restrictive and normative ways of engaging as leaders in higher education. I described how organizations are gendered and serve in a gendering capacity through their processes, policies, and practices.

In the following chapter, I describe the feminist poststructural theoretical framework I utilized to deconstruct the discursive conditions of higher education leadership and examine the *doings* and *undoings* of leadership by women leaders.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In the introductory chapter, I shared my ruining as a leader to provide a foundational understanding of the leadership status quo and to illustrate how I used *thinking with theory* as a methodology (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) by *plugging in* Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) theory of performativity. Using empirical data on the progress and presence of women in leadership, I describe the leadership status quo and posit that conventional research conducted within the modernist paradigm reproduces humanist, binary understandings of gender and leadership. This way of thinking about gender and leadership is rooted in the capitalist, patriarchal, and white supremacist history of the United States, and accepted as common sense knowledge. Our societal structure is built on these historical beliefs, which subordinate women, privilege men, and ultimately center women as the "problem" to solve in higher education leadership. I argue in order to engage these common sense discourses as sites of deconstruction, it is necessary to examine the conditions that produce and reinforce them more fully. Understanding how power and discourse work to shape and regulate how women are able to show up and be in spaces of leadership, enables us to identify opportunities for resistance and strategies for change.

This chapter provides an overview of the significance of feminist poststructural theory in educational leadership, the foundations of poststructuralism, Foucault's (1980) concepts of power, and the core tenets of Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) theory of performativity that comprise the theoretical framework for my dissertation. In this review, I describe the utility of performativity and the concepts of power, discourse, performativity, recognition, and agency in the deconstructive analysis of the leadership status quo to produce new knowledges about women in leadership in higher education. These are core concepts as I attempt to answer the overarching question that guides my inquiry, *what does leadership do*? This

question prompted more specific questions that evolved into the research questions, which anchor my study.

In this qualitative, feminist poststructural dissertation, I interviewed three women on pathways to leadership in higher education in order to identify and deconstruct normative categories and discursive conditions that shape their subjectivities. My analysis exposed how the women's performative practices of *doing* (and *undoing*) of leadership loosened up rigid and normative subject positions within their particular contexts. Using Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) *thinking with theory* methodology for analysis, I plugged in Judith Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) theory of performativity and the interview data and addressed the following research questions:

4. What are the dominant discourses operating in higher education leadership?
5. What normalizations are produced, within dominant leadership discourses, which shape possibilities for subject formation for women leaders?
6. How do women do (and undo) their gender subjectivities through performative practices within and against normalizing, dominant leadership discourses?

Feminist Poststructural Theory

Poststructural theory is a response to and critique of the structural foundations of Cartesian logic, rationality, and dualism grounded in the idea of language as structurally fixed and predetermined (Weedon, 1987). This arbitrary linking of signs (thing, object) and signifiers (name, descriptor) by structural linguistic theories is refused by poststructuralism, which instead embraces language and meaning as relational abstractions that do not reflect a predetermined reality. This poststructural worldview accepts that people and things do not possess inherent meaning, and instead language and meaning are engaged in a continuous process of producing and reproducing each other. The result of this reciprocal process is a permanent deferral of meaning that cannot be pinned to any one person or thing and is fixed

only temporarily before being immediately reinterpreted and redefined. All meaning and identity comes into being through a process of social negotiation in which it is understood only through its difference from its binary other, rather than from a shared or inherent identity (St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1987). Ultimately, a successful negotiation of identity results in some sort of recognition.

The theories and concepts of French philosopher Michel Foucault (1977, 1980) make interrogations of humanist foundations possible. This is significant for women in leadership because these foundations, including dualistic understandings of knowledge, subjectivity, power, discourse, and agency, reproduce harmful binaries that perpetuate inequities and place limits on the possibilities for how people live their lives (Knights, 2015). Feminists have taken up Foucault's theories of power because he enters the feminist conversation "from a perspective that is sympathetic with demands for radical change" (Sawicki, 1991, p. 97). For Foucault, poststructural critiques are practices of freedom that urges the disengagement from political and cultural identities, normative categories, and practices that threaten to define feminism. Sawicki (1991) proposes feminists must cultivate this form of freedom because gender and feminism are produced by patriarchal power even as we resist it. Pairing the theories and concepts of Michel Foucault (1977, 1980) and Judith Butler (1990, 2004, 2011) opens up understandings of women leaders that extends beyond structural and discursive conditions, normative categories, and power relations.

Engaging in feminist poststructural thought supports a dislodging of common sense assumptions about gender and leadership, as well as other identity categories. Performativity offers a way out of humanist truths, binaries, and common sense notions that keeps us confined to narrow and rigid subject positions. These humanist conceptions of essential truths privilege some identities over others in harmful ways. Thinking with performativity is a strategy to interrogate the conditions that make some possibilities

available for women leaders, and some not. A feminist analysis can benefit women by opening up different ways of thinking about, existing in, and moving through the world (St. Pierre, 2014).

Feminists propose the personal extends beyond the social to become political because the historical exclusion of women from research and leadership (Burns & Chantler, 2011) and power relations that uphold gender inequalities in society produce consequences for women in their everyday lives (Weedon, 1987). Therefore, a feminist approach to research is a politics that challenges what matters and is accepted as truth in the context of connections between personal experiences and institutional discourses (Aston, 2016).

Poststructuralism and feminist research have shared research goals, including aligns understanding the various oppressions that plague society, disrupting and subverting dominant accounts of history and experience, and changing the power relations that perpetuate injustice. These theoretical perspectives overlap in many ways and share concerns about the production of knowledge, which grounds research in the question of, “Who benefits from traditional forms of knowledge production, and who may be disadvantaged by these?” (Naples & Gurr, 2014, p. 15). Poststructuralism and feminism also share several key principles, including the multiplicity and partiality of truth, connectedness of knowledge and power, and influence of the social world on the production of knowledge. Both poststructuralists and feminists insist on the close examination of power, distrust of language and meaning, refuse knowledge as value free, and reject truth as singular, pre-existing, and discoverable. Feminist poststructuralism considers knowledge produced within and by power to perpetuate systemic bias.

Feminist poststructural theories enable an approach to research that strives to acknowledge, account for, and understand the influence of the social world on individuals’ subjectivity and the complex relations of power involved in oppression (Weedon, 1987).

Poststructural theorizing about women leaders' subjectivities, leadership practices, and the discursive conditions they must negotiate, produces alternative truths and meanings about how women lead within gendered organizations. By approaching inquiry in this way, feminists break meaning open to see knowledge in new different ways and produce new knowledges in which women are not shackled to the oppressive constructs and discourses of gender and leadership.

My study opens up thinking about women leaders by using a feminist poststructural lens to shift the focus of my inquiry to the conditions of higher education that make women leaders (the subjects) possible and away from the women themselves. As a result, my study opens gender and leadership up to new ways of being and doing by producing new knowledges about what matters in higher education. In the sections that follow, I elucidate the theory of performativity through descriptions of subjectivity, discourse, and power/knowledge, the key principles of poststructuralism.

Performativity

Understanding how individuals become subjects is central to Foucault's work and signals "a crucial break with humanist conceptions of the individual" to which modern society in the Western world is still beholden (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). For Foucault (as cited in Foucault & Faubion, 2000), the term subject holds dual meaning. First, as an individual who is subject to and dependent on regulatory power for a viable existence. Second, as an individual bound to their "own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault & Faubion, 2000, p. 331). Conceiving of subjects, and subjectivity in this way, as "not fixed, unified, or essential (determined in advance of discourse)," is a cornerstone of poststructural thought (Allan, 2010, p. 15). Therefore, the poststructural subject is a socially constructed cultural phenomenon where the illusion of identity is actually an ongoing effect of power created in response to the demands of society (Jackson, 2013; St. Pierre, 2000). Identity in

poststructural theory is not an essence inherent to humans; rather individuals are made into subjects within power relations and discourse. Fenwick (2002) describes this subjectivity as one's "complex and changing understanding of 'self'" (p. 162), a self that is engaged in a process of continual revision within reinforcing and competing discourses.

Ropers-Huilman (2010) proposes that "discourse provides options for creating oneself and, as discourses and power relations within them shift, so too do those affected by those discourses" (p. 173). This reliance on the social world ensures that subjectivity remains contingent, as we construct ourselves within these power relations and demands of discourse, we are both produced and positioned by discourses and cultural contexts. Who we were, who we are, and who we will become is dependent on the context in which we live, work, and grow (Nealon & Giroux, 2012). So that subjectivity remains "precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (Weedon, 1987, p. 33). Poststructural notions of subjectivity are critical to my study, and to educational leaders, because this yet-to-be-determined state of being prevents subjects from being contained to rigid identity categories, such as gender or leader. Therefore, there is no natural, or correct, way of being a woman, man, or leader.

Feminists expanded and adapted the poststructural concept of subjectivity and put it to use to open up possibilities for women. Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) theory of subjectivity – named *performativity* –extends the poststructural notion of a subject, as produced by and through her conditions while engaged in an ongoing process of becoming, to propose that subjects construct themselves through a series of constitutive *doings*. Performativity's emphasis on a subject in process is crucial for my study because we make sense of ourselves as women and leaders in relation to a social world influenced by regulatory discourses, power relations, material conditions, historical experiences, and cultural practices that "preexist and outlast" us (Nealon & Giroux, 2012, p. 39). Women cannot

ignore the demands of these social conditions and depend on them to become seen and understood as leaders. External factors we have little control over determine the limits of these demands, including socioeconomic status, ethnic background, nationality, education, and cultural expectations (Bové, 1990). Multiple and conflicting subjectivities are produced for women leaders as we draw from the multiple and conflicting discourses available as we construct ourselves. Women leaders slip in and out of these subjectivities through performative *doings*, as we conform to and resist the demands of prevailing social norms and dominant discourses in a particular context. These slippings challenge common sense understandings of woman and leader as stable and contained identity categories and reveal women's *doings* of leadership as constitutive, rather than a theatrical performance.

Thinking with performativity has many implications for women and leadership in higher education, including opening up the possibility for more than just a reimagining of women as leaders, but a *redoing* of leadership. Performativity is a useful framework for examining and troubling gender and leadership within the constraints of higher education leadership because it exposes the power and discourse working to shape possibilities for women leaders and illuminate how women leaders negotiate their subjectivities within multiple, complex, and shifting power relations. I use leadership and gender as activities controlled by power and discourse as my starting point. Women *make* themselves into leaders through their repeated everyday practices within leadership discourses that are inscribed with rules and truths that shape them into certain types of leaders. Foucault (1978, 1980) proposes that knowledge is produced through social practices; in the case of this study, women negotiate their subjectivity within the power relations of higher education and leadership discourses. In this way, women are subjected to, and produced by, power/knowledge within their negotiations.

In the sections that follow, I describe the concepts necessary to develop a poststructural understanding of the conditions of higher education that shape women leaders' possibilities. This includes the normative categories that attempt to contain women, the discourses that make demands of them as women and leaders, and the power relations networked within higher education leadership.

Butler (1990, 2004, 2011) considers normative categories, like those of gender and leader, to be socially constructed fictions that create only the illusion of a unified essence, but acknowledges these categories are also necessary conditions of possibility that performativity requires for its deconstructive work. Martin (1988) cautions, "We cannot afford to refuse to take a political stance which 'pins us to our sex' for the sake of an abstract theoretical correctness, but we can refuse to be content with fixed identities or to universalize ourselves" (p. 16). A complete refusal to acknowledge identity restricts critiques to theoretical abstractions and runs the risk of reproducing a universalizing androcentric and humanist subject, which is a risk that women cannot afford to take. Therefore, I use the normative categories of woman and leader and my starting point and pathway into the feminist struggle against gendered conceptions and representations of leadership.

Foucault contends that binary oppositions, such as masculinity/femininity, are sites ripe for critical analysis as they are created through "dividing practices" that organize people into identity categories that preserve Humanist common sense truths (Foucault & Faubion, 2000, p. 326). These binaries are disciplinary by design and attempt to lock people into specific ways of being. Weedon (1997) affirms that gender has become naturalized with masculinity fixed as the norm, which enables and perpetuates a patriarchal ideology and discourse (St. Pierre, 2000). Patriarchy in higher education works at the intersections of femininity, masculinity, and leadership discourses to authorize men as the superior, preferred experts, and assumed leaders in the field of higher education. Conversely, women

have been designated as the exception in and diagnosed as the problem to be fixed in leadership (Hannum et al., 2015). This is significant because women must make sense of themselves in relation to a reality produced through power and discourse that deeply affects the possibilities for who they are allowed to become as women and leaders (Allan, 2010; Ropers-Huilman, 2010). Women and leaders are produced through and against their binary opposite in humanist common sense thinking, which means woman is defined by man and leader is defined by follower. These identity categories allow lived experiences, with all of their variations and limitations, to serve as locations to ground feminist poststructural critiques. These normative identity categories need to be understood in relation to social structures, practices, and discourses due to their implications for the possibilities for women's subjectivities (Butler, 1990, 2004, 2011; Weedon, 1987).

Butler refuses common sense understandings of gender (and leader) as an inherent or predetermined inner essence in subjects (and category) and instead, proposes a gender subjectivity that we actively negotiate in relation to the social world as we make meaning of ourselves. Butler (2004) considers gender to be, "a kind of *doing*" that attempts to regulate and normalize people into certain ways of being gendered (p. 1). Attention to the "*doing* and *undoing*" of gender is vital because of the possibilities it opens up for new ways of practicing leadership – ways that are "diverse and contradictory critiques that resist, subvert, and refuse and structural formation" (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 615). These ways of being, break the gender binary and category of leader apart and open it up to new meaning.

Butler (2004) further describes gender as an involuntary and unconscious "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" that cannot be *done* (or *undone*) in isolation (p. 1). "Practice," in this phrase, is the performative doings by which subjects produce themselves as gendered, which paradoxically sustains the normative discourse that regulates their own doings. For my dissertation research, the "scene" where these practices

take place is the discursive field of leadership in higher education. And the “constraints” imposed within the scene are the terms that frame who and what behavior counts in relation to gender; for example, in my project, “constraints” are structural conditions, discourses, power relations, and normalizations. Power and discourse shape and condition those terms in advance of and external to subjects that operate in the lives of the women in my study on their pathways to leadership in higher education. With the use of the word “improvisation,” Butler (1990, 1995, 2004, 2011) signals the possibility for agency to be generated with every performative doing. Understanding performativity in this way means subjects are not locked down entirely to a category and have some choice in how they respond.

Discourse

Discourses are social practices that provides rules that we unconsciously follow and reproduce. They enforce and regulate identity and structure how knowledge is produced about people and the world around us (Foucault & Faubion, 2000). Power/knowledge and discourse are mutually constitutive concepts where leadership practices produce and sustain leadership discourse, while discourse is not only embedded in relations of power, it serves to reinforce them (Suspitsyna, 2010). Leadership discourse creates the field of meaning in higher education that regulates and structures our social reality and “organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485). Leadership discourses are “dynamic sites for the construction of meaning” (Allan, 2010, p. 13) that produce reality, knowledge, norms, power relations, as well as subjectivity for women leaders (Ropers-Huilman, 2010). The contours of discourse are influenced by power/knowledge relations, which enable discourse to gain authority and dominance. When discourse becomes dominant, it dictates what is “worth discussing and what is not” and presents some knowledge as natural and true (Stromquist, 2010, p. 217).

In the gender binary (male/female), the male subject is privileged as the norm, while the female subject is subordinated and silenced as the “other” (Gordon et al., 2010; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Sprague, 2016; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1987). These binaries attempt to regulate and stabilize meaning along divisions that establish one side as dominant and superior to the other side. This way of thinking fixes gender as a rigid binary and an inherently who we are, our identity or essence, that results from biological sexual difference. Understanding gender in this way has become so ingrained in our culture that it has become a common sense discourse. Women get pulled by the social norms of discourses that conflict, compete, and converge as women engage in an ongoing process of revision and reconstitution making them a “dynamic, unstable effect of language/discourse and cultural practice” (Nealon & Giroux, 2012, p. 502). In terms of my research, women are positioned and produced by dominant leadership discourses as they negotiate the demands of not only their immediate work environment, but their entire social world.

Leadership discourse within the organizational culture in the United States is embedded with the social norm of the historical image of the ideal worker. Although leadership discourse claims a gender neutral, disembodied, and universal subject, men assume themselves to represent the universal human, therefore, leadership is male normed. These claims of gender neutrality ignore and obscure the gendered organizational processes and practices that reinforce masculine normativity. However, a close examination of the characteristics, traits, skills, and behaviors workers are expected to display and conform to, reveals ideal worker norms working with hegemonic masculinity to produce norms that are decidedly male and likely white (Acker, 1990; Bierema, 2016; Sallee, 2020). Ideal workers are also conceived of as strong and competent employees who consistently go above and beyond, even prioritizing their work above familial obligations.

These ideal worker norms are persistent and pervasive in higher education and because our entire labor system depends on it, there is little incentive for administration to change.

The specific leadership discourses that inform this study are detailed more fully in the next two chapters, but it is most important to understand that dominant discourses maintain normative power in ways that are oppressive, dangerous, and have significant implications for women in higher educational leadership. This aligns with Nidiffer's (2010) contention, "It will surprise no one that the dominant story in the history of higher education is largely told from a white, male, Protestant, and middle/upper-class point of view" (p. 41). The task for feminist poststructuralists is to disrupt discourses that reproduce certain knowledges and meaning that results in the perpetuation of oppressive structures. Butler's (2004) particular concern with discourse and power is how it works through discourse to produce subjects as recognizable (or not) within particular contexts.

Recognition

Butler (2004) proposes that recognition is a process through which subjects are incorporated as "socially viable beings" (p. 3). That is, they become beings who are able to live, breathe, grow, and succeed within the normative constraints of their social worlds. Social and cultural norms produce highly regulated possibilities for women's subject formation and work within dominant discourse to "circumscribe the domain of intelligibility" (Butler, 2011, p. 139). This domain determines who and what (ways of being, thinking, and doing) count in certain contexts (Butler, 2004, 2011). For the women in this study, social norms they did not choose determine who they are allowed to be and shape the possibilities for who they are allowed to become, as leaders in higher education. The women are called into being as leaders through a process of *interpellation*, in which social norms demand that women act in compliance with the prevailing social norms of discourse to become specific types of leaders. This interpellation is ongoing, constant, and intent on compelling subjects

to conform to the norms of leadership, which include being strong, assertive, confident, independent, and unemotional.

Subjects become recognizable when their performative doings prove effective and they are able to conform successfully to prevailing social norms. The degree to which women adhere to and repeat these norms, which gain authority from dominant discourse, determine how *intelligible*, or how well understood, they are able to be as women and leaders. These repetitions can only happen within the category that constitutes a subject, which in this case is woman leader. Conformity occurs when subjects cite and repeat the rules of social norms. For a practice to be *citational,* a subject must integrate norms into their ways of being, such as thinking, behaving, and presenting. As subjects are compelled to repeat these citational practices in an ongoing manner, the contours of their performativity are shaped until an illusion of a coherent identity appears and the women are produced as recognizable. These repetitions and the state of ongoing reconstitution of what it means to be a woman leader cannot be predicted, therefore, it cannot be fixed to an identity as it is constantly being revised.

Power/knowledge

Fundamental to Foucault's (1980) radical philosophy and analysis of power is the rejection of structuralism's understanding of power as a force that reins from above as repressive and possessable. This modern conception of power operates all around and through us at every moment and is distributed throughout various institutions and all areas of social life (Sawicki, 1988). As power circulates, it develops and exercises strategies that serve disciplinary purposes (Stone, 2007). This new invisible disciplinary power is at once "everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular" (Bartky, 1988, p. 74). This disciplinary power invades all aspects of our lives and the

absence of formal structures or visible authorities “creates the impression that the production of femininity is either entirely voluntary or natural” (Bartky, 1988, p. 75).

Foucault’s (1980) power is also generative, always on the move within networks of power, and operates at the “microlevel of society to make possible certain global effects of domination, such as class power and patriarchy” (Sawicki, 1991, p. 23). In fact, Foucault (1980) was adamant that societal change was not possible unless the mechanisms of power that operate on a “more minute and everyday level, are not also changed” (p. 60). For this reason, I focused my research on exploring the everyday lives of women leaders in higher education. By examining the workings of power relations on that local level, I was able to gain insight into how domination and oppression were both enabled and disrupted.

Higher education leadership has become a machine embedded with gendered assumptions of leadership that uphold the common sense truth that men are naturally more qualified as leaders. This disciplinary method of power distribution has significant implications for recognition as it imposes “its structures and hierarchies, its inspections, exercises and methods of training and conditioning” (Foucault, 1980, p. 158) reflected in the supervision, promotion, and evaluation practices the participants discussed in their interviews. This is significant because these are processes that educational leaders are often responsible for implementing.

Agency and Resistance

Social norms compel subjects to constitute themselves as coherent beings who fit into the fixed and stable identity categories of woman and leader in order to become recognizable. However, even though subjects are subjugated by the power and discourses that permeate society, we are not trapped, nor rendered entirely powerless (Stone, 2007). Subjects have the freedom to resist and in fact, as Stone (2007) asserts, “Power *always* provokes resistance” (p. 59).

Foucault's freedom and Butler's agency are complementary and overlapping concepts that frame the possibility of resistance as paradoxical. From Foucault's perspective, power and freedom are not oppositional, nor mutually exclusive. Rather, these ideas are engaged in a complicated interplay in which power cannot be exercised without the possibility of freedom. Foucault (as cited in Foucault & Faubion, 2000) proposes that power and discourse work to present subjects with "a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available" (p. 342). The possibilities this field presents to subjects supports the idea that no relationship of power can exist "without the means of escape or possible flight" (Foucault & Faubion, 2000, p. 346).

Agency refers to a person's ability to respond to their social world and historical context. Butler (1990, 2004, 2011) contends that subjects have agency in how they respond to the hailings of social norms, but the choices available to them are contingent on the context that produces them. The paradox of agency is described by Butler (2004) in the following way: "If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that a paradox is the condition of its possibility" (p. 3). Agency is generated discursively within women leaders' *doings* and *undoings* as they conform and resist in response to the interpellations of social norms. In this way, dominant discourse becomes a regime of truth and regulates who women leaders are allowed to be in a specific moment, but also influences who they are allowed to become in the future. The categories of gender and leader are discursive effects produced through ongoing doings as social norms are embodied and repeated. However, the citational repetitions of the norms we are compelled to make, create opportunities for resistance and disruption. With each iteration, we have the choice to be recognized or not.

Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) notion of discursive agency means we are not as limited as we think we are. We have the ability contest and resist dominant discourses and restrictive subject positions, and existing in a state of permanent becoming means that we can always choose to act differently. These acts of resistance *undo* socially constructed categories such as leader and woman, which in turn denaturalizes the gender binary and reconfigures leadership norms (Kelan, 2010). Identity categories destabilize because citational acts are home to agency, which makes both leadership discourse and the women's performativities susceptible to challenge and reformation. Therefore, although normative forces seek to contain us into rigid categories, there are opportunities to carve out space for new and different performativities with every breath we take. Women leaders have freedom and agency to reassess "inherited identities and values" and challenge the ways in which these normative ways of being have been articulated and expressed in their own performativities, as well as in others (Sawicki, 1991, p. 101). Moreover, as acts of resistance against norms, *undoings*, make power more visible, this visibility creates new opportunities and spaces for resistance and *redoings* of leadership.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework I utilized for my deconstructive analysis and describe the foundations of poststructuralism, concepts of performativity, and relations of power and their usefulness for disrupting dominant discourse and troubling normative categories. I develop the argument that because performativity locates women's struggles for recognition within power relations at the local level, this theory is accessible, and therefore can be useful, to all women and leaders.

In the following chapter, my descriptions of ideologies, discourses, and power relations illuminate how higher education operates as a productive space of power. I detail how the ideologies of patriarchy, white supremacy, and neoliberalism function as structures that converge to create the conditions that enable power relations that produce dominant leadership discourses, normalizations, and women leaders' subjectivities. My review of literature develops the argument that this space of power provides the discursive conditions that constrain the possibilities for women leaders' subject formation.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

In the preceding chapters, I presented an argument for the necessity of feminist poststructural research on women on leadership pathways in higher education. I proposed women's everyday experiences as sites for the deconstruction of the discourses and categories that attempt to constrain women's subjectivities. In this chapter, I describe the discursive conditions and productions using the theory of performativity, as well as the concepts of discourse, power/knowledge, recognition, and agency, which I explained in the previous chapter.

My review of literature in this chapter develops the argument that dominant leadership discourses, the structural ideology of *White-supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy*, and power relations comprise the conditions of possibility that shape how women are able show up as leaders in higher education. These elements of discourse, ideology, and power construct a productive discursive field that generates discourses, normalizations, and subjectivities for women. I contend that women's subjectivities, or ways of being, are shaped within these discursive fields by dominant ideologies and discourses that carry essentialist common sense assumptions about gender and leadership in higher education. This review also provides the context necessary for my poststructural deconstructive analysis by informing my first two research questions: 1) What are the dominant discourses operating in higher education leadership? 2) What normalizations are produced, within dominant leadership discourses, which shape possibilities for subject formation for women leaders? The information I present in this chapter enables a close examination of women leaders' performative doings in order to answer my third and final research question: 3) How do women do (and undo) their gender subjectivities through performative practices within and against normalizing, dominant leadership discourses?

In order to address these questions adequately, my review required a weaving of traditional scholarship on women in the workplace, education, and leadership into my discussion of the structural and discursive conditions of higher education leadership. The majority of literature available on women in these realms offers a single theoretical story; with much of the scholarship, failing to consider the contextual factors that influence women's lived experiences. By approaching this inquiry from a feminist poststructural perspective, I was able to avoid the totalization and essentialization of women leaders by forcing them into a construct that closes off meaning. Instead, I was able to explore the complexities and multiplicities of their performativities as I encountered them in my research.

The majority of research on women in leadership is conventional and invested in a rigid gender binary that emphasizes gender difference and the measuring of women's progress to, and presence in, positions of leadership. While research on leadership purports to be gender neutral, it ignores the exclusion of women and the influence of cultural and social forces (Chin, 2011). Blackmore (2020) reminds us that even when leadership is framed as gender neutral, it remains invested in a male normed model of leadership. This is because leadership takes place within structural conditions and power relations that function to gender subjects through practices, process, and policy.

My review of literature reveals scholarship on women in the field of leadership is planted firmly in the modernist perspective, with the majority of studies focusing on measuring women's progress, and describing barriers and motivators (Johnson, 2016; Madsen & Longman, 2020). There were, of course, notable exceptions: poststructural researchers I used as touchstones and returned to read alongside. This developing area of literature highlights an encouraging trend towards less traditional, more innovative and exciting scholarship (Blackmore, 2020; Britton, 2017; Ford, 2006; Kelan, 2010, 2020; Lester,

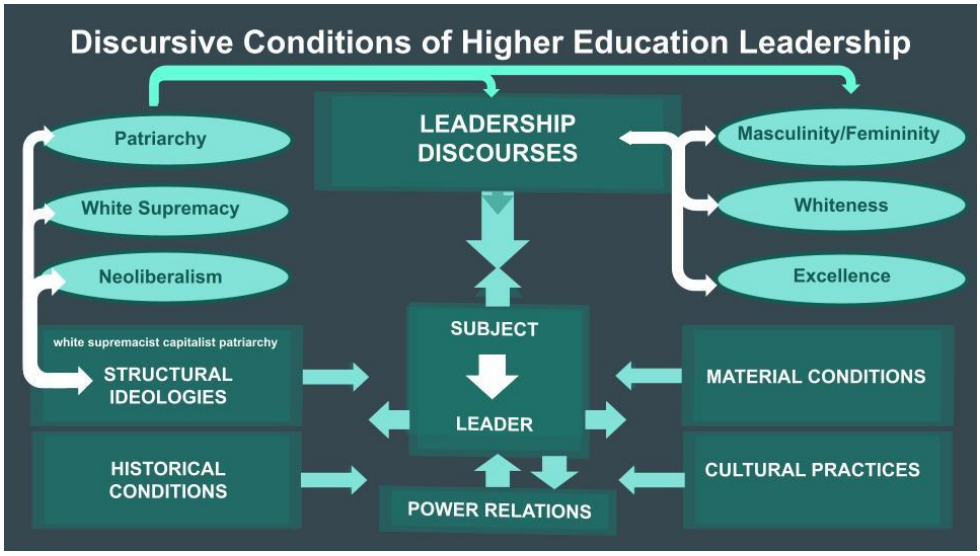
2008; Sinclair, 2014). While the majority of the literature was essentializing and often void of social context, it provides a platform from which to jump into my poststructural inquiry.

In the sections that follow, I describe the dominant discourses that produce women leaders' subjectivities through leadership practices. Then I provide an overview of the historical and ideological grounding of these discourses, the structural conditions they uphold in higher education, and the power relations they make possible that produce and reproduce leadership discourses and their normalizations. My descriptions of these elements, and how they intersect, illuminate higher education as a discursive field that reinforces the dominant leadership ideals of masculinity, whiteness, and excellence.

Discursive fields enable institutions, such as higher education, to organize and normalize social structures and practices, such as leadership. These fields are not physical places, but theoretical locations where people grapple with competing discourses and shifting power relations to make meaning about themselves and the world. The following descriptions, culled from my review of literature, provide a foundational understanding of the discursive conditions that shape and narrow subjectivities for women leaders. The discursive field that produce the women in my study as leaders is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Discursive Conditions of Higher Education



My review of literature found that theorists have struggled to arrive at a full understanding or definition of leadership because of its complexity, as it is studied through human experience and perception, which are unreliable. While a conclusive definition is elusive, contemporary theorists agree that leadership can be understood as a change oriented process of social influence (Chelf, 2018; King, 1990; MacKillop, 2018; McCleskey, 2014; Sinclair, 2014). It should also be noted that leadership has historically been defined in terms of masculinity and accepted within institutional thought and practice as an individual property, and those understandings persist to this day (Johnson & Lacerenza, 2018; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016, Raelin, 2011; Sinclair, 2014).

Truth is a particular point of concern for poststructuralists because we do not believe in a singular truth (Frost & Elichaoff, 2014). We believe in multiple truths that can co-exist without making other truths less true. This understanding of truth is bound to power/knowledge practices, therefore there is no attempt to define leadership from the

poststructural perspective because we understand that to define the concept of leadership or the category of leader is to enclose it in a rigid category. These boundaries become set and lock in arbitrary skills, traits, and characteristics as most appropriate for leadership. Once that category is set, it is accepted as universally true and becomes closed off to new meaning.

Niesche and Gowlett (2015) describe leadership as “a relationship between leadership practice and knowledge, normative frames and models of behaviour and the potentials of subject formation” (p. 382). So, from a poststructural perspective, leadership is constructed in much the same way gender is; through leadership practices within the discourses and power relations in a particular context. A poststructural analysis looks beyond the actions of the leader to question the conditions that are making that leader or that practice of leadership possible and recognizable.

In the following section, I review dominant leadership discourses which produce my study participants, Gracie, Willa, and Veronica, as subjects and from which they must constitute their performativities. These dominant leadership discourses include dominant gender discourses of masculinity, femininity, whiteness, and excellence.

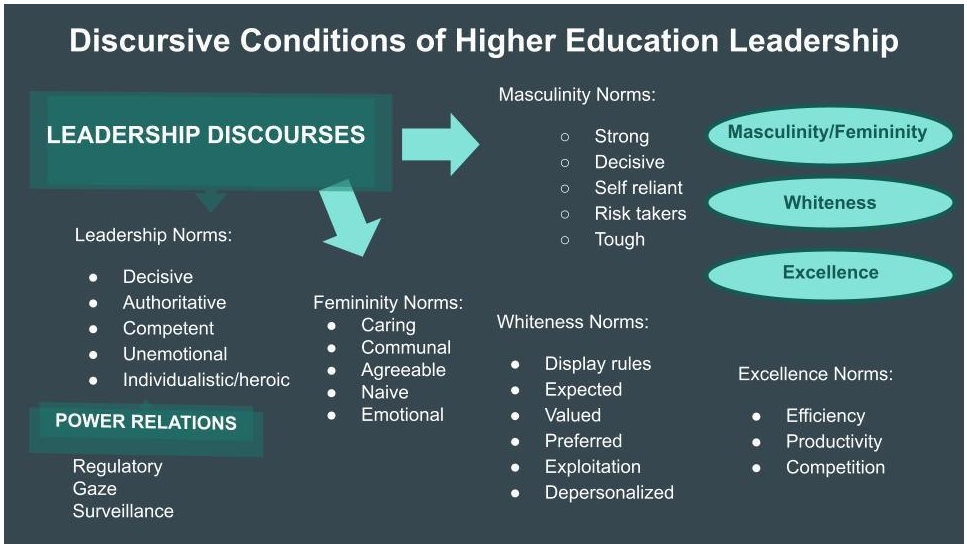
Dominant Leadership Discourses

Women *make* themselves into leaders through their repeated everyday practices within leadership discourses that are inscribed with rules and truths that shape them into certain types of leaders. Foucault (1978, 1980) proposes that social practices produce knowledge. In terms of my study, women negotiate their subjectivity within the power relations of higher education and dominant leadership discourses illustrated in Figure 2. In this way, women both become subjected to and produced by power/knowledge within their negotiations. Women have choices as they make sense of themselves within these conditions in relation to these leadership discourses and higher education power relations,

because power/knowledge also produces subject positions from which women must choose to take up or refuse. Not only do women not make sense outside of this power/knowledge process, they cannot exist outside of these discourses and power relations. This is because as women are produced, they become an effect and articulation of leadership discourse, which operates within higher education and its broader network of power (Foucault, 1978, 1980; Weedon, 1987).

Figure 2

Dominant Leadership Discourses in Higher Education



Leadership discourses in higher education produce knowledge – specific “truths” – about women within their particular cultural context (Bové, 1990). When these knowledges are accepted without question, when they are considered basic and assumed, they become normalizing and difficult to see beyond or act outside of (Guttorm et al., 2015). Normativities attempt to enclose meaning and keep women contained within narrow subjectivities, or ways of being, as leaders. While discourses can be contested as well as accepted, they can never fully do either, because women must fashion themselves from the discourses that are

available to them. The more successfully they adhere to the normalizing discourses circulating, the more recognizable they become as leaders. Structural ideologies work together to create the conditions within which power relations emerge and produce the discourses, categories, and normalizations that narrow the possibilities for the subject formation of women leaders in higher education.

Masculinity/femininity

The dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity shape the boundaries for men and women around what is appropriate and acceptable behavior in a particular context. The behaviors authorized by discourse within these constraints appear natural and normal, while behaviors that fall outside the discursive limits appear wrong and deviant (Allan, 2010). Our understanding of masculinity has been developed within a dominant white middle-class male perspective. This male dominated perspective has long associated masculinity with a science that is objective and value-free, which has produced the ideal of man as undeniably rational and emotionally neutral (Connell, 1987; Mattsson, 2015).

Femininity is not monolithic and should be thought of as multiple femininities, although dominant femininities are presented as rational and obvious. In a contemporary Western context, the dominant version of femininity is that of woman as a nurturing and emotional caregiver. Women become gendered through the process of femininity in which they come to embody femininity into their thoughts, language, and practices (Connell, 1987; Mattsson, 2015).

Gender theory claims that dominant, or hegemonic, femininity operates passively (Gordon, et al., 2010) as a disciplinary strategy directed at ensuring women remain “docile and compliant” (Bartky, 1988, p. 75). Women’s gendered performances are expressions of the social norms of femininity characterized by caring, nurturing, sharing, and dependence (Connell et al., 2005; Weedon, 1987). Women who fail to incorporate femininity discourse

successfully into their gender performance face negative consequences (Butler, 1990). Although femininity shapes women into specific styles of female, women's expressions of femininity will never be the same because discourse is specific to a particular moment in time in a subject's cultural location and position (Britton, 2017). Femininity discourses intersect with other subjectivities and competing discourses, which is significant for women with marginalized subjectivities, because they are often positioned outside of normative conceptions of femininity (Chowdhury, 2017).

Although both are dominant forms of discourse, masculinity dominates femininity and is fixed as the norm in the social world. Men are conditioned to reject and devalue the feminine within hegemonic masculinity threatening severe consequences if they embody anything other than distinctly masculine. Expectations of masculine behavior include being stoic, aggressive, competitive, and authoritative, and authorized roles include leader, provider, protector, and guide (Chowdhury, 2017; Connell et al., 2005).

Whiteness

Race is not an inherent biological trait; it is a social construction constituted through practices, processes, and policies in higher education and other institutions. Race is a modern invention aimed at dividing, essentializing, and categorizing people to exert control and maintain domination. Whiteness, both embraced and embedded as a cultural norm in the United States, perpetuates this social domination as it is reinforced in our everyday thoughts and actions. Race in the United States is assumed to be a binary of white/Black or white/non-white. Whiteness is given the privileged position and framed as normal. With the uncritical acceptance of whiteness as a dominant discourse, it is naturalized and becomes invisible (Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Cabrera, 2012; Pechenkina & Liu, 2018).

Excellence

Excellence discourse in education is less about quality and more about elitism and privilege that can be traced back to the founding of higher education in the United States in the 1800s. The privileged define standards, create policies, endorse practices, and approve processes that serve to marginalize groups that do not qualify as privileged or elite (Maher & Tetreault, 2013). This privilege has been camouflaged as merit and has become a taken for granted assumption that advantages white, middle-class, Christian, heterosexual men. Excellence discourse in education is not well defined as it operates within and through multiple cultures, perspectives, and intelligences, which include many ways of knowing, doing, and believing (Ghosh, 2012; Maher & Tetreault, 2013).

From a poststructural perspective, excellence can only exist when there is a group of "others" that are deemed mediocre. Therefore, a discourse of excellence seduces subjects into a struggle for recognition against a "subpar other." To excel in higher education means to do so at the expense of others, by embracing a culture of constant competition and productivity. The acceptance of excellence as a common sense truth forces conformity to social norms that advantage white men and disadvantage women, people of color, and other groups that fall outside of the dominant. As a result, women experience bias, discrimination, and double-binds and -standards, which work to limit and narrow the subject positions made available to them. The tightening of subjectivity is more severe for women of color who face essentialization, devaluation, and exploitation under the white gaze (Rabelo et al., 2021).

A project of Foucault's is to draw a critical awareness to how discourses like these, along with the leadership practices enabled by them, have contributed significantly to the normalization of the modern individual. He advocates for "de-individualization," or the displacement and reconfiguration of power, because humans are invested in and products

of power (Foucault & Faubion, 2000, p. 109). Foucault proposes this divestment and resistance will result in new forms of subjectivity for women leaders. Leadership discourses have significant implications for women leaders as they work with/in structural ideologies, power relations, and social norms to create *things*. These *things*, both vast and varied and will be explored in the next section. I frame these implications of dominant leadership for women as "productions" by the discursive conditions and power relations of higher education. As discourse and subjectivity mutually produce and reproduce perceptions of reality, leadership discourse has sustained hegemonic masculinity in higher education leadership through these leadership images (Chelf, 2018). This has transformed into a collective acceptance that charismatic white males are natural leaders, while everyone else is not.

Historical and Structural Conditions of Higher Education

Women's exclusion and subsequent underrepresentation in higher education in the United States began in 1636 with the founding of Harvard College. It was not until the 1800s that women, who were almost exclusively white, were able to access higher education. Between 1836-1875, fifty women's colleges were founded to accommodate women's demands for higher education, and by 1890, women's enrollment had risen to 47% of the undergraduate population. Women's enrollment continued to climb, and this increased access to higher education resulted in increased participation and representation of women in male dominated professional occupations, including law and medicine (Sokoloff, 2014).

The 1960s and early 1970s marked a time of significant resistance and social change, when movements for equality in the workplace and education gained legislative traction (Sokoloff, 2014). On the heels of the passing of The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination based on sex, race, color, national origin, or religion, Title IX passed in 1972, adding "protection against employment discrimination based on sex. This

policy extended its coverage to recruitment, hiring, and promotion practices; to lines of progression or tenure based on sex; and to compensation, benefits, and working conditions" (Glazer-Raymo, 2008, p. 3). These public policies signaled a turning point for "women's equitable participation both in education and in other social institutions" (Madsen, 2011, p. 33). Title IX, along with other Supreme Court rulings regarding affirmative action, was credited with expediting women's progress in higher education and was key to broadening and softening the boundaries of higher education, which offered "access and opportunity to women and minorities at almost every level of the academy" (Glazer-Raymo, 2008, p. 11).

Higher education has long been conceived of as an environment that embraces intellectual curiosity and discovery, free thought and expression, and critical inquiry and examination. As a result, higher education in general has accepted change and the need to respond to the ever-changing external world (Tierney, 2014). This has created the perception of an environment that embraces diversity and inclusion, engages in open dialogue, where organizational structure is more flat than hierarchical (Chelf, 2018). However, the literature on higher education leadership revealed a more complicated perspective. As higher education evolved to be more inclusive, albeit still exclusive to many, it forced a confrontation between conservative approaches to leadership and liberal ideals of education (Chelf, 2018; Kezar et al., 2006). Conservative leadership continues to prevail and as a result, perceptions and practices remain rooted in patriarchal models of leadership.

Ideologies are systems of beliefs that structure our social worlds and attempt to explain our social existence so that they become lenses through which we come to see and understand the world around us (Stoddart, 2007; Weedon, 1987). In my analysis, patriarchy, white supremacy, and neoliberalism are most visible as ideologies that uphold the social structures of sexism, racism, and capitalism; thus, producing the conditions for women's

social existence and subject formation within the institution of higher education. The terms *ideology* and *discourse* are often used interchangeably and while they are entwined and do make the other possible, I engage them differently in my research and so clarify the distinction here. The relationship between ideology and discourse can be understood as similar to the relationship between squares and rectangles. The mnemonic device I learned in grammar school provides the insight that *Every square is a rectangle but not every rectangle is a square.* This means that while ideology is always discursive (every square is a rectangle), discourse is not necessarily ideological (not every rectangle is a square). In this way, ideology is an effect of discourse and discourse is the materiality of ideology and only becomes ideological when it works to reinforce social systems of power.

Ideologies serve to organize and categorize societal thought in ways that often simplify, minimize, or falsify conflicts and complexities to rationalize and sustain inequality. Ideologies can operate at the level of personal experience, as well as within broader power structures in institutions and society. Higher education is a site of discursive practices that produce and disseminate discourses, which means it is deeply entrenched in the principles of patriarchy, white supremacy, and neoliberalism (Wilkinson & Blackmore, 2008). These ideologies operate in higher education as mutually reinforcing mechanisms of dominance that create the conditions from which power relations emerge and begin producing things. These productions include normative identity categories, dominant leadership discourses, normalizations, subjectivities, and common sense “truths” of gender, race, and class (Foucault, 1980; Stoddart, 2007).

It is within these oppressive conditions and power relations that women constitute themselves as leaders. Butler (1990, 2004, 2011) proposes this constitution is performativity, the dual process of meaning and sense making through which women are produced as particular types of leaders by power and discourse, while simultaneously being

presented with subject positions through which they can transform themselves. Women are active participants in the construction and maintenance of these ideologies as they constitute themselves within and against the ideologies, integrating them into who they are, how they make sense of the world, and who they become. It is in this way that “institutions of modern life literally make all of us into subjects” (Nealon & Giroux, 2012, p. 44).

Understanding these ideologies as structural conditions is critical to my research because, along with dominant leadership discourses and normative categories of woman and leader, these ideologies comprise the discursive conditions from which power relations emerge to “determine who does what and for whom, what we are and what we might become” (Weedon, 1987, p. 1). In the following sections, I describe the structural ideologies and then discuss their productions to better understand the discursive conditions within which the women do (and undo) their gender subjectivities through performative practices.

White-supremacist Capitalist Patriarchy

Issues of race, class, gender, economy, and injustice are entangled in the history of the United States since its founding, yet a substantive public discourse on their interconnectivity has begun only in recent decades. bell hooks (1994) calls for the critique of this “white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy,” (p. 26) which she describes as “interlocking systems of classism, racism, and sexism work to keep women exploited and oppressed” (hooks, 2000, p. 109). Issues of economy, race, and gender are too enmeshed be examined in isolation, as they amplify the effects of exploitation and inequality produced within these ideologies (Abdelfatah, 2022). The convergence of these ideologies has made their deep integration into higher education as an institution possible and has profound implications for women in leadership, particularly women of color. This is because women’s access to and participation in the workplace, education, and leadership has fluctuated alongside historical economic and social shifts (Parker, 2015).

In his theory of racial capitalism, Cedric Robinson (as cited in Abdelfatah, 2022) contends that the US capitalist economy is a by-product of racism and is dependent on the dehumanization and the devaluation of black and brown people and their labor to function. Race and racism are integral features of capitalism that serve to persuade the white working class that being white carries value that entitles them to more than non-white people. The system still exploits the white working class, but to a lesser degree than people of color. Labor, race, and gender inequalities created during the founding of the United States persist to this day. patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism (and eventually neoliberalism in the 1980s) are both the causes and effects of those inequalities (Abdelfatah, 2022).

Patriarchy

Patriarchy can be understood as a system of power that privileges men, establishing them as dominant and the norm, then defines women in relation to men. While feminists continue to debate the best way to define patriarchy, there is consensus that patriarchy is an oppressive construct that is harmful to men and women alike. In fact, bell hooks (1994) proposes that patriarchy is “the single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation” (p. 17). Understanding patriarchy in this way highlights its insidiousness as it operates often invisibly at the individual, institutional, and societal levels of our social worlds.

Patriarchal ideology maintains its power by demanding that we accept and reaffirm hegemonic gender norms as truths within our everyday social practices. Because masculine roles and work are deemed to be more valuable, men are unevenly rewarded and validated for reaffirming gender norms. This repeated acceptance and reaffirmation of social norms requires the dismissal and discreditation of non-dominant ways of being which reproduces dominant discourse and further marginalizes those who fall outside the norm.

Understanding how patriarchy operates is critical to my study because the meaning of sex, gender, and biological difference are sites of struggle against subjection for the women in my study. These struggles within power relations are opportunities for the women to loosen up rigid subject positions as they do (and undo) their gender performativities.

The power of patriarchy and white supremacy as ideologies lies in our social investment in the idea that biological, sexual, and racial differences are naturally significant rationalizations for privileging men and white people and subordinating women and People of Color (Bartky, 1988; Weedon, 1987). Patriarchy and white supremacy gain their power through what Foucault (as cited in Foucault & Faubion, 2000) describe as "dividing practices" that cleave subjects within themselves or from others. In the case of patriarchy, living beings are split into two distinct categories based on their biological sex (p. 326). The division created by white supremacy is also based on the assumption that race is a biological fact and racial difference is significant. These divisions force people into oppositional relationships within male/female and white/Black binaries in a humanist attempt to stabilize meaning around gender and race. Binaries grant the superior status to all that is white and masculine, and relegates all that is not white, typically People of Color, and feminine to an inferior status. These common sense "truths," that people are inherently more valuable or naturally suited for different social roles based on their race and gender, are collectively embraced and reproduced within higher education leadership.

Neoliberalism

For the purposes of this dissertation, I use a simplified understanding of neoliberalism derived from Giroux (2002, 2010) to examine its underlying assumptions and productions that have impacted the environments and experiences of the women who participated in my study. Neoliberalism is an economic and political ideology that gained traction in higher education in the last four decades. Neoliberalism can be understood as a

later version of capitalism, and its emergence signaled a discursive shift from ethics based thinking to economic centered reasoning in higher education. Neoliberalism has wrapped "itself in what appears to be an unassailable appeal to common sense" (Giroux, 2002, p. 428) which has enabled it to gain strength, as it raises expectations and intensifies pressure to perform and produce.

Although it is not always visible, neoliberal ideology provides important context for understanding how it contributed to the conditions the women in my study constituted their subjectivities within. A scarcity of resources has created a culture of competition and increased the pressure around innovation and production. Rather than curious and active constructors of knowledge, the subjectivities of students are narrowed to that of basic consumers. Neoliberal ideology emphasizes efficiency, innovation, financial solvency, and revenue generation. Neoliberalism has shifted the blame for educational failures from the educational system to individual leaders and educators. Education as a public service has been commodified, assigned a dollar value, and turned into a mechanism for churning out graduates who are workforce ready. Measures of success have been reduced to standardized tests and job attainment post-graduation (Giroux, 2002, 2010; McNeely, 2020; Tight, 2019).

Power Relations

My review of the structural ideologies of patriarchy, white supremacy, and neoliberalism illuminates how they work together to create the conditions for power relations to emerge and become productive. According to Foucault (1977,1980), power relations are inevitable and deeply rooted features of our social world within which we exercise power as we act on the actions of others. Power is deployed through and produced as an effect of the interactions between entities within those complex systems of relations that exist on all levels of society. In terms of my study, these entities construct a network of power that

organizes and structures the conditions of higher education in which the struggle over gender and leadership occurs. The entities that form the points of the power network of higher education include the historical, institutional, and societal characterizations of leadership and the structural conditions of patriarchy, white supremacy, and neoliberal ideologies. It is at the convergence of these entities that power becomes productive and generates possibilities and limits for women leaders within and through competing discourses and relations.

Foucault (as cited in Foucault & Faubion, 2000) proposes that institutions engage stable mechanisms of power that are "designed to ensure its own preservation" (p. 343), which is of particular concern for women, people of color, and other historically marginalized (underrepresented) populations because institutions of higher education in the United States were founded upon and serve the interests of white men. These beginnings have enabled a powerful patriarchal discourse to envelope us, making it difficult to challenge, question, or even think beyond (Nidiffer, 2010; St. Pierre, 2000). These discursive conditions and power relations produce not only normative categories like that of *leader* and dominant leadership discourses, but they produce the women themselves, by way of their subjectivities. The productions I describe in the following section provide insight into how the discursive conditions of higher education work to shape the possibilities for women leaders' subject formation. These productions serve much like symptoms of a disease in that they are not the problem per se, but they indicate there is a bigger issue, a root cause. Discursive productions would not be possible without the conditions of higher education actively subjugating women in ways that constrain their subjectivities. The patriarchal culture of higher education produces tensions between personal and professional life for women, which have serious implications for their mental health and well-being as well as their academic output (DIamini & Adams, 2014).

Discursive Productions

In the following section, I discuss a conglomeration of *things* –normalizations, subjectivities, biases, exclusions, normalizations, categories, barriers, tensions, and inequities –- that are produced within the conditions and power/knowledge relations of higher education leadership. These productions are overlapping, conflicting, and often normalizing. These productions not only contribute to the narrowing of women leaders' subjectivities, but also serve to reinforce and maintain the rigid and constrained subject positions made available to them through power and discourse. As women accept and integrate leadership norms into the negotiation of their subjectivities, their actions confirm and reproduce the expectations discourses demand of them and keep them in constant tension within the web of power relations.

Gender Bias

The fixing of the gender binary as a norm in leadership discourse enables gender bias to be produced and reproduced within power/knowledge and dominant leadership discourses, effectively normalizing gender bias and discrimination within institutional and cultural discourses. Gender bias has been a pervasive concern and manifests in myriad forms for women in the workplace and beyond. Gender bias operates both overtly and implicitly with harmful consequences for the health and well-being of women leaders and their organizations (Madsen & Andrade, 2018).

Ely et al. (2011) identify a second-generation bias that operates subtly to maintain the status quo within predominantly male hierarchical organizations to privilege men as more natural leaders. Gender bias and discrimination contribute to the gender leadership gap by prompting and supporting men's promotions, neglecting women's development, and operating so subtly women are unwilling to identify gender as a potential influence on their career trajectory (Ibarra et al., 2013).

Gender Roles and Expectations

The collective societal embrace of the common sense "truth" that men and women are inherently gendered and therefore suited for different social roles is reproduced within higher education leadership. Dominant gender discourses of femininity and masculinity intersecting with leadership discourse inform the double standards and double binds that limit possibilities for women leaders. The *double bind*, also referred to as the *double burden*, is often used in ways that infer the operation of the *double standard* phenomenon. The double bind and double standard manifest as exclusionary practices, assigning more value to one group over another and then employing stricter requirements for the devalued group. In terms of my research, women are not only the devalued group, but they face higher standards and stricter requirements than men, who are valued more highly. Double standards are designed to maintain the status quo by enabling "different interpretations of the same outcome" by ascribing certain attributes to specific groups (Foschi, 2000, p. 38). As a result, women are expected to work twice as hard as men for less compensation and lower prestige while facing higher thresholds for competence, often for less reward (Bierema, 2016). In addition, men tend to be judged by their potential for success while women are judged by their accomplishments. This forces women to work to prove themselves constantly, often in areas beyond their scope of responsibility and outside of their expertise (Williams, 2005).

Women in leadership find themselves in a double bind as discourses of femininity and discourses of masculine leadership conflict and demand different behavior of them. Leadership discourses demand toughness, assertiveness, and confidence while femininity discourses demand that women be nurturing, passive, and collaborative. This cross-pressure can result in criticism regardless of whether women exhibit masculine or feminine leadership behaviors. Gendered expectations designate women to serve as caretakers for

their families, often having to alter their career paths to accommodate their partner's career or to care for family members, like children or elders (Phipps & Prieto, 2014). For similar reasons, women are more likely to miss out on professional development, mentoring, and networking opportunities. Women more often are responsible for domestic responsibilities and are impacted more negatively by inflexible work environments. There is a collective assumption that women have to choose between career advancement and family to advance their career or to maintain a manageable work-life balance. Some implications of these tensions include women university presidents being less likely than men to have children and more likely to be in their first presidency. This means that women are promoted more slowly, potentially due to the challenges of having a family (Rodriguez & Giuffrida, 2019).

Leadership Gap and Barriers

My review of literature revealed evidence of gender inequity made visible in a leadership gap with a pervasive absence of women at upper levels of leadership in higher education (Chin, 2011, Cook & Glass, 2014; DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). This gender gap in higher education leadership is made possible through women's exclusion from realms outside of domesticity in response to patriarchal ideology. Understandings of leadership are produced, and reproduced, through exclusionary gendered practices in both formal domains, such as recruitment and hiring, promotion and tenure, performance evaluation, and salary, as well as informal domains, such as access to financial resources, decision-making spaces, and social networks. This image of women leaders is a production of power/knowledge and sustains our understanding of women as less naturally suited for leadership's duties.

Dominant productions of the discursive conditions of higher education include the previously discussed gender discrimination and bias often experienced by women as

leadership barriers. These barriers are produced within discourse and work to essentialize women and keep subject positions narrow, reproduced through leadership practices. These barriers have been portrayed as various metaphors over the last several decades. The term *concrete wall* was given to the overt and legal discrimination women encountered because of their gender attempting to enter the workforce before World War II (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The *glass ceiling* is the most notable and persistent metaphor introduced by Hymowitz and Schelhardt (as cited in Klenke, 2011) to describe invisible barriers that women can see through but are still strong enough to prevent the upward movement of women to top-level leadership positions resulting from gender discrimination. The term *glass wall* is a metaphor to describe another invisible barrier that denies women access to powerful upper level leaders, who are typically male. These glass walls prevent access to key players in the organization and therefore lateral movement within an organization due to a lack of access to those resources that often provide opportunities for promotion (Klenke, 2011). Women leaders who are also mothers experience additional challenges and face the *maternal wall* created by second-generation bias. This includes weaker performance evaluations after returning from maternity leave, as well as treatment in line with the domestic housewife stereotype (Williams, 2005).

The *glass cliff* metaphor was introduced as an extension of the glass ceiling metaphor to illustrate what may happen to women once they break through the glass ceiling and find themselves in top-level leadership positions of an organization showing signs of decline in its performance (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). The labyrinth represents a more recent metaphor to describe women's complex path to positions of leadership. Eagly and Carli (2007) described this metaphor as a journey that is not "simple or direct, but requires persistence, awareness of one's progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles ahead" (p. x). And while all of these are only metaphors, they represent manifestations of power and

discourse that have material consequences for women's career trajectories (Atkins & Vicars, 2016; Bierema, 2016; Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Catalyst, 2007; Chelf, 2018; Chowdhury, 2017; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Foschi, 2000; Gordon et al., 2010; Lennon et al., 2013; Ropers-Huilman, 2010).

The gender salary gap remains an issue, although efforts have been made to address it resulting in some gains for women. On average, women make 20% less than men, or 82 cents for every dollar a man makes (Tucker, 2021). The National Women's Law Center reports that in the US, this pay gap costs women approximately $10,086 each year, and may cost over $1 million dollars in a woman's lifetime. In higher education specifically, the gender salary gap remained consistent over the course of 15 years. In 2001, women earned 77 cents for every dollar earned by men, and by 2016, the gap narrowed to 80 cents for women compared to 1 dollar for men and disproportionately impacts older women (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I first describe the dominant leadership discourses of masculinity, femininity, whiteness, and excellence, and then the ideologies of patriarchy, white supremacy, and neoliberalism, all of which organize and structure higher education leadership, in order to illuminate the conditions that power relations emerge from. Then I explored the discursive conditions of higher education leadership to show how it becomes a productive, "mobile, noncontainer space of power that creates and reinforces things" (Jackson, 2013). These things include biases, assumptions, absences, gaps, barriers, inequities, discourses, resistance, subjectivities, and more. These productions both provide a glimpse of higher education leadership culture and construct the context for my deconstructive analysis in the next chapter.

My review establishes higher education leadership as a patriarchal, white supremacist, neoliberal, and gendered space of power that churns out discourses and normalizations, which shape the possibilities for women leaders' subjectivities. Therefore, my review of literature served to situate and describe the problem at the crux of my study. While my review revealed burgeoning literature on educational leadership framed in the poststructural paradigm, the majority of scholarship in leadership studies is rooted in the modernist tradition. Previous research centers women and attempts to capture the essence of what it means to be a woman leader. This solidifies rather than proliferates meaning and reproduces harmful normalizations from the discursive conditions of higher education, such as gender assumptions and bias. This failure to decenter women, or any subject, and trouble institutional structures reinforces binary thinking that positions women as the other, as less than, in the dominant masculine leadership discourse and patriarchal culture. This constructs women as the "problem" to solve in leadership and obscures the power and discourse working within the practices, policies, and processes of higher education to exclude and silence women (Acker, 1990, 2012; Hill et al., 2016, Sinclair, 2014).

Foucault (1980) proposes that poststructural analysis "makes it possible to locate lines of weakened, strong points, positions where the instances of power have secured and implanted themselves by a system of organisation dating back over 150 years" (p. 62). Positioning my study in the poststructural paradigm grants me access to analytical tools that not only allow me to critically examine and deconstruct the complex power relations in the present, but they identify possibilities for moving forward. In the next chapter, I detail the feminist poststructural methodology that frames my inquiry, including descriptions of my qualitative methods for participant selection and interviews, as well as my feminist poststructural analysis using thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) to plug in Judith Butler's theory of performativity.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In the introduction of this dissertation, I located my subjectivity as a feminist poststructural practitioner and researcher and described the need for more nuanced understandings of how women constitute their performativities within and against dominant leadership discourses in higher education. I then described the historical, structural, and discursive conditions of higher education and their productions. I then deconstruct these productions, which include dominant leadership discourses, normalizations, subjectivities, and resistances that I deconstruct in my analysis.

I describe my methodological approach and outline my methods for data collection in this chapter. I detail my poststructural thinking with theory analysis and revisit poststructural concepts of power/knowledge and discourse, and then define the specific concepts I utilized in my analysis. Next, I elaborate my feminist poststructural thinking with theory methodology and finally, I contextualize my theoretical approach with examples from the field and discuss the usefulness of performativity for interrogating normalizing dominant leadership discourses and normative identity categories (Butler, 1990, 2004, 2011).

In this qualitative, feminist poststructural dissertation, I interviewed three women on pathways to leadership in higher education in order to deconstruct normative categories and discursive conditions that shape their subjectivities. My analysis exposed how the women's *doing* and *undoing* of leadership loosened up rigid and normative subject positions within

their particular contexts. Using Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) thinking with theory methodology for analysis, I plugged in Judith Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) theory of performativity to the interview data and addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant discourses operating in higher education leadership?
2. What normalizations are produced, within dominant leadership discourses, which shape possibilities for subject formation for women leaders?
3. How do women do (and undo) their gender subjectivities through performative practices within and against normalizing, dominant leadership discourses?

This analysis further serves to interrogate the fields of meaning and power in higher education that attempt to organize and govern people and social practices (St. Pierre, 2001). With this deeper understanding of how discursive conditions and rigid identity categories function, women leaders are able to develop agentic strategies for disrupting dominant leadership discourses, and the normalizations they produce, which narrow possibilities for women leaders.

Methodology, according to Harding (1987), is "a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed" (p. 3), which is rooted in largely unexamined assumptions about the nature of knowledge and reality. The justifications we make for using a particular methodology and method reveal these assumptions and our theoretical perspective (Crotty, 2020). So as researchers develop philosophical and methodological approaches within research, we make claims about what we believe qualifies as knowledge, how we believe reality is constructed, and how these epistemological and ontological positionings shape the contours and direction of our research (Sprague, 2016). Methodology provides the "terrain where philosophy and action meet" (Sprague, 2016, p. 5), where we reflect upon and consider the implications of our research as we make decisions about its direction. I entered this methodological terrain as a feminist poststructuralist with epistemological and

ontological perspectives that are invested in a reality that is socially constructed and in constant flux and embrace knowledge as multiple and produced within and through power.

Epistemological Perspective: Feminist Qualitative Inquiry

A starting point for feminism is the subjugation of women and their experiences of oppression and exploitation. Feminism is not a monolith, there are many feminisms that acknowledges the importance and include a diversity of perspectives and multiple locations, because the social world is experienced through our multiple identities (Burns & Chantler, 2011). The foundational ontological belief of poststructuralism is a reality that is not rigid nor stable because, much like gender, it is constructed within language, discourse, and power/knowledge (Davies & Gannon, 2011). A poststructural research approach is embedded with the epistemological belief that new knowledge can be generated through the examination and deconstruction of texts. I used not only physical and printed texts and digital documents, but theorists, theories, participants, myself as a researcher as well, and the social world as sites of deconstruction.

I grounded my qualitative research in a feminist epistemological perspective that takes up a poststructural thinking with theory analysis as a challenge to conventional research practices and interpretive frameworks that serve the interests of the powerful. My dissertation is a conceptual inquiry project that uses interview data to conduct a feminist poststructural deconstruction of the discursive conditions that shape the possibilities for the subject formation of women leaders. I elucidate my thinking with theory methodology in a later section in this chapter.

My research is a critique of prevailing assumptions about knowledge – who is knowable and what counts as knowledge – that perpetuate uneven power relations. Feminism seeks to address issues of power embedded in research based in binary oppositions that obscure social relations that benefit one social category over another.

These binary oppositions include the male/female, centered in interpretivist research approaches, and the data/theory binary, centered in traditional research. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) propose these binary oppositions make feminist research political because there is “power and injustice in relationships of difference” which can be used for radical resistance (p. 81).

These perspectives made the open and emergent characteristics of qualitative research the most advantageous and appropriate for my study. The goals of qualitative research are to “understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them” (Glesne, 2006, p. 4). Qualitative inquiry can be understood in terms of both paradigm and methods. Paradigms are frameworks that organize belief systems and worldviews world that generate knowledge. Through a paradigmatic lens, qualitative inquiry both frames the nature of knowledge and defines the purpose of the research project. As a method, qualitative inquiry defines approaches to data collection, analysis, and representation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010), notable for representing data through words, pictures, or icons over statistical analysis and numbers. The lack of standardization in qualitative research allowed for the flexibility and customization I required as pivoted from a qualitative approach to data collection to feminist poststructural data analysis. This enabled me to invite the complexities of subjectivity, power and discourse, social interactions, and interpretation of experience into my research design. In this way, I was able to use participant accounts to “knead the dynamics among philosophy, theory, and social life to see what gets *made*, not understood” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 3).

Feminist research methodology, which is better described than defined, is at its heart a political project distinguished by the intentional focus on women and their experiences, critique of non-feminist scholarship, and attention to the implications of power. However, feminist research is not simply about studying women; it is about agitating a broken system

to instigate social change and progress. Therefore, my theoretical stance within feminism does not rest on my research's focus on women and their experiences, it stems from a shared interest in working towards social justice and redressing asymmetrical power relations across multiple categories, including race, class, sexual orientation, and other identities (Bartky, 1988; Harding, 1987; Hesse-Biber, 2013; Sprague, 2016; Stone, 2007; Tong, 2014).

Research anchored in concern for these effects of power/knowledge provides malleable tools that create opportunities for the resistance and interrogation of power relations, social norms, and dominant discourses. Feminism and poststructuralism are also both pliable, multiple, and oriented towards change, all of which are necessary to examine the complexities of women's subjectivities within those discourses and power relations. Putting feminism and poststructuralism together in my epistemological approach enabled a way of shifting the focus of my research to the conditions of higher education that make the women's subjectivities possible and allowed for thinking outside of and beyond the gender binary. Feminist and poststructural theories became pathways and interventions for disrupting my ways of understanding research so that I was able to ask new questions about women and their experiences.

Research Methods

Methods used in qualitative research attempt to break down barriers and reduce distances between the researcher and participants so that participants can contribute their ideas and feelings in their own time and in their own words. In the sections that follow, I describe the processes I followed to select and recruit participants and collect data.

Participant Overview

It was critical that the participants have personal connections to and experience with the foci of the study, which meant participants must self-identify as women and be employed in

higher education on a pathway to leadership. Therefore, in order to answer the research questions of my study, it was necessary for the participants to meet the following criteria:

1. Participants must self-identify as a woman.
2. Participants must serve in a position that falls on a continuum of leadership.
3. Participants must be employed in higher education in a non-academic capacity, in a position outside of academic affairs.
4. Participants must not possess a terminal degree, specifically a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), and Juris Doctor (J.D.).

I put a lot of thought into the decision to recruit participants specifically from non-academic positions of leadership for my study. I had initially intended to recruit leaders from student affairs, but quickly discovered very little consistency in organizational structures between institutions. This made me realize it would not be possible to narrow the scope of my study to student affairs leaders specifically. I chose to focus my study on the experiences of women working in non-academic positions in higher education for two reasons. First, my personal experience and the literature reflect historical and cultural differences between student affairs and academic affairs (Rodems, 2011; Sallee, 2020; Voyles, 2015). I felt it was significant to recruit leaders who worked in unprotected, “at will” positions. While there are many faculty and staff leaders in academic affairs who also work in unprotected positions, positions outside of academic affairs are almost always unprotected. The literature offered other examples of unprotected positions, including contingent faculty (Porter et al., 2020; Tierney, 2014) and precarious staff (O'Keefe & Courtois, 2019). I was interested in this discrepancy and how women’s experiences might be impacted by these power differentials. Second, I wanted to focus on women outside of academic affairs because there was shockingly little literature available on women in leadership outside of

academic affairs, except for research on women in upper administrative leadership positions (Associate or Assistant Vice Chancellors, Directors, and Associate Directors).

I decided to recruit participants that did not hold a terminal degree for a variety of reasons. I wanted to capture the experiences of women on pathways to leadership, women who were solidly in the middle of their careers and in middle management positions. When I embarked on this journey of discovery, I was intrigued by how power was operating in my own life and in those of my close female colleagues. I was less concerned about the experiences of women who seemed to have "made it" to top-level leadership positions and who tended to have terminal degrees. My rationalization was that there was more literature available on women in senior leadership positions and I wanted my scholarship to address that gap in research. Additionally, women without terminal degrees were more likely to be proximate to the data I hoped to explore. As a student about to complete a terminal degree, I believe a doctorate will open up opportunities not currently available to me. My contexts will shift, new discourses will be accessible to me, and I will be produced in different ways. A doctorate holds the potential to change how I am seen and understood as a leader and to open new pathways potentially not available to women in mid-career, mid-level leadership positions. While this research may not directly impact me, it presents the opportunity for a redoing of leadership that may benefit those in similar positions.

Sampling and Recruitment

I have worked in the field of student affairs for the past 20 years in various capacities in the areas of residence life and community engagement. The collaborative nature of these functional areas offered invaluable networking opportunities throughout my career, resulting in many positive and lasting professional relationships with colleagues across the country. These connections allowed me to identify former colleagues that met the criteria for my study via purposive strategies. This approach is supported by Esterberg (2002) who

contends that researchers can choose “research participants for the specific qualities they can bring to the study” (p. 93).

My decision to choose women who had no clear personal or professional connection to the other participants in the study was intentional. While a strong rapport with participants was my priority, I had ethical concerns regarding the risk/benefit analysis and confidentiality (Redwood & Todres, 2006). An ethic of care is embedded in feminist research as a way to “reduce symbolic violence” within each interview and to protect the rights of my research participants (Barbour & Schostak, 2011, p. 64). Unbalanced power relationships complicate interviewing as a research method in ways that can be invasive and painful for participants. Esterberg (2002) affirms this stance, claiming there is always potential to inflict harm because “social research is influenced by humans on every level. When it is conducted by, for, and about people, there is always the potential to harm others” (p. 44). In this particular case, I considered my participants vulnerable to repercussions if their interview data traced back to them. I was concerned that participants might accidentally identify other participants if they knew each other and the harm that might cause.

After identifying eight potential participants, I sent each participant an invitation (Appendix A) to engage in a 60–90 minute interview conducted in a location that was convenient and comfortable for them. I encountered a few challenges securing selected participants, including one woman who never responded, another woman who was initially enthusiastic about participating but never confirmed an interview date, and one woman who was interested in participating, but we could not match our availability to schedule an interview. We did discuss the possibility of a remote interview over Zoom, but in the end, I decided I wanted to be consistent and conduct all of my interviews in person. When those three potential participants fell through, I identified three additional women who I invited to an interview.

Once eight participants agreed to interviews, I sent a confirmation email with a reminder about the required criteria for participants, an overview of the process and timeline, and I encouraged them to reach out to me with any questions. In this email, I also shared the following documents approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). While my dissertation received an IRB exemption (Appendix B), I chose to use the approved protocol and documents to guide my study. These documents included an informed consent form (Appendix C), which provided a description of their role and the scope of my research to ensure optimal conditions for maintaining participant confidentiality and harm reduction for participants. The Participant Background and Demographic Information Form (Appendix D) gathered demographic information, such as job position and title, years of experience in higher education, and social identities, which was useful in creating sketches of each participant to provide context for my analysis. I also shared the interview guide (Appendix E) with participants to provide some time to consider their responses as well as a clearer sense of the scope of my research.

Although disclosure of participant identity is always a possible risk, I took every precaution to protect the privacy and confidentiality of any records generated by this research. I saved all of these forms, the interview transcripts, and audio files under pseudonyms on a personal, password-protected laptop and redacted the women's information, including name, title, position, and other identifying information, from the transcript and my research discussion. Due to their personal connection to me, I was careful not to disclose the nature of my travels with colleagues or mutual acquaintances. I also cautioned participants about posting on social media and assured them I would also not share information about our visit publicly. I advised the participants that the audio files of their interviews would be destroyed upon the completion and final approval of my dissertation, but the interview transcriptions would be kept indefinitely under their

pseudonyms for the purpose of future research development. Furthermore, I informed participants that their participation in my research would assist me in the completion of my dissertation and doctoral degree and notified them of the potential risks and discomforts, including recounting difficult experiences in their professional journeys. At several junctures, I alerted and advised the women that participation in this research was voluntary and they were welcome to discontinue at any time, and for any reason.

Participants Demographics

This study initially involved eight women with a diversity of social identities, backgrounds, and experiences on pathways to leadership in higher education from four-year public institutions representing a range of geographical regions across the United States. Ultimately, I only used the interview data from three women for my analysis. I selected these three participants in particular because their interviews provided experiences that exposed their subjectivities as leaders to be complex and conflicting, which provided compelling sites for my deconstructive analysis.

The three participants selected their own pseudonyms for the study, which were Veronica, Gracie, and Willa. More robust descriptions will develop in Chapter 5, but what follows are brief descriptions of each woman's demographic information.

Veronica. Veronica is a white, cisgender, straight woman who is married with children. Veronica has worked in higher education for 20 years in various roles and departments, including housing and residence life, student conduct, and Title IX. Veronica worked at a small public institution at the time of the interview.

Gracie. Gracie is a white, cisgender; queer identifying woman who is partnered, but not married, and is childfree. Gracie has worked in higher education for over 20 years in various roles and departments, including housing and residence life and student

intervention, support, and emergency response services. Gracie worked at a large four-year public institution at the time of the interview.

Willa. Willa identifies as a Black or African American, cisgender, straight woman who is single with no children. Willa has worked in higher education for over 20 years in the field of housing and residential education. Willa worked at a mid-sized public four-year institution at the time of the interview.

Data Collection

I spent significant time weighing the pros and cons of the commitment to “in person” interviews, but ultimately decided that I would feel more connected to and invested in the research. My travels took me between 35 and 1500 miles away from my home in Asheville, North Carolina. The diverse landscapes I ventured to were rivaled only by the unique lodging scenarios in each locale. I slumbered in a hostel bunk shrouded by a velvet privacy curtain, a twin mattress in the corner of the baby’s room, and against the starchy sheets in a standard hotel room. I lodged in a ruffled-curtained and makeup-stained tween’s lair, an airy and comfortable in-law suite, a sterile and humid cinder block wall on-campus apartment, and an air mattress of questionable integrity on a tiled basement floor. The only common thread tying these seemingly disparate sleep spaces to each other were the workplaces of my studies participants, specifically the public, four-year institutions towering nearby. The institutions where the women worked ranged from small (4,000 students) to large (over 50,000 students), but participants chose to share stories and experiences from previous institutional work places, some of which were private and community colleges.

Interview Process

I chose a semi-structured interview as my method of data collection because interviews proved to be the optimal way to gain insight into the experiences of my participants. A feminist approach to interviewing seeks to expose women’s subjugated

knowledges (Hesse-Biber, 2013) and interviews were powerful opportunities to acknowledge subjectivities and address issues of power. Furthermore, the interview provided a supportive space for the participants of my study to reflect on and share their experiences in ways that acknowledged the importance of their contributions to my research (Glesne, 2006).

In our brief time together, I witnessed subtle shifts in consciousness of the women I interviewed. They considered ideas and questions and discussed experiences they previously had not given too much time, attention, or merit. I glimpsed the promise of social change as I peeled back the layers, using probing questions as my tool. I chose to find motivation and hope in this inquiry project where I could easily have found heaviness, exhaustion, and despair. My participants reported that they enjoyed the experience and appreciated the opportunity to think about their experiences through the lens of being a woman in a male dominated field. I chose to collect data via semi-structured interviews because of the possibilities this method offers. Glesne (2006) suggests that interview questions can “stimulate verbal flights from the important respondents who know what you do not” (p. 79). I was interested in learning what my participants knew and believed, and semi-structured interviews provided enough structure to keep the conversation focused and enough flexibility to allow unexpected data to emerge.

I asked participants to select a location for their interviews where they would feel most comfortable and encouraged them to think about where they would feel most calm, settled, and confident to share their honest thoughts and opinions. Individual interview settings varied significantly. I facilitated interviews at a kitchen table while babies slumbered upstairs, on a living room couch in the still of a snowy morning, at a small table at a conveniently located but particularly noisy coffee shop, in another living room couch with lounging pups stretched across our laps, on a stiff hotel couch with the soundtrack of closing

doors and voices dopplering down the hall, in a bustling brewery on an unseasonably warm afternoon, at an office desk with a curious supervisor across the hall during a busy afternoon, and in another office in the haunted dark of a building after business hours.

During each interview, I took copious notes, but only enough to remain present and engaged. Immediately following each interview, I reflected on our conversation and reviewed my notes from the interview. Then I compiled my observations by writing down my thoughts, feelings, and impressions. Next, I identified the stories, comments, and experiences that stood out to me and developed an informal profile on each participant. I listened to the audio recordings and took detailed notes within two weeks of the interviews, marking the timestamps of compelling data. No more than a month later, I reviewed my notes and listened to the interview again. I used Otter Voice Notes for the initial transcription, and then made edits to the data I thought needed to be explored and analyzed most urgently. The overwhelming amount of rich and compelling data the interviews produced surprised me, so I ultimately transcribed each interview in its entirety. I then conducted member checks by sending each participant their interview transcription and asking for their feedback before proceeding to my analysis (Glesne, 2006).

Timeline

I began data collection in March of 2019 and completed my last interview four months later in July of 2019. Within a few weeks, I transitioned to transcribing the interviews then threw myself into the analysis. I experimented with various poststructural theories, primarily Foucault's theories of power and discourse, but I had a hard time finding my way into the data in a way that worked. In January of 2020, I started a writing regimen with a friend every morning before work and those daily virtual meetings proved to be quite effective in keeping us accountable. However, all of that fell away when the entire world came to an abrupt stop only two months later in March of 2020 with the arrival of the global

COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent “lockdown.” Like many others, I crashed into a void of fear and social isolation in those early months. Time became suspended and a fog overtook my brain, so writing took a backseat to survival.

My institution required staff members to return to campus in July of 2020, just a few months after the initial lock down. Balancing my dissertation work with work duties proved to be overwhelming, frustrating, and exhausting as we faced increased pressure from leadership to innovate, appease students and administrators, and retain students in impossible circumstances. While my emotions of fear, sadness, and anger influenced my analysis significantly, the pandemic experiences of the participants were conspicuously absent. It is important to acknowledge that discrepancy in experience between the researcher and the researched, because so much changed during that first year of the pandemic. I acknowledge that while my analysis provides one possible interpretation of the data, it straddles two very different realities in higher education. The shifts in our culture and economy have been tectonic and the full impact of the pandemic on the women in my study, and on higher education in general, may never be understood fully. I attempt to bridge this chasm by providing brief updates on the “post-pandemic” lives of the study’s participants in my discussion of the findings in the final chapter.

Data Analysis

Once all of the interviews were complete, I reviewed the notes I took during the initial auditory review of the interviews. I combed through the data to see what questions, connections, intersecting and overlapping data, and intriguing subjectivities captivated my attention. Next, I heeded the advice of Esterberg (2002) who recommends that a researcher load up her memory with the data collected. I sat with the interview transcriptions, notes, recorded interviews, and immersed myself in the data. I allowed the information to marinate in my subconscious and to seep into the folds of my memory. I summoned the data into my

daily thought processes and routines, inviting it to dance through my subconscious as I engaged in everyday tasks. I scribbled moments of inspiration in a small notebook, and a notes app on my phone, as connections sparked and data began to shine.

As I shifted through the data, Caputo (1997) reminded me that it is the goal of deconstruction to expose the impossibility of meaning tied to material things in the structural world. Therefore, deconstruction is the relentless pursuit of impossible meaning, bending and stretching meaning beyond its limits to open it up to become something new. I was captivated by Caputo's use of the image of fireworks to illustrate the pliability and promise that deconstruction offers. Caputo (1997) described sites of deconstruction as "compact little fireworks devices" (p. 34) that illuminate the night sky with "awe-inspiring color, with a magnificent pyrotechnic plumage" (p. 34). There it was. Fireworks almost exactly described how I felt when I encountered moments of analysis in my research. These moments were of resistance, collusion, conformity, and complexity that glimmered in the innocuous words and phrases, pregnant pauses, emotional disclosures, and reluctant reflections of my participants. *There it was. That was it.* I had stumbled onto sparkling "firework devices" that whispered in the distance (Caputo, 1997, p. 34).

I used these fireworks to locate sites of analysis in my interview transcript data, or as Ropers-Huilman (2010) refers to them, "snapshots" of discourse that illuminated "the ways in which 'normality' is constructed, understood, and enacted" (p. 172) within higher education leadership discourse. These snapshots "sparked" as sites ripe for deconstruction in part because the participants had emotional responses to my questions. Gracie became animated and loud, Willa spoke slowly and pensively drifted off, and Veronica choked out her responses through tears, frustration, and pain. Once I located these snapshots, I proceeded to formulate and sketch out my thoughts for data analysis.

Feminist Poststructuralism

Feminism poststructuralism provides the theoretical and conceptual framework for my analysis, so in the following section, I review the theories and concepts that were helpful in answering my research questions. Next, I describe my process of *thinking with theory* alongside both Foucault's theories of power and discourse and Butler's performativity.

Poststructuralism holds promise for educational research because it makes it possible to move beyond what is currently known to be true. Thinking outside of and beyond historical, structural, and discursive conditions, normative categories, and power relations in this way enables a shift in research away from a focus on the subject and toward the discursive conditions that make the subject possible. While other theories illuminate what we need to think differently about, poststructuralism shows us what is possible and offers ways to think, be, and act outside of the confines of conventional research. This is significant for higher education leadership because we become a part of the machine that reproduces and reinforces harmful and oppressive structures when we fail to grapple with the "lust for authoritative accounts" from traditional paradigms (Lather, 1988, p. 577). In terms of this project, by examining the performativities of women on pathways to leadership, I was able to avoid essentializing women leaders and open them up to new meaning instead.

Discourse

By using Foucault's discourse theory for my analysis, I was able to explore my first research question: *What are the dominant discourses operating in higher education leadership?* Through a poststructural deconstruction and discourse analysis, I exposed the dominant leadership discourses in higher education to be masculinity, femininity, whiteness, and excellence. These discourses made conflicting and confusing demands of the women leaders in my study and narrow possibilities for the subjectivities of women leaders.

Power/knowledge

Foucault's power/knowledge doublet addresses my second research question: *What normalizations are produced, within dominant leadership discourses, which shape possibilities for subject formation for women leaders?* A significant emphasis in Foucault's work is his contention that power and knowledge are connected in a process of constant, mutual rearticulation in the actions of people. Power produces knowledge as its effect and power/knowledge works within discourse to produce truth as its effect (Allan, 2010; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Understanding knowledge as a social construction highlights its instability and power's influence.

By using Foucault's concept of power/knowledge, I was able to investigate the discursive conditions of higher education that produced possibilities for women leaders. Foucault's power/knowledge doublet is useful for investigating how power, subjectivity, and discourse converge to produce and reproduce knowledge about women, and how women produce and reproduce knowledge about themselves, within male normed leadership discourse in higher education.

Performativity

Butler's theoretical expansion of subjectivity, performativity, was the key to addressing my third research question: *How do women do (and undo) their gender subjectivity through performative practices within and against normalizing, dominant leadership discourses?* Similar to poststructuralism, feminist poststructural theories decenter the subject in order to move beyond an understanding of subjects as originators and guarantors of meaning and toward a subject in process (Butler, 1990, 2004, 2011; Weedon, 1987). However, feminist poststructuralists seek to develop understandings that emphasize the process of performativity, or how women repeatedly engage with discourse to constitute

themselves, which is aimed specifically at changing oppressive gender relations (Gavey, 1989; Mills, 2004; Weedon, 1987).

Thinking with Theory

The goals of poststructuralism are to create space for asking new and different questions and generating new knowledge, so it makes sense that “the posts” do not offer a road map or a recipe for research design (St. Pierre, 2011). I searched for a model, a method, or a design that could support my research. I read new theories and played with analyses and found myself abandoning theories that did not take hold (St. Pierre, 1994). My conceptual and analytical framework emerged as dynamic and layered over time as I wrestled with how to approach and examine the data before me.

Not until I began writing with a friend and doctoral classmate did I realize that my research design had been right there the entire time. In their book, *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research*, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) propose a poststructural *thinking with theory* approach to analyzing qualitative data they coined “plugging in” (p. 6) which “creates a different relationship among texts: they *constitute* one another and in doing so create something new” (p. 4). In my analysis, these texts included actual written texts, like articles and transcripts, but also the people involved in the study, including participants, theorists, and me. This decentering of both theory and practice helped me to understand how texts talked to and through each other as they made and remade each other. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) offer the theoretical “threshold” (p. 6) as a space for data to pause before being opened up as endless possibilities. Theory and data are *put to work* in the threshold, stretching and pressing to transform the data into something new. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) describe the plugging in of concepts and theories as a process that “resists an easy story” and avoids the dangers of simplifying and essentializing data (p. 3).

I found my analytical approach when I plugged in Butler's (1990, 1995, 2004, 2011) theory of performativity and Foucault's (1980, 2000) concepts of power. This necessitated close co-reading with Jackson (2001, 2014, 2015, 2017), Jackson & Mazzei (2012, 2017), Sawicki (1991), St. Pierre (2000, 2001, 2014), and Weedon (1987). My co-reading consisted of first voraciously consuming many texts, then second returning to the aforementioned descendants of Foucault time and again for clarity and to resituate myself in theory. I used these scholars as touchstones, identifying excerpts of their work that connected with the sentiments of my participants. Then I would read, reflect, and write, though not necessarily in that order. Writing was key to my understanding of poststructural theory and crucial to my analysis. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) propose that "writing is indeed thinking, writing is analysis, writing is indeed a seductive and tangled method of discovery" (p. 967).

Disruptive Analysis

I spent a significant amount of time considering and attending to the contamination I brought to my research, including my expectations, assumptions, biases, experiences, and the power circulating around, through, and within me. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) remind us that researchers are burdened with significant responsibility to interpret and represent both their participants and their experiences because "language has powerful effects in producing meanings, so interpretation of data is like translation in constructing rather than just conveying meaning" (p. 86).

Overwhelmed with data, impressions, and possibilities for analysis, I created visual representations to process the emotions, images, and connections that materialized for me. I drew maps, constructed diagrams, painted with watercolors, wrote poetry, and devised equations that were not quite mathematical, but were still somehow compelling and worthwhile. As I considered my next analytical move, I recalled a doctoral seminar on the complexities of data representation that introduced me to disruptive methodologies and

alternative representations as ways to disrupt what knowledge gets privileged. I was entranced and motivated by the world of possibilities this new perspective opened up and I harkened back to a question posited by Gannon (2004), “What might we learn about our ‘data’ if we stage it in different writing formats?” (p. 5) I was desperate to stage and represent data differently and greedily consumed words and works by St. Pierre (2000, 2001, 2011, 2014) and Richardson (1997a, 1997b).

In the text, Dream (e) scapes, Gannon (2004) extends an invitation to her readers to “experiment with data, with texts and with the ‘selves’ we bring to writing” (p. 123). I wanted to use art, specifically painting with watercolors, as an alternative mode of analysis and method of representation, to make connections between theory, practice, and experience in an effort to “enlarge the field through other representational forms” (Richardson, 1997b, p. 5). I turned to St. Pierre (2000, 2001, 2011, 2014) who asserts that qualitative methodology has come to imitate and parallel positivist science and as a result, it has become predictable and sanitized. Furthermore, the prestige of hard science normalizes systematicity as quality assurance for scientific research, which ultimately discourages alternative modes of research. I took my cue from St. Pierre’s (as cited in Guttorm et al., 2015) contention that research and analysis begin long before we claim and formalize our methodology. This means, we must trust ourselves as researchers and let theory guide our analytical doings. Therefore, that is what I did.

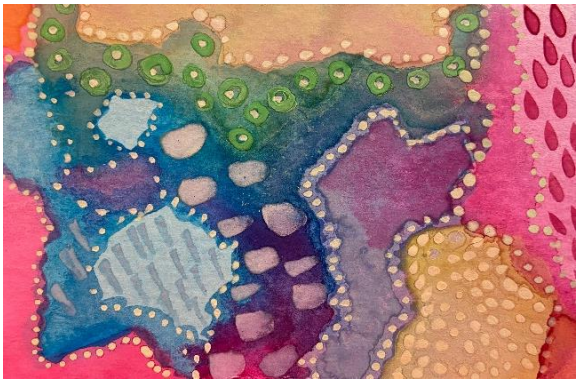
It happened all of sudden, the pull to capture what threatened to float away. The poetry and painting arrived in my analysis process unexpectedly and uninvited as I struggled with the realization that I could not make the data fit into my analysis. I was overwhelmed with content and unprepared for the images, connections, and emotions that attached themselves to the words of my student’s participants. I had to walk away, spend time with data outside of analysis in a way that somehow *became* my analysis.

Figure 3

Spark

Figure 4

Luminescent Freedom



Poetry and watercolors became a cistern that caught the thoughts and ideas I could not capture in words. I hoped to use this medium to create visualizations of the vivid images the participants contributed in their interviews. The images that vibrated with meaning, the ones I just could not shake. Sadly, the poetry did not last long, perhaps because it tied me too closely to my participants, or perhaps because it revealed too much of me. At first, the watercolors were for only for me, because the words did not always come. I was not able to preserve the connections I made between texts in enough time to pin it to the page. Painting offered a space that slowed down the world and my thoughts, where I could chase connections, forestall making judgments, question long held assumptions, and attempt to make sense of it all. It was an important part of my process. I painted when my focus failed, when my brain shut down, or when a connection would not fuse.

Figure 4

Devine-ish Intervention

Figure 5

Transcendence

The process of moving a paintbrush between the water, color, and paper to create images was a bit like citing norms and drawing from discourse. Much like a paintbrush draws from the water and color, subjects repeatedly draw from and integrate norms and discourse as subjects make sense of themselves. There is no guarantee of producing an intelligible picture in painting, much like there is no guarantee of producing an intelligible subject in the negotiation of subjectivity. Using too much or too little water or paint creates a less intelligible picture than using just the right amount, but there is not actually a right amount. Paintings are never wrong, never right, and never really be finished, much like our subjectivities.

Figure 7

Rearticulation

Figure 8

Letting Go

I never quite figured out how to fit the watercolors into my analysis, however when my paintings dropped from my dissertation drafts, it was never long before they returned. I turned to painting when I struggled to understand poststructural concepts and became fascinated by the connections between watercolors and performativity. Painting made poststructural theory and performativity more accessible to me and my understanding and analysis were incomplete without painting.

I never considered myself an artist, much like I never considered myself a researcher and theorist until St. Pierre (2000, 2001, 2011, 2014) gave me the courage to become both. Painting and poststructural theory offer endless opportunities to consider new perspectives, connections, and realities. Everything changes with just a line or a dot, and all of it can be washed away or transformed into something dramatically different and startlingly new. I drew inspiration from other artists, similar to co-reading with theorists, playing with technique and style. Every time I returned to painting or theory, not only did I change as an artist and a researcher, so were the paintings and theories. In the end, much like St. Pierre (2011) suggested, “Theory produced me differently, and I am not the same. I never was” (p. 621).

In order to address my first and second research questions: *What are the dominant discourses operating in higher education leadership?* And, *what normalizations are produced, within dominant leadership discourses, that shape possibilities for subject formation for women leaders?* I prompted myself to consider a set of questions I adapted from Bové (1990) discourse framework. These questions included; *what conditions make leaders in higher education possible? How does leadership in higher education work? What are the effects of leadership on women leaders' subjectivities?* I required Butler (1990, 2004, 2011) and performativity to address my third research question: *How do women do (and undo) their gender subjectivities through performative practices within and against normalizing, dominant leadership discourses*? However, before I could understand and utilize Butler, I had to spend quite a bit of time with Foucault. The following is an analytical story of how I came to feminist poststructural theory and how it informed my analysis.

Thinking and Fishing with Foucault

I propose the idea of thinking with Foucault as one might visit with a beloved elder. I arrived eagerly in search of consultation and sage advice as I considered the world around me. As we sat together, Foucault pressed me to see the world differently, challenged me to look and listen beyond the socially constructed plane of existence. He guided me back again and again, always insistent, to his theories of power to support my deconstruction of the discursive conditions and normative categories I encountered in the women's stories. I use the word "sit" to mean how one might earnestly sit with their feelings - wrestling, questioning, sorting, and exploring. However, perhaps this idea of sitting is too sedate? For Foucault's theories are active and I do not mean to invoke images of stagnation. So then, my time with Foucault was akin to fishing with an elder. Perhaps there is something to the idea of Foucault as a part of our theoretical lineage?

I went fishing with Foucault for glimpses of power, moments of disruption, sightings of power, acts of resistance, and occasions of compliance; fishing for stories, observations, feelings, and new ways of thinking, knowing, and being. Foucault and his theories were not easily satiated with superficial thoughts, casual observations, or unformed ideas because his philosophy of power includes a pervasive suspicion of everything he encountered (Sawicki, 1991). Foucault shook me from what I thought was a stable reality and provoked me to peel back the surface of normativities to think about them differently and consider how I might reimagine things. I wrestled for a long time with theory, data, my perspective, and my contamination. For example, Foucault helped me to think through Willa's repeated slipping into subjectivities of helplessness as she was produced as a vulnerable subject by power and discourse. As she slipped in and out of helplessness, it looked different every time because not only had she changed, so had her context and motivations. I was not sure where to start or how to go about my analysis without trapping her in a vulnerable or victim subject position in my representation. However, Foucault reminded me that complicating things was good and even expected. With Foucault, I was able to let go and follow the theory and the data into the threshold.

While I was desperate to think with Foucault, I had to claw my way into poststructural thinking. All too often, my brain would glitch and I would quietly slip back to the structural world, and Foucault would challenge me to stay and think in and through my discomfort. I would not recommend reading Foucault the way I did. I rolled the dice and selected readings at random, hoping to get lucky and find a helpful passage or concept that helped me to decipher the theory and make sense of the data. Sometimes I read Foucault backwards, starting with the last paragraph and reading toward the beginning, and forcing myself to focus, organize, and connect seemingly disparate ideas and words. However, while Foucault had a wealth of knowledge and a deep and broad understanding of the world, I

could only get so far with him at my side. Something was missing, so I looked beyond Foucault for the analytic tools I needed to accomplish my research objectives to expose and dislodge humanists' common sense assumptions about gender and leadership.

The absence I felt can be traced to Diamond and Quinby's (1988) stance that Foucault's analysis of power neglects a careful examination of its gendered contours, resulting in the continued subjugation of women. And so, I went in pursuit of a more nuanced context and complex perspectives. I turned to the next generation of poststructural theorists, women who took poststructural thought and put it to work toward their feminist intentions. I came to think of them as mentors and advisors throughout my analysis process. I read diffractively with no clear pattern, other than I knew I would be back before too long to think with Alecia Jackson, Lisa Mazzei, Jana Sawicki, Elizabeth St. Pierre, and Chris Weedon. Soon, I felt them guiding, pushing, and pulling me and I realized that I was thinking and fishing alongside a crowd of theorists and theories. Yet even still, I searched for the missing theory to plug in. I did not retire Foucault, nor did I abandon my mentors as I went searching; I held them with me in the threshold.

Thinking with Performativity

I turned to Judith Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) theory of performativity, a feminist adaptation of subjectivity, as a framework for understanding gender (and other identity categories) as an ongoing process of becoming a woman (and a leader) within the constraints of higher education leadership. Performativity was critical for answering my third research question: *How do women do (and undo) their gender subjectivity through performative practices within and against normalizing, dominant leadership discourses?* Performativity disrupts the humanist framing of gender as a rigid binary and reveals gender as a constitutive *doing* rather than a theatrical performance. Performativity, along with its key concepts of interpellation, recognition, and agency, is dedicated to opening up new ways of

theorizing about women to massify the possibilities for who they are authorized to be and become (Butler, 1990, 2004, 2011; Davies & Gannon, 2011; Storberg-Walker & Haber-Curran, 2017). Performativity offered the deconstructive strategies I needed to interrogate the discursive conditions and normative categories within higher education that shaped women's subjectivities as leaders.

In my analysis, I expose the power relations and conditions of possibility in higher education leadership and examine how they contribute to, and maintain, a dominant discourse of a leader as a racialized and gendered body, as someone who self-disciplines in accordance with the white male panoptical gaze within the context of higher education. I began with my personal experience within the culture of higher education leadership, which has been a focal point of reflection for the past several years. My analytic questions emerged from my initial thinking through of this experience with feminist and poststructural theories. I used interview transcripts, as well as my own experiences, as data and thought about these data and texts alongside and through my analytic questions as I read, re-read, and wrote with feminist and poststructural theories. This process of thinking with theory drew me to focus on performativity, Butler's feminist adaptation of subjectivity, as I considered leadership identity formation and the discursive conditions that shape the possibilities for women's subjectivities. I plugged in my data into the works of feminist poststructural theorists about leadership and gender.

As I read and wrote, I became intrigued by disruptive modes of analysis and began painting alongside and through my analysis and plugged painting into theory. I wrote, thought, read, and painted rhizomatically as I followed the data and theory to reveal dominant discourses, normalizations, and power relations working in higher education leadership to shape possibilities for women leaders' subjectivities. The concept of rhizomatic means there is no hierarchy or linearity, so as connections are made, they spread out in no

particular order or pattern (Linstead & Pullen, 2006). Rhizomatic thinking is an *undoing* of the order and structure that make enclosed identities possible, as it emphasizes multiplicity and a constant state of becoming.

I considered how those relations of power and conditions of higher education produced dominant discourses of leadership as a gendered and racialized practice and leaders as heroic, authoritative, unemotional, white, and masculine, who self-disciplines under the white masculine gaze as they engage in leadership practices deemed appropriate and professional. In the following sections, I elaborate my thinking with theory methodology and provide examples to show how I plugged in Butler's performativity into my data in order to think with, through, and alongside theoretical concepts. Thinking with Butler opened up my understanding of language, meaning, and identity to conceive of how and why they require deconstruction. This way of understanding language and meaning illuminates notions of gender and leadership as discursive phenomena and reveals power relations and discourses working to produce narrow and constraining subject positions for women leaders. Thinking with Butler also highlighted performativity as an ongoing and constant process that produced incomplete and fragmented subjectivities.

Performativity's expansiveness juxtaposed with the limitations of my analysis presented me with a conflict. I wanted to fit more of the interview data, more of the women, into my analysis. For example, Gracie's performativity was so much more than I was able to present in an analysis of a fragment of a conversation with her supervisor. My analysis revealed the conditions of higher education producing her as over-accommodating, but the range of her subjectivities was vast. This was due in part to Gracie's unique position that managed crises, which necessitated the negotiation of complex power relations of multiple stakeholders. Over-accommodating was only one of Gracie's subjectivities; she also showed up as bold, brash, pragmatic, and not agreeable. Gracie was produced within

power/knowledge relations as a bully, a mentor, and a champion. Thinking with poststructural theories of language and meaning exposed subjects as never settled once and for all. Who Gracie is as a subject is deferred permanently as the meaning about herself is postponed along a chain of signifiers. My analysis is a brief stopping point for Gracie's meaning as a leader because she is incomplete and in the process of becoming. Therefore, my analysis is only an interpretation of who Gracie is in that moment, not a coherent essence of who Gracie is frozen in time.

Performativity provided me with the concept of recognition, which was the key to deconstructing the normative categories of leader and woman. Central to performativity is Butler's contention that subjects are both constituted by and dependent on social norms fixed in discourse to become socially viable and recognizable beings (Butler, 2004). In terms of my study, women were limited in who they could be and become as leaders by the social norms, discourses, and power relations available to them in their particular context. Therefore, when the women were called to become recognizable subjects, they were forced into a struggle to be seen and understood as leaders by conforming to prevailing social norms of masculine leadership, femininity, whiteness, and excellence. Because people, like language, do not have inherent meaning, a successful negotiation of identity involves recognition by other people.

In the next chapter, I use performativity to illuminate the doings of the participants as they engage in performative struggles for recognition that keeps them in a constant state of *becoming* as women leaders. Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) recognition is at the center of performativity and it requires subjects to have some degree of recognition to become viable in their particular context. In terms of my study, the women struggled for recognition in higher education within and against dominant leadership discourse and the normative

category of leader. This form of recognition has serious implications for the women in my study, because without some sort of recognition, they cannot create livable lives as leaders.

I thought with Butler (2004) as I grappled with my analysis of Veronica because I was confounded by the workings of power and discourse in her journey from prized undergraduate leader to esteemed and trusted leader, to problematic and difficult leader. Veronica's slip from recognizability seemed to be without warning; however, performativity and recognition revealed power relations and discursive conditions working to produce and pathologize Veronica as a difficult woman leader (Ussher, 2013). Recognition is a handy device to understand that after significant administrative leadership turnover and institutional restructuring, the conditions Veronica needed for recognizability were unexpectedly and suddenly not available to her any longer. The power relations shifted, discourses evolved, and Veronica discovered she could not integrate the prevailing social norms that demanded that she fall in line as a leader.

In summary, as I thought with performativity, I used the concepts of language, meaning, identity, gender, and recognition to make sense of my interview data. My analysis exposed how the women's performative practices of *doing* (and *undoing*) leadership loosen up rigid and normative subject positions within their particular contexts.

Ethical Considerations in Feminist Research

Questions about who is researched, how data are collected, and how a researcher decides to represent her data emerge as the most urgent ethical considerations for feminist researchers. Decisions about these quandaries are constituted by power, making it impossible for a researcher to portray people and culture in a neutral way. Pillow (2003) advises a persistent questioning of what the research is doing, including "who benefits from our representations? Are our representations valid?" (p. 175). These questions tugged at my conscience, troubling me through the research process. Was I pushing the participants

toward what I hoped I might find in my research? As Veronica's memories came spilling out, so many questions and assumptions rushed into my consciousness. As I tried to keep up with a story with so many people and moving pieces, I began to reconcile and essentialize her experiences in my mind. I could feel it happening, as so many of the follow up questions that I wanted to ask were pointing in a single direction. I had reached a conclusion before she even finished speaking; however, thinking with poststructural theorists allowed me to recognize the lure of structural reasoning and hold myself back.

My ethical dilemma in this dissertation bubbled up somewhere between securing my participants' consent and the crisis that comes with deciding how to represent the data. As the women shared their stories, they were conflicting, overlapping, and confusing, which was to be expected. However, when I thought about how I might represent the data, I became preoccupied about how it might feel (for them and for me) and how it might look, after running their emotions and vulnerabilities through an analysis. I wondered how Gracie, a strong, opinionated, and fearless woman, might feel about my analysis that produced her as accommodating. I worried about how Willa might be impacted by reading my analysis of her experience "playing" helpless. I was concerned about retraumatizing Veronica with my representation of the experience that she said, "almost killed her," which entailed a promotion being rescinded followed by a demotion.

There is a great obligation of responsibility in engaging in research because, as Pillow (2003) proposes, reflexivity has a dual purpose, assisting in producing knowledge that offers insight into how the social world operates and illuminating how that knowledge is generated. It is through this lens that I see my research as a portal into the world of higher education as experienced by women on the pathways to leadership and a mechanism that exposes new ways of seeing and understanding higher education.

Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) contend, “theory and the experience are interrelated” (p. 94), proposing that researchers make women’s experiences politically significant by conceptualizing them in theory. They caution that this is made possible only with an investment of time and energy in addressing power relations. I experienced the necessity and significance of attentiveness to issues of power during the interview process and analysis. My participants shared vulnerable stories that evoked strong emotional reactions. The rapport we had developed allowed the women to speak freely and make connections and sense of their experiences during the interview. Several women disclosed that they rarely, if ever, thought about their experiences through the lens of gender. Our interview provided space to think about and to process their lived experiences. They shared that they felt validated and freed to speak of their experiences aloud. These disclosures provided me with the data to conduct my analysis and produce politically significant research that challenges normative conceptions to create new ways of being, doing, and thinking as women leaders in higher education.

Relationships of power are embedded in the research process so the connection between a feminist researcher and her participants is important (Pillow, 2003). Researchers must build trust and represent the knowledges produced within the interview responsibly. Pillow (2003) suggests researchers take an inside/outsider stance to address these relationships of power to “point to how their own dual identities, their own dual positions of power and subjugation in the academy and in their community” (p. 182) influence processes of research and representation.

Accounting for subjectivity is a hallmark of feminist research. Some of my subjectivities overlapped with those of my participants and I was able to identify data where the women’s performativities were complicated, multiple, and on the move. However, my subjectivity directed me to some specific snapshots and not to others, which shapes the

contours of this research. My research is shaped by my other subjectivities, which include being a childfree, single, white woman struggling for recognition as a leader within higher education. There were experiences that my participants shared that I could not “access” with my subjectivities, including Gracie as a gay woman, Veronica as a wife and mother of two teenagers, and Willa as a Black woman raised in the Deep South.

Limitations of the Study

From a traditional research perspective, major limitations of my dissertation include a lack of diverse participant representation, the time limitation and number of interviews conducted, and the power inherent in interview and interviewee relationships (Hesse-Biber, 2013). A poststructural perspective challenges these concerns and repositions them as issues produced by power. This demands that attention be paid to unraveling these complexities in the preceding chapters to promote a nuanced understanding of the multiple realities of women’s experiences in higher education, as there is an ever-present danger of simplifying, essentializing, or stabilizing data into truths.

Thinking with poststructural theory means releasing any notions that there is a truth to be discovered or reality to be represented, therefore all research is limited in its attempt to capture and represent data as any sort of truth (Esterberg, 2002; Glesne, 2006). Knowledge and subjectivity are provisional and produced within and through relations of power, so “truth is whatever power proclaims it to be” (Tong, 2014, p. 194). Not only is truth contingent on the networks of power exerted on it, but also the language itself that attempts to convey truth and reality cannot be trusted, because language and reality are mutually constructed and validate each other. In this way, truth and meaning are always in process, always impending, and never stable or fixed (St. Pierre, 2013). Understanding the pursuit of truth and reality as “slippery” is especially important for women because as Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) submit, “feminist knowledge claims cannot directly specify connections to

reality, and ‘truths’ are socially constituted within male-dominated disciplines and academics” (p. 49). This means that all attempts to claim truth, even incomplete truths, run the risk of marginalizing and devaluing the knowledges of others.

With Davies and Gannon’s (2011) claim that poststructuralism is “not an orderly, agreed on and internally consistent set of ideas” (p. 71) comes a significant limitation to poststructural theory in research, which is that poststructural analysis never ends. Richardson (1997b) proposes that poststructural notions of temporality, when applied to research, should lead to the questioning of the authority that dictates the beginning and end to inquiry and analysis. Richardson (1997b) considers, “When does a project start? When is it finished? Says who?” (p. 162) Principles of poststructuralism support Richardson’s contention because they hold that language and meaning is both fleeting and fragile, and all claims to truth can only be partial and fragmented. There will always be another binary, relation of power, and slipping of subjectivity to interrogate in poststructural analysis because contexts shift and subjectivities are remade, and because analysis is just an interpretation of an interpretation, there is always another interpretation to be made (St. Pierre, 2000).

All of the participants in my study identified as cisgender, meaning that they identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. This was a limitation of my study and reflective of the lack of gender diversity in higher education leadership which highlights institutionalized assumptions of leadership as binary and gendered. Conceptualizing leadership as gendered in this way reproduces those common sense assumptions and limits possibilities for trans, non-binary, and intersex leaders in higher education. Further research is needed to support the degendering of leadership in higher education to support the inclusivity and diversity institutions claim to value (Katuna, 2019).

Time was also a limitation in my research. My interviews were lengthy and could have been longer, so some data escaped that would have informed my study differently. Landing on an analytical approach also took a lot of time because I struggled for a while to find my theoretical home with Butler and performativity. Once I found it, it took me several months to work through my analyses. I attempted to analyze too much data on the front end and rubbed up against graduate school deadlines on the back end. So much literature and a lifetime of data was left behind to review and integrate, which could have led to different conclusion. My analysis and findings are limited by the data I was not able to analyze and incorporate.

Trustworthiness

Producing trustworthy qualitative research is imperative when human lives are involved and there is a possibility they could be impacted. Merriam (2019) provides several strategies for producing trustworthy research that is credible and ethically conducted. From a feminist's perspective, the goal of an interview is to provide a space to expose subjugated knowledge and allow for the articulation of women's diverse realities (Hesse-Biber, 2013). Using the maximum variation strategy, I invited women from different backgrounds with diverse experiences and selected data excerpts that represented different perspectives.

I also used the strategy of adequate engagement in data collection to develop my study's credibility. My interviews were lengthy and lasted anywhere from 90 minutes to 180 minutes and I often lingered after the interviews to answer questions or connect personally. I took copious notes during each interview, which I revisited each time I listened to each interview and read each interview transcript. While listening to the interviews, which I did at least three times, I either read along on the transcript or painted as I soaked in and processed the data (Merriam, 2019).

Following Foucault and Butler, I acknowledge and embrace the multiplicity of truth and ascribe to the belief that there are no experts. Meaning is fleeting and contingent and cannot be pinned down and claimed. Stories, experience, and data are sites for multiplying meaning and proliferating rigid categories that attempt to close off meaning. The phenomenon of experience complicates notions of authority and trustworthiness. Experience is an interpretation, or more accurately, an interpretation of an interpretation, so it cannot be trusted and cannot be verified (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). This notion of truth, experience, and interpretation inform the ethical considerations in my research by remaining vigilant about issues of authority and power. Within this framework, I was able to acknowledge and highlight each participant's realities by providing rich and thick descriptions of the conditions and discourses that produced the women's subjectivities. I delivered vivid depictions of their social, cultural, material, and historical contexts by documenting and communicating participants' everyday experiences. This insider perspective was not meant to generalize, but to capture nuance and multiplicity of meaning in ways that allowed readers to connect to the research.

Reflexivity and Power

Feminist researchers must attend to not only the power operating in the experiences of women at the societal level, but also the unbalanced power inherent in relationships developed between the researcher and researched (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Reflexivity, a strategy to mitigate harm in a research relationship, is a critical awareness and self-reflection developed via "personal accounting of how the researcher's self-location (across for example, gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality), position, and interests influence all stages of the research process" (Pillow, 2003, p. 178). The need for reflexivity emerges from researchers being living, breathing, fallible people (Esterberg, 2002), therefore we must account for how our personal positionality influences what we

choose to investigate, how we go about it, and how to represent the knowledge we produced in the end.

Pillow (2003) offers that reflexivity is a move toward more valid and trustworthy knowledge but it falls just short. She emphasizes the urgent need for reflexivity as an ongoing critique of all research, even if the practice of reflexivity is not flawless. To hold myself accountable for the meaning and knowledge I produced throughout this dissertation, I fervently pursued a reflexivity diligent enough to mitigate the potential for harm to my participants, to women in general, and to the social world around us. I entered into the process gingerly, but grew more confident with time, asking myself how I was contributing to the production of knowledge that had the potential for perpetuating and reinforcing violent, gendered leadership discourse that has historically pitted men against women. I chose my words with intention and persistently questioned my own motives, assumptions, and interpretations at every stage of the research process.

Feminist and poststructuralists use reflexivity to stay mindful of their positionality, voice, and privilege; however, we do not seek to cultivate reflexivity to expose a fuller understanding of a researcher's ways of knowing. Rather, we pursue a proliferation of meaning, so that we may see knowledge in new ways and make something new from it (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Using a thinking with theory approach provides me with access to Butler's work to help me interrogate my subjectivities and the ways I put performativity to work to interpret data.

Representational Dilemma

Reflexivity is not a finite process; it begins all at once and then never stops vying for consideration. Even after the interviews were over and transcriptions complete, and the stories, thoughts, and opinions from my participants were documented, I continued to

grapple with a great burden. The responsibility of the dilemma of representation landed hard as I decided to discuss, and therefore what counts as truth and knowledge in my research.

Van Maanen (2011) reminds us that the notion of representational dilemma should be highly prioritized. Van Maanen (2011) also cautions that researchers assume the fundamental mantle of representation, which bears significant moral, ethical, and intellectual responsibilities for how they portray the people and culture they study. Research requires researchers to attempt to capture, then represent, without too great a perversion, the slippery expression of a phenomenon to a contextually disconnected audience. This presentation of social reality is an interpretation by a researcher, not a truth. Therefore, when researchers communicate their data to a detached and isolated audience, they make decisions about what counts as knowledge as they construct specific truths. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) propose that the exercise of power lies in the fundamental process of interpretation and "marks a critical point of decision about the possibility or impossibility of connecting ideas, experience and realities, but also marks points of divergence, as feminists draw on different epistemological assumptions in making or refusing connections" (p. 85). The complexities of acknowledging the limits of research practices, specifically the extent to which culture can be captured in a predetermined amount of time in a given environment, as well as "an uncountable number of strategic choices and active constructions (e.g. what details to include or omit; how to summarize and present data; what voice to select; what quotations to use)" (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 73) a researcher makes when crafting a final research product. The weight of this responsibility can be overwhelming and even immobilizing for researchers especially when we consider Richardson's (1997b) warning, "we are always present in our texts, no matter how we try to suppress ourselves" (p. 2).

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to locate my study in the epistemological perspective of feminist qualitative inquiry and describe the methodological framework for my study of power, discourse, and performativity in leadership in higher education. I outlined my research methods, including participant sampling and recruitment and data collection processes. Then, I provided an overview of my theoretical framework and described how I used thinking with theory methodology to think and write alongside multiple theorists to analyze the data from my study. Thinking with Foucault and Butler, I use theories of power, discourse, and performativity to interrogate the conditions of higher education to expose the forces that shape the possibilities for women leaders' performativities. Finally, I discussed ethical considerations, limitations, and trustworthiness as they related to my study.

In the following chapter, I present my *thinking with theory* deconstructive analysis through short narratives that provide contextual information for Willa, Gracie, and Veronica. I use information gleaned from their interviews and through snapshots of discourse that contain scenes of gender improvisation (excerpts) from the interview data. I designed my analysis to complicate the data, so it is messy, conflicting, and overlapping. Following a poststructural approach to research, I did not attempt to lock down a truth, or capture an essence of either woman or leader; rather I attempted to open up the data up to new meanings.

Chapter 5: *Doing* and *Undoing* Leadership in Higher Education

In this qualitative, feminist poststructural dissertation, I analyze the interviews of three women on pathways to leadership in higher education in order to deconstruct the normative categories and discursive conditions that shape their subjectivities. My analysis exposes how the women's performative practices of *doing* (and *undoing*) leadership loosen up rigid and normative subject positions within their particular context. Using Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) thinking with theory methodology for analysis, I plugged in Judith Butler's (1990, 2004, 2011) theory of performativity and the interview data and addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant discourses operating in higher education leadership?
2. What normalizations are produced, within dominant leadership discourses, which shape possibilities for subject formation for women leaders?
3. How do women do (and undo) their gender subjectivities through performative practices within and against normalizing, dominant leadership discourses?

These questions guided my analysis using Butler's theory of performativity to disrupt gender, and other identity categories, as I encountered them in the data. These lines of inquiry created opportunities for me to analyze how women resist and comply with dominant leadership discourses in order to escape the constraints of normative discourse and identity categories, such as woman and leader. Through this analysis, I am able to not only rethink "woman" and "leader," but open up the possibility for a *redoing* of leadership altogether.

Doing gender in the Butlerian sense is to embrace the gender binary by keeping gender performance within its authorized bounds. These *doings* attempt to stabilize gender, reinforce its boundaries, and reproduce a coherent subjectivity that clearly expresses gender norms. *Undoing* gender, then, is to resist gender norms and introduces multiplicity to the rigid gender binary in order to perforate its boundaries (Kelan, 2010) which offers

alternative ways of being and doing as a woman leader. In terms of this study, as the women *undo* their gender and leader subjectivities and expand the limits of what it means to be a woman, they also loosen up what it means to be a leader in higher education by resisting the gender norms embedded in leadership discourse.

Using snapshots of discourse and scenes of gender improvisation as sites of analysis captured from the women's interviews, I examined how Gracie, Willa, and Veronica generated and activated agency within performative acts of resistance and compliance as they negotiated their subjectivities within relations of power and dominant leadership discourses in higher education. The feminist poststructural orientation of my dissertation requires an understanding of gender as a constructed binary opposition to expose how gender difference operates within dominant discourse to privilege masculinity over femininity (Foucault & Faubion, 2000; Sawicki, 1991; Weedon, 1987). Women's *doings* of leadership are punitively regulated by dominant masculine leadership discourses, which means they are forced to adhere to the norms of leadership in higher education (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Butler, 1990). This regulation ensures that in order to be seen, understood, and rewarded as leaders, women "must not be too much within or too far outside of social constructions of femininity" (Hannum et al., 2015, p. 66).

Weedon (1987) proposed, "To speak is to assume a subject position within discourse and to become subjected to the power and regulation of the discourse" (p. 119). Weedon uses the phrase "to speak" to indicate an individual's step into the social world where they become subjected to power and discourse and thus, begin their social existence. This study focuses on women's *doings* of leadership as particular ways of speaking within leadership discourse in higher education. And because there is no world or society devoid of power (Foucault, 1980), it follows that subjects cannot simply arrive in the social world with a pre-existing gender, like our current culture of gender reveals would have us believe. Butler

(1990, 2004, 2011) argues that subjects *become* gendered through performativity, or a *doing* through an ongoing process of repeated bodily enactments that are highly regulated by discourse. Bodily enactments are not necessarily bound to the corporeal body and materiality; they can be in the form of any thinking, moving, or being.

In order for these performative *doings* to be effective, subjects must cite and repeat the social norms embedded in discourses that govern and produce their realities. That is, when subjects "cite and repeat," they are conforming to the rules of social norms. Norms are fixed as universal truths and thus compel subjects to act in specific ways. Norms coerce and punitively regulate normative identity categories, such as gender, in ways that keep the possibilities for women's subjectivities narrow and rigid. By conforming, subjects become knowable within their particular contexts as women and leaders. Gender, then, is not a stable binary, but a discursive *effect* produced by continuous *doings*, through the embodiment and repetition of social norms. These performative repetitions serve to both install and stabilize identity, as well as sustain normalizing discourses (Butler, 1990).

For the women in this study, social norms they did not (and could not) choose shaped the possibilities for who they were allowed to be, and become, as leaders in higher education. Social norms such as accommodation, vulnerability, and achievement are embedded in the dominant leadership discourses of masculinity/femininity, excellence, and whiteness. Women are called to be certain types of leaders through the process of interpellation, which is an ongoing and constant calling to conform to the social norms of leadership discourse. As the women make (and unmake and remake) themselves in negotiation with these norms and discourses, their performativities are always in the process of responding and becoming. This means that women's performativities are never complete and therefore never settled once and for all.

In their interviews with me, the women described the discursive field of higher educational leadership as a space dominated by white leaders with marginal representation of women, particularly in upper administration. Higher education leadership is situated in a competitive economic market with diminishing financial resources often with nebulous, disparate, and unreasonable standards of success. *Doing* gender within leadership discourse requires strict adherence to the conflicting scripts of femininity (as a woman) and masculinity (as a leader), which necessitates the negotiation of complex power relations. Hart and Hubbard (2010) argue that "educational systems are structured to benefit the people they serve" (p. 149), which makes leadership in higher education a strategy primed to preserve the gender binary that privileges men over women. In my study, Willa, Veronica, and Gracie all described work environments that 1) emphasized innovation and productivity at any cost, 2) lacked accountability (Veronica, Willa), and 3) required women to constantly prove themselves (Gracie, Veronica). These descriptions indicate cultural norms working within discourse to produce unspoken expectations for women leaders that influence their *doings* of leadership. Other literature supports the presence and power of discourse and norms shaping the possibilities for who women can become as leaders. For example, Bartky (1988) posits that docility and compliance are demanded of women, while O'Keefe and Courtois (2019) assert that women's labor is undervalued. Many scholars confirm the persistence of double-binds and double standards for women's behavior and performance in their work spaces (Eagly, 2007; Foschi, 2000; Gordon et al., 2010; Teelken & Deem, 2013).

In the following section, I introduce Gracie through a brief narrative gleaned from her descriptions of herself during her interview. Then I turn to a snapshot from Gracie's interview in which she describes her work environment and relationships with colleagues and her supervisor. I think with the theory of performativity for two general purposes in this analysis. First, I examine the process of subject formation through the ways Gracie responds to the

demands of social norms and discourse within the power relations circulating between her supervisor and colleagues in her work environment. I do this by exposing moments of compliance and resistance to examine how Gracie's subjectivity is informed by dominant leadership discourses and to highlight her as a subject who is always in the process of becoming. Second, I think with performativity to identify and interrogate the normative category of leader and the dominant leadership discourses as I encounter them in my analysis. I expose how discourses work to normalize and shape the possibilities for Gracie's subjectivities, or how she is able to show up as a leader in that particular moment in time. Gracie's always-in-process status means that she is never fully formed as a subject and every time she "speaks," there is the opportunity to do something different. I expound on this ability to change course – Butler's concept of discursive agency – in analyses to come later in this chapter. Butler (2004) proposes this process of gender performativity, these repeated *doings* that take their cue from social norms in discourse, is a mechanism that produces reality. I use a snapshot from Gracie's interview to illustrate how this process works.

Performativity as a Mechanism for Reality Production

Gracie has worked at the large, four-year public institution in a politically moderate state for most of her 20-year career in higher education. Throughout her career, she has worked in various roles and departments, including housing and residence life, student intervention, support, and emergency response services. Gracie's work is "not the spotlight of the university," because her office exists to fix problems, while other "flashy, bubbly, enigmatic" areas of student life are more marketable services and so receive more resources, including money, attention, and support. Because of this dynamic, Gracie reflected, "I've had to be calculated and very strategic. I've had to be patient, persistent, and respectful in order to garner favor of the higher ups."

Gracie's position is unique and involves supporting students and their families as they navigate crises big and small, including illness, financial strain, injury, mental health issues, and death. Gracie interfaces with both internal and external entities to advocate on behalf of the students to communicate needs, as well as identify and secure resources. Her job involves interpreting and enforcing policies for multiple audiences, which compels her to identify solutions that make everyone satisfied. She said, "The work that we do in the immediate makes the university look good and is supportive for families, students, and faculty. So, I sort of turn shit into gold."

Gracie believes that her abilities to get things done and think quickly on her feet, as well as her talent for building trusting and respectful relationships has made her a useful employee. Her skills have helped students, faculty, and staff to manage their disappointment, put things in perspective, and empower them by providing choices for resolution. This expertise not only made her valuable as a practitioner and leader but kept her useful to her division and institution. Gracie commented, "I think that has made me a valuable resource...Give it to Gracie, she'll make it work."

Butler (2004) proposes that there are many terms and conditions outside of a subject's control when negotiating gender performativity. These include the gender binary imposed centuries ago by Enlightenment Humanism, as well as social norms and discourses, which constitute fields of meaning that both pre-exist and outlast subjects. In the data excerpt below, Gracie articulates the social norms and discourses of femininity, excellence, and masculine leadership as she negotiates the network of power created by her relationships with her supervisor and colleague – all within the structural and discursive conditions of higher education leadership. Butler (2004) proposes that conceiving of performativity as an ongoing and active negotiation within these external forces offers insight into "one of the mechanisms by which reality is reproduced and altered in the course

of that reproduction" (p. 218). The following snapshot from Gracie's interview reveals how her negotiation of gender within the discursive conditions of higher education leadership works as a mechanism to reproduce and alter her reality. In sum, this close reading offers the opportunity to examine how her gender performativity constructs and reconstructs her reality. She said,

> You know who my boss wants to promote? The lowest performer, who is always behind, always has people calling and complaining. And he's not responsive and I have to take on his students. I said, "I'm done. I'm not gonna get screamed at and add more cases to my load because he's not able to manage his own. How are you going to promote somebody who cannot do his job at the bare minimum?" And she's like, "I know, but he's just so busy with some of this extra work." But he doesn't have any extra work, she's making excuses for him.
>
> We've taught him that he is fine to underperform and to play catch up. And I've made it easier for him because I'm a helper. I will frequently stay until six or seven at night so that I'm not behind, but the men in my office, they're not there till 7 pm ever. If our boss leaves at 4:30 pm, they're gone by 4:45 pm. But we teach people how to treat us and it turns out, we're just enabling the men in our office. I'm effective in the work I do and have a significant portion of the cases because, what do they call it, the curse of the competent? I am accessible and I am helpful, so people will come to me to help them.

Gracie's gender performativity became visible as a mechanism of reality reproduction when she diagnosed herself as suffering from "the curse of the competent." Gracie described this "curse" as a predicament she created by being too helpful and accessible to colleagues, which she claimed resulted in not only "enabling" her male colleagues as underperformers, but also in creating a much heavier workload for herself.

Gracie's performativity is bound to the social norms and discourses of femininity, excellence, and masculine leadership, and she reproduces understandings of women as high achieving, over-accommodating caretakers through her acts of diligence in her case management, commitment to her colleagues who need help, and compassion for the students who needed support. In this way, Gracie's expressions of the norms constitute are what it means to be a woman leader.

Performativity is a helpful lens to understand how subjects are both constituted by and dependent on social norms to become socially viable beings (Butler, 2004). Dominant leadership discourses of femininity, masculinity, and excellence worked to shape possibilities for Gracie's subjectivity by compelling her to conform with prevailing social norms, such as being nurturing and productive even when it meant more work and stress for her, in order to be seen and understood as a leader. Femininity discourses demanded Gracie be compliant, caring, helpful, dutiful, and loyal to the team, while masculine leadership discourses and a discourse of excellence enforced a double standard that compelled Gracie to prove herself, work harder, and take on more responsibility than was expected of her male colleagues. This double standard also emerged in the gendered expectations of Gracie's supervisor that, on one hand validated, rewarded, excused, and assumed competence in Gracie's colleague despite his poor performance. On the other hand, this devalued and invalidated Gracie's work by expecting her to work twice as hard as her colleague.

Gracie's retelling of her experience implied that she felt responsible for creating the conditions that attempted to lock her into the subject position of a caring and helpful Over Accommodating Team Player However, Butler (1990) rejects the notion that Gracie could stand as the lone architect of her gender performativity in any scenario. This is because, as Butler (1990, 1995) contends, there is a paradox in subject formation that says that Gracie

cannot exist prior to, or outside of, the language and discourse that insists on gendering her. Instead, Gracie can only *become* a gendered leader by citing and repeating the prevailing social norms in discourse within power relations. For example, taking on additional cases because her colleague is not responsive to students and being accessible to other colleagues are expressions of the norms of femininity. In these moments, Gracie is being interpellated, or hailed, to be a leader who is helpful, kind, and sympathetic. These are communal qualities focused on the welfare of others and are typically used to describe women (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Then, when Gracie describes herself as "effective" and in the moments when Gracie stays late to catch up on work and carries a significant portion of the office's caseload, she is citing the norms of masculine leadership and excellence. Leadership norms are rooted in the image of the "ideal worker," a dedicated and overly available leader who is able to work without interference from personal responsibilities (Acker, 1990; Sallee, 2020). The norms of excellence undergird an institutional neoliberal ideology that values efficiency, emphasizes customer service, and demands productivity in pursuit of profit (Giroux, 2010; Hall, 2016; Tight, 2018). Typically, a discourse of excellence is disguised as a meritocracy so that leaders believe they will be recognized and rewarded for their hard work (Ghosh, 2012).

Thinking with performativity reveals how Gracie's gender performativity, not Gracie as a subject, operates as a mechanism for producing and altering her reality. It is through her repeated performative practices that Gracie makes herself into a woman and a leader. As she successfully negotiates her subjectivity and is able to be understood as a leader within her work context, she is "done" by the norms of femininity, leadership, and excellence as an accommodating leader. This process is ongoing however, so Gracie has not fully become a woman or a leader in this experience, nor will she ever completely become either. Gracie's encounter with her supervisor is only one act of gender improvisation within a

scene of constraint, and it is tied to that specific moment in time. With every decision she makes, with every word she speaks, and with every move she makes, Gracie reconstitutes her performativity.

Gracie has constituted herself as a woman and a leader within the conditions of higher education leadership since the beginning of her career. While she can only make herself from the discourses and norms available to her at any given moment, who she has become as a leader is informed by all of her previous enactments and historical experiences. In this way, the conditions of higher education, including structural ideologies, normativities, and discourses, have entered into Gracie's subject formation. For example, Gracie has learned to control and hide her emotions to get closer to what she wants and needs. She said, "I have learned that I get much more of a favorable outcome if I am cool, calm and collected, right? Not outraged, unprofessional." Learning to control her emotions is not a skill that Gracie learned all at once, nor is it a permanent part of her. Dominant leadership discourses insist leaders be objective and rational, characteristics associated with masculinity, and Gracie has integrated these "truths" into her performativity since she took her first leadership position as an undergraduate student. Furthermore, Gracie's comment regarding a "more favorable outcome" indicates that she has been rewarded for hiding her emotions in the past.

Gracie describes an experience from her early career in the following snapshot that provides a glimpse at how discourses of femininity and masculine leadership carry highly regulated rules for women on pathways to leadership. This excerpt illuminates how these discursive rules are punitively enforced through evaluation and coaching practices in Gracie's workplace by her supervisor. Consider this experience from early in Gracie's career:

> I had a really good supervisor once who said, “There’s a difference between being aggressive and being assertive, and you have not yet worked out what it is to be assertive.” And I think that's probably where I first heard the phrase, you get more flies with honey. And I was like, “I don't want flies.” But that's what we grew up with, right? Act like a lady. And she wasn't telling me to be nice or to be sweet or anything like that. She was saying, “You're actually pretty actively aggressive and that's turning people away.” It was nice for me to hear that my behavior had an impact on my co-workers, who I liked, and that actually sort of helped me hone my skill a little bit.

While Gracie is being regulated overtly in this situation, it is important to note that the power of gender discourse lies in how it operates subtly through common sense knowledge discourse. This understanding of Gracie as a subject, who is always in the process of becoming a gendered leader through a mutual engagement with her social world, releases us from the notion that Gracie is locked into the restrictive identity categories of woman or leader. That is, when Gracie equates acting “like a lady” with catching flies with honey, we are able to understand gender working to reproduce feminine norms. Then when Gracie acquiesced and allowed herself to be pulled back in line by social norms to be less aggressive, she was being done by the social norms demanding that she, “Act like a lady.” However, when Gracie declares she does not want to catch flies, we see the glimmer of agency and the possibility for Gracie to do and become something different.

The possibilities for Gracie’s subject formation are grounded in a collective, societal investment in genders that are distinct and polar, Butler, however, argues that genders are actually cultural fictions that are highly regulated by disciplinary actions to preserve the gender binary. In Gracie’s narrative, these disciplinary actions are delivered through her supervisor’s feedback and they work to keep her on the feminine side of the binary. Gracie’s

possibilities are constrained by this gender fiction and the discourse Gracie was situated in, but she is not without agency to act. Gracie's agency emerges from the contingency of her subjectivity, as it is always in process and temporary, meaning the opportunity to act and do something different lies within every one of Gracie's performative acts. For example, when Gracie told her supervisor that she was "done" in response to the promotion of her low performing colleague, it was an agentic act of resistance that made leadership and femininity discourses visible (Foucault, 1980). Gracie disrupts these discourses by acknowledging and refusing the norms that compel her to take on extra work that benefits her colleague but burdens her and prevents her from doing work that might enhance her career, such as developing programs and building relationships. Butler (2011) describes agency as "the hiatus in iterability" (p.167), which is the opportunity for Gracie to choose to do something different in the moment right before she repeats the category of woman leader. Gracie activates her agency by choosing to express her frustration to her supervisor and refuse to support her colleague — to her own detriment.

Gracie's incident illuminates how scripts of femininity and masculinity work at the intersection of leadership discourse to normalize her gender performance so it appears as a naturalized gender binary. For example, when Gracie describes herself as someone who is helpful, we come to see how Gracie's reiterations of feminine norms that compel acts of care produce her as a feminine subject. Therefore, Gracie's performativity ultimately created an illusion of an "abiding gendered self" (Butler, 1990, p. 191) purporting to be an innocent, inherently, and compulsory "woman-ness." The notion of an abiding gendered self is constructed through repeated acts that seek to approximate the norms of an identity category and through their occasional *dis*continuity reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of that identity. That is, when Gracie submits to her supervisor's coaching and the call to be less aggressive, we can understand how the illusion of femininity is at

work. As a result, Gracie's "performative accomplishment" became the construction of a gender identity so convincing that even Gracie herself came to believe she was just naturally a helper who was cursed with competence (Butler, 1990, p. 192).

Butler (1990) proposes that it is impossible to enclose and force what it means to be a particular subject, in this case a leader, into a rigid identity category. The concept of identity collapses within performativity because we cannot be pinned down nor locked into a succinct description of woman or leader. We must make sense of ourselves within and through discourses that are constantly reproduced within contexts that are always shifting. This continuous shift of context means that discursive conditions are also changing, so the power relations that subjects are embedded in may shift into something completely different and the discourses that were dominant may become negligible. For example, when I accepted my first professional position of leadership, it was an entry-level position working as a residence hall director in an all-female building of about 500 women at a large four-year institution in the Southeast. When I was hired, I stepped into a position that was vacated by a dynamic and beloved woman whose leadership style was more direct and public than I preferred to be. I was called to be a leader exactly like the woman I replaced by my student staff, all of whom had worked with or at least known the previous hall director. The leadership discourses circulating among my student staff demanded I call out students for breaking policies in front of other students. I preferred to meet with students one on one in a contained space, like my office, in order to approach the policy infraction as an educational conversation. I refused the prevailing norms that desired I would be publicly confrontational and in doing so, I became *undone* by the social norms. This meant I became unintelligible as a leader to my student team, who dismissed me as intimidated and ineffective, within the power relations and discourse at that point in time within my particular building. However, as I made and remade myself within the conditions of higher education that made me possible

as a leader, I was able to approximate other social norms of leadership, including relationship building and transparent, direct communication. When the context shifted, I became intelligible within the same building again, but the context, moment in time, and even my student teams' subjectivities were all different. It is interesting to note that during that span of unintelligibility as a leader among my student staff, I never slipped from intelligibility as a leader within the broader context of my campus that included thousands of other students, my colleagues, and my supervisors. My proximity to those outside of my building and the context were different, so the performativities that were visible stayed intelligible to the external audience.

We carry multiple and complicated subjectivities with us, as leaders, women, sisters, mothers, children, aunties, and so on. We slip between these subjectivities as we negotiate the discursive conditions of our social worlds, as we are compelled to be more feminine to garner favor with administrators, and as we resist the status quo by questioning and making space for showing up differently. We are more than what we do and who we are in a given context, so we are unstable as essentialized categories and identities. Butler (1990) reminds us that gender and other categories escape definition because they are "a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is" (p. 22). Like language, what it means to be a subject (or in this case, a woman leader) is fragile and deferred indefinitely. A normative category like leader or woman is unstable from its inception, because it indicates a "dense intersection of social relations that cannot be summarized through the terms of identity" (Butler, 2011, p.165). Therefore, who Gracie *is* cannot be understood from one moment in time; who she is as a leader can only be temporarily located before contexts shift and she does, and undoes, her subjectivity again.

Performativity as Exclusionary

Identity categories are constructed through exclusionary practices, so the process of gender performativity can be understood as a mechanism of exclusion. In the next section, I analyze Willa's performativity by showing how, as power works through the gender binary to privilege masculinity and subordinate femininity, discourses are circulating that dictate how Willa must be, act, think, feel, dress, and sound in order to be accepted. I explore this notion of gender performativity as exclusionary in the next section and introduce the usefulness of performativity in understanding and deconstructing other rigid categories that shape the performativities of Willa.

Willa had worked at her institution for fifteen years at the time of the interview. Her institution is a predominantly white, mid-sized, public, four-year institution in a politically conservative state. Willa described her workplace culture as being very "task driven" with a constant demand for quality, excellence, and efficiency. "Being successful" is a discursive practice within feminine and excellence norms and takes up a particular meaning: accepting new projects in addition to existing responsibilities without complaint. Willa reflected that these additional responsibilities were often the result of her institution's tendency to chase the "next big, amazing, and fantastic thing" in order to stay competitive with other institutions. For Willa, this meant, "Very few things ever come off your plate, but new things are always added... but there's only so much of you and there's only so much time."

Even so, Willa loved her job because there was never a dull moment, and she enjoyed the lack of routine, the challenges, and the relationships. She described herself as an intrinsically motivated, strategic thinker who frequently managed the expectations of others as part of her work. While she considered herself a team player, she often got tapped for evening and weekend work because she was the only single and childless woman in her department. She believed that colleagues assumed she "must not have anything better to

do with [her] life," when in fact, Willa had a gratifying personal life full of friends, hobbies, and volunteer work that helped her to decompress from work.

Willa expressed aspirations of advancing her career but was unable to access the experiences she needed in order to do so. Willa built her career in a realm of higher education that required extensive experience managing construction projects to even be considered competitive for higher-level positions. Although Willa had decades of experience managing buildings that housed thousands of students, she did not have enough substantive experience with facility management. Willa saw her supervisor as part of the problem because the experiences Willa needed brought him reward and validation, so he was protective and hesitant to let them go. She described him as one of those people who "...want you to shine, but not to shine. They want you to shine, so you can be a feather in *their* hat. Instead of you being able to put a feather in *your* hat." While Willa did not mind sharing credit, she was frustrated that he was capitalizing off all of that extra night and weekend work. Another contributing factor was the male dominated field of facilities management and the culture that had developed around it.

According to Butler (2011), performativity's normative power, which is responsible for authorizing who and what counts in which spaces, is sustained not only through repetition, but through exclusion as well. Authorization is a process of social control that structures and governs social behaviors within a hierarchy. In a patriarchal context, women are excluded from authorization as valid, worthy, or as having expertise while men are assumed to be competent experts. Identity categories are constructed by producing meaning about a dominant identity through its difference to another, and therefore are "produced precisely by what is excluded" (Butler, 2011, p.165). This is significant for the "other," non-dominant identity because this practice erases, silences, and refuses the excessive or discontinuous aspect of subjects that elude the limits of the dominant identity. However, those

discontinuities and excesses are guaranteed to return to disturb the identity's contingent meaning. For example, in the context of women and leadership in higher education, leaders are valued for being strong, authoritative, and motivated; however, women leaders who are opinionated, assertive, or ambitious may be deemed too abrasive and too much for the category of leader. This discrepancy in identification is a failure of the category of leader, which is fabricated and delicate. The failure to reconcile both constitutions of leader will return to haunt the dominant definition of leader as its impossibility. These hauntings threaten to disrupt leadership discourse and therefore the dominance of men and masculinity.

Foucault (1981) proposes that systems of exclusion operate to control who is knowable and what is sayable in a given context. Attempts to fix meaning to an ideal leader are essentializing and exclusionary because the ideal leader claims gender neutrality, but is male by default (Atkins & Vicars, 2016; Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Ford, 2006). In the following interview excerpt, Willa describes how she believes leaders become knowable within the discursive conditions of her institution:

> It's important to always be standing on your tippy toes, always reaching for something to improve on. I think that you're only a good leader, if you are developing good leaders. I like when a job is well done and being able to work with other offices to develop things that make us all better. And I think enjoying what you do even when it's crappy. Even when it's the worst day and parents don't have anything positive to say and somebody's cussed you out. And you can just be like, "Okay, next."

Willa's understanding of good leadership is shaped by discourses of excellence, femininity, and masculine leadership. She has been called into being as a leader who is always looking to do her job well and improve for the future. Willa is also being pulled by

discourse to find enjoyment in her job even on her worst day when someone has cussed her out. The prevailing social norms in this snapshot are achievement embedded within excellence discourse insisting that she always be reaching for something, docility embedded within femininity that accepts a bad day and just moves on, and dedication above and beyond embedded within leadership discourse. Willa is able to constitute herself as intelligible within the conditions of her workplace by closely approximating the social norms. However, Butler (2011) proposes that in order for Willa, or any subject, to become recognizable as a leader, there must be a domain of unrecognizable, or abject, subjects to compare Willa's intelligibility against. Subjects are formed through an exclusionary matrix that simultaneously produces domains of viable subjects, those that are recognizable, and "uninhabitable" domains for those with "unlivable" lives who have not yet been granted the status of a subject. The exclusionary practices involved in subject formation are of critical importance to marginalized populations.

Ehlers (2012) asserts that a subject is "never simply called into being as 'woman.' Rather, norms of gender are always already racialized" (p. 64). Literature supports that people have multiple subjectivities and positionalities that cannot be disentangled, so their lives are experienced at those intersections (Crenshaw, 1998). Powerful effects are produced at these intersections for Black women in contingent positions in higher education (Porter, 2018), including institutional oppression, intersectional subordination, and exploitation (Porter et al., 2020). The marginalization and devaluation Black women experience require them to expend additional energy engaging in constant negotiations of power as they are forced to prove themselves in order to be acknowledged and understood (Crenshaw, 2016; Porter, 2018; Porter et al., 2020). Therefore, as Willa, a Black woman, becomes a leader in an unprotected position within the discursive conditions of a Predominantly White Institution in the United States, she does so at the intersections of

race, gender, and her institutional status (Porter et al., 2020). Therefore, when Willa accepts the hailing to be a leader, it is at the intersections of leadership, femininity, excellence, and whiteness discourses and her subjectivities become constituted through each other. In her book *Racial Imperatives: Discipline, Performativity, and Struggles against Subjection,* Ehlers (2012) extends Butler's theory of performativity to suggest the processes through which people become racialized are similar to ways people become gendered. Ehlers (2012) asserts,

> If we consider that the racial subject is called forth in discourse as white or black, and that this individual then partakes in the normalizing process of constituting themselves in relation to the sanctions, decrees, and prohibitions of that racial status, then this individual fabricates themself in a manner that reflects the discursive norms of that racial identity. They do so in relation to the power that is exercised within the disciplinary panoptic schema: under, against, through, and because of the potentially ever-present watchful eye of discursive power. Racializing discipline operates by shaping behavior, and in incorporating and conforming to racial norms the individual who observes this discipline is shaped as a racial subject. (p. 55)

While Willa found that her Blackness was "simultaneously hyper-visible yet invisibilized," her race was not discussed explicitly within the discursive conditions of her institution (Ehlers, 2012, p. 59). This idea sparked in some thoughts Willa shared about her relationship with her boss and a trusted colleague. Willa disclosed that she had been receiving requests from her boss to address "sensitive" personnel concerns for many years. At one point, Willa supervised a woman from another country who was experiencing a steep cultural learning curve and her boss would bring Willa concerns about the woman's style of dress and the smell of her food in the office kitchen. Both Willa and her boss knew those concerns were not only culturally sensitive; they were legally protected. Even still, Willa's

boss wanted Willa to “do something about it.” Willa worked with Human Resources frequently about her boss’ concerns and attempted to get him to speak with human resources directly, but he never wanted to get involved.

Willa’s Blackness was not an explicit topic of conversation with her boss, but it was a conspicuous absence. While Willa’s job responsibilities certainly encompassed having conversations with supervisees about sensitive topics, her boss’ insistence that she addressed his concerns combined with his reluctance to get involved at all illuminate a dominant whiteness discourse circulating, produced and maintained by a disciplinary white gaze. The white gaze manifests as presuming, imposing, celebrating, and forcing whiteness. These mechanisms privilege and benefit Willa’s white, cisgender, male boss by structuring the discursive conditions to authorize compliance with white display rules, Eurocentric beauty standards, and white authority (Rabelo et al., 2021). The white gaze and discourse of whiteness functioned differently for Willa as a woman of color and constrained her possibilities for subjectivity. As a result, Willa is compelled to edit and enclose parts of herself in order to be understood as a leader in her work environment:

> My feelings are hurt extremely easily. I take things very personally. I can't come in here with that because I will be shattered all the time. So, I have to harden myself a little bit. I have to remind myself that here is the decision that I made, but I made the decision based on my role. So, when they're looking at me and they're calling me a bitch, it’s not really at me. I have to separate that, but not to the point that I become cold. There’s a balance there, keeping myself from getting my feelings hurt all the time, but staying me.
>
> As a Black female, I have to be very conscious of how much of my personality I let show because I can be sort of sassy. But when I allow that side of myself to come out, it opens the door for people to speak to me in a certain way.

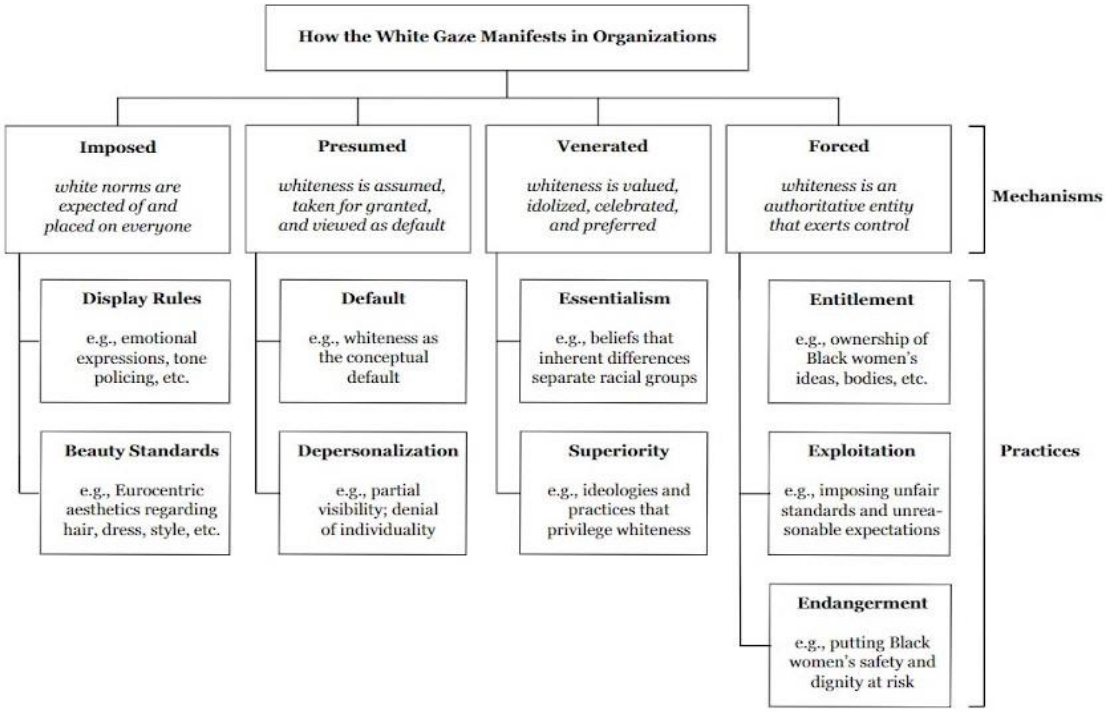
> That is not the way they should be speaking to me. It's like, I'll show you my sass, but we're not sister-girls now. You can't refer to me as “diva.” It's really crazy to think about all this, there is a lot of work. That is a lot of manpower that goes into just navigating the world. As a woman of color, it is different for me than it is for other people.

As Willa negotiated her subjectivities, racial and gender imperatives collided within dominant leadership discourses, seducing and producing Willa via the regulatory power of norms in each discourse. Feminine imperatives impose the expectation that women are emotional and irrational, which conflicts with the masculine imperatives embedded in leadership that authorize leaders who are cool, calm, and collected (as referenced by Gracie earlier in this chapter). This means that Willa is already caught in a struggle between the demands of femininity to be warm, and the competing demands to be unemotional in order to appear “leaderly.” Then, racial imperatives impose even stricter and more severe expectations of emotional control and seamless professionalism. Whiteness can be imposed in a variety of ways, including “white display rules,” which are practices that regulate how Black women express themselves in workspaces (Rabelo et al., 2021, p. 1846). See Figure 9 below for a detailed chart of the mechanisms and practices of the white gaze (Rabelo et al., 2021). For Willa, white display rules force her to negotiate the Angry Black Woman stereotype, so she does not appear threatening. Black women may choose to preemptively mitigate colleague scrutiny regarding this stereotype by being more accommodating, less demanding, or playing victim (Rabelo et al., 2021). Therefore, Willa experiences additional pressure to maintain her composure, even when verbally accosted through language such as “bitch.” This forces her to find a precarious balance between being friendly enough so she does not appear “cold,” and therefore not feminine, and not being so approachable that people think they can be overly familiar and refer to her as “diva.” In these ways, leadership

discourse along with gender and racial imperatives of docility and restraint dictate the discursive norms of emotional compartmentalization and social customization that shape how she is allowed to behave and show up in certain spaces to be substantiated as a viable leader and racial subject (Ehlers, 2012).

Figure 9.

How the White Gaze Manifests in Organizations (Rabelo et al., 2021)



Willa is pulled by the norms of whiteness and masculinity discourses and positioned outside of and in opposition to normalizing leadership discourse as a Black woman leader. She cites the norms of emotional control and rules of white display each time she "hardens herself" and holds back her "sass" and other parts of her personality. The more successfully Willa is able to cite and reiterate these norms of white femininity or integrate the norms

repeatedly over time into her subjectivity, the more likely it is that Willa will be seen and understood as a leader.

This means that the dimensions of Willa that exceed the limits of leadership and femininity, like her Blackness, aspects of her personality, and her emotions, are excluded from being accepted, valued, and authorized. Willa's comment about hardening herself without becoming "cold," exposes a behavioral double-bind that she experiences at the intersection of her gender and racial subjectivities. This "cross-pressure" (Eagly, 2007, p. 4) is a consequence of gendered leadership stereotypes that force women into no-win choices between being compliant and likable, or resistant and capable (Bierema, 2016; Catalyst, 2007; Eagly, 2007). This double-bind is amplified for Willa as a Black woman because white display rules are imposed by the whiteness discourse circulating, which limits her options for emotional expression. Power imposes white display rules through a disciplinary white gaze to regulate and narrow Willa's subjectivities as a leader.

As Willa negotiates the discourse of whiteness, she is forced into the subject position of a stereotypical *Strong Black Woman* (Burton et al., 2020). Black women face demands to make themselves into saviors and superheroes who are tireless, resilient, invincible, and often expected to serve as the backbone of organizations. The exploitation of Black women and their work installs and reinforces whiteness as a leadership norm. Leadership practices like these keep Black women subordinated by narrowing the possibilities for their subjectivities, which impedes career advancement and limits the ways they are able to show up as vulnerable in spaces of leadership. Examples of exploitative leadership practices include ignoring Black women's contributions, assuming tolerance of unfair treatment, expecting more work, withholding adequate resources and compensation, and assigning credit for their work to others (Rabelo et al., 2021).

As a woman of color, Willa is compelled to cite the “disciplinary regime of race” that is sustained through a perpetual, invisible, and regulatory surveillance that coerces subjects into self-governing how they form and articulate their racial identity (Ehlers, 2012, p. 55). Through this self-disciplining process, Willa regulated her performativity, so she fit into the racial subject position of “reserved professional” that has been discursively determined as, “possible and permissible” (Ehlers, 2012, p. 52). Therefore, as Willa constituted herself as a woman and a leader in higher education, it was indeed different for her than it was for others. By being a Black woman leader, Willa herself was a resistance to the white masculine normalizing leadership discourse in higher education.

Butler (1990) proposed that all identity categories that attempt to contain individuals create insider/outsider divisions, which results in categories being defined by what is excluded (Atkins & Vicars, 2016; Foucault & Faubion, 2000). This means, those who do not conform to the norms of the category are systematically excluded from its definition, deeming them as unaccepted and unauthorized. For the purposes of this research, the categories of gender and leader exclude those who do not “fit” or conform to the gender norms of nurturing, docility, and accommodation and the leader norms of authoritative, dedicated, and unemotional.

Although Butler (1990) believed the notion of coherent and continuous identities, those that consistently and permanently fit categorical definition, to be a cultural fabrication, performativity acknowledges a subject’s inevitable subjection to power and the governing norms of discourse that compel subjects toward identity. Therefore, these exclusionary structures and practices have significant implications for who gets recognized and who does not. As we see from the case of Willa, exclusionary structures and practices of dominant leadership produced recognition for Willa when she was able to balance closing off her emotions and aspects of her personality, in this case her “sass,” with remaining open

enough to be acceptably feminine. Exclusionary structures and practices such as acknowledgement and reward within the workplace are especially critical for individuals with marginalized identities because their social viability is dependent upon successfully negotiating the limits of identity categories that have excluded them from the start. Therefore, Willa must work harder than white women and within much tighter subject positions as they attempt to conform to leadership norms. I highlight this phenomena in my analysis of Veronica's interview in the paragraphs that follow.

Veronica was raised by a single mother and experienced resource insecurity, including financial, food, heat, and water, throughout her childhood. She paid her own way through college and proved herself to be a motivated student who maximized her education through the pursuit of multiple degrees, a myriad of jobs and co-curricular experiences, and a well-developed social and professional network. After graduation, Veronica had a fruitful professional career that took her across the country and provided her the opportunity to earn her master's degree and a job that offered increasing levels of responsibility. Several years later, Veronica returned to her alma mater because she believed strongly in the institution's mission and values. She was elated to continue to advance her career there and build a future with her partner and young children.

Veronica quickly re-established herself as a dedicated team player, strategic thinker, and promising leader. Veronica experienced a progression of success in her career, including multiple promotions and invitations to assist with organizational revisionings at the departmental, divisional, and institutional levels. This upward trajectory was a manifestation of Veronica's recognizability as a leader in earlier stages of her career at her institution. Veronica's performative *doings* were able to accommodate prevailing leadership norms, and so, her affinity for strategic, critical, and systems thinking, along with her collaborative

approach with colleagues, enabled her to experience long stretches of intelligibility as a leader.

Recognition in Performativity

As evidenced by Gracie and Willa's narratives and excerpts, women make sense of themselves as leaders within and through the discourses and social norms available to them at a particular moment within their specific context. These women have become gendered and racialized through their performativities, their repeated *doings* that approximate social norms. Their repetitions are meant to stabilize the meanings of woman and leader so that the categories appear to be coherent and natural. The women's gendering takes place within the conditions of higher education, which produce and maintain inequalities through processes, actions, and meanings (Acker, 2006). It is within these conditions that Gracie and Willa struggle to be recognized as women leaders. Butler (1995) proposes their struggles to be the "passionate pursuit of a recognition," a process they must experience to become possible as subjects (p. 12). In this section, I define the process of recognition and demonstrate how it works using snapshots from the interviews of Gracie, Willa, and Veronica (whom I more fully introduce later in this chapter).

Butler (2004) posits that subjects do not become socially viable, they do not begin to exist, until they are recognized within their social world. Subjects cannot be seen nor understood until they conform to the standards of the prevailing social norms. This means that Gracie and Willa cannot become women or leaders in their particular contexts until they take up and repeat the norms of the discourses available to them at the particular moment they are in. What is available to these women leaders are the social norms of emotional control and assertiveness, efficiency and productivity, and whiteness as imposed, assumed, preferred, and controlled, all of which are embedded within the discourses of masculine leadership, excellence, and whiteness (Rabelo et al., 2021). It is these conditions of higher

education leadership, its structures, discourses, norms, and power relations, confer recognition upon Gracie and Willa.

Butler (2011) does not propose a recognition in the conventional sense of the word, for example a familiarity or an acknowledgement of achievement; rather, they suggest a recognition that allows subjects to be seen and understood in ways that facilitate their capacity to live full and satisfying lives. These terms of recognition are not fixed, they are socially constructed and therefore alterable. Central to Butler's concept of recognition is the understanding that the social norms that shape our subjectivities carry desires that do not originate with subjects. In the context of leadership, such desire might include influence, respect, and career advancement, and rather than originating in "us," desire is produced within the conditions of higher education leadership. These conditions make the women leaders possible but exist outside of the women's control. Therefore, our expressed desires can never be our own; rather, they are *responses* to an interpellation, or a hailing, into the process of recognition.

Butler's (1995) adaptation of Althusser's (1971) interpellation proposes that subjects are primed to "move toward identity" (p. 7), so subjects actually *accept* the call to conform to social norms (and the norm's desires) before they even *respond* to it. Therefore, I must examine not only the desires of the women in my research but consider the desires of higher education leadership as well. By building careers and pursuing success as professionals in higher education, Gracie, Willa, and Veronica "moved toward" the identity of leader (recognition) and accepted the interpellation to the social norms of leadership discourse (and the norm's desires). The remaining question becomes, "what does higher education want" of Gracie, Willa, and Veronica as leaders? (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012)

What higher education leadership wants is for the women to be recognizable as both leaders and women. For Gracie, Willa, and Veronica, this means as they establish

themselves as subjects, they are interpellated to approximate the highly regulated and conflicted norms of both a woman and a leader. Leadership discourse is embedded with the norms of whiteness and masculinity where male competence is assumed and valued (Chelf, 2018); therefore, leadership norms desire subjects to be authoritative, unemotional, and dedicated. Meanwhile, femininity discourse is embedded with the norms of docility and compliance that desire subjects to be agreeable, passive, nurturing, and accommodating (Bierema, 2016). The degree to which the women adhere to and repeat the aforementioned norms, determine how intelligible, or how well understood, they will be as women and leaders. However, leadership and femininity discourses desire different responses from the women and the implications of this tension are significant because subjects require some amount of recognition to remain viable and live fulfilling lives (Butler, 2004). In fact, Butler (1990) frames the notion of recognition as a matter of survival. In terms of women leaders in higher education, survival requires negotiating complex and multiple subjectivities as they attempt to adhere closely to prevailing social norms of both femininity and leadership in pursuit of some amount of recognition. In the section that follows, I put performativity to work as I explore the understanding of gender as a strategy of survival for women leaders in higher education.

Performativity as a Strategy of Survival

If gender performance is, as Butler (1990) proposes, a "strategy of survival within compulsory systems" (p. 190), then for the women in my dissertation, to survive is to become recognized as a leader within the constraints of normativity of their work environments. The phrase “constraints of normativity” is being used to describe the conditions that make women’s realities possible, the conditions that shape who they can become as women and leaders, including social norms, discourse, power relations, and historical experiences. Women are called into being through processes of constraint that set

limits on the possibilities for their articulation. In these processes, specific subject positions, or possibilities for subjectivity, are shaped (constrained) and produced for women leaders within the discursive conditions of higher education leadership. Gracie, Willa, and Veronica must take up these subject positions in order to be recognized as women leaders and by doing so, they become viable and inevitably gendered and racialized (Ehlers, 2012).

Recognition is a dual process that “imposes and activates identity” by calling subjects into social existence and demanding they step into specific subject positions to become and remain understood (Ehlers, 2012, p. 22). Jackson and Mazzei (2012) propose this dual process produces a “split subject: as one who is subjected to power/knowledge, but also one who is offered a range of subject positions from which to choose” (p. 64). As split subjects, women leaders are compelled to maintain these subject positions through reiterative citational practices in order to maintain their recognizability and in doing so, they integrate the conditions that produced them into not only who they are, but also who they will become.

This split subject status became clear in a snapshot from Gracie’s early career when she was put on a performance plan for missing too much work as she battled debilitating migraines. Gracie was told that her performance was suffering, and it was impacting her colleagues' workloads. In this snapshot, the norms of productivity, toughness, docility, and dedication interpellated Gracie, demanding she get the job done no matter the cost, even if it meant her health and wellbeing. Gracie said, “I got my shit together as far as my health goes. I had to work at it, but not a year has gone by that I haven't been the number one case performing person.” In this circumstance, Gracie was disciplined via supervisor reprimand and official performance plan and produced within relations of power/knowledge as unproductive and unreliable as she grappled with health issues, but she readily acquiesced to the pull of leadership, excellence, and femininity discourses. Gracie’s compliance

produced her as a recognizable leader in the subject position of “high achieving hustler” within the discursive conditions of higher education leadership. Gracie maintains this subject position via her reiterative *doings* of accepting and resolving more cases than any one of her colleagues. Through her citational practices, the discursive conditions that produced Gracie as a high achieving hustler became so integrated into her subjectivity that it appears to be a natural, or inherent, part of who she is as a leader.

Willa’s struggle for survival occurred within conditions that refused, erased, and silenced salient parts of her subjectivity. The following excerpt is a snapshot that illuminates Willa’s struggle for recognition as a site of power:

> I grew up and I have worked, always in the south. Every position I’ve had, this has been my little hub. So, there's certain things that I've learned in dealing with people. It does frustrate me sometimes that I have to approach people in a way that doesn't mesh with the directness of my usual personality. But at the end of the day, I want to get what I want and know that if I came in a direct way, that wouldn't work. So, I have to come into a situation more helpless than what I actually am to get the things I need to do my job. So, someone feels like they're doing something great and powerful, and helping me out with something. I've learned how to do that because I have always been in a culture that had that good ol’ boy type system.
>
> The whole “playing the helpless card” is so not me. I’m a pretty tough cookie, but I can't let people know I’m a tough cookie. And sometimes I can't let people know how much I know [about my work]. I have to sit through and listen to someone explain a process to me when I know doggone well how to do that process. But I know for [colleague], he wants to have the knowledge. I feel like in a twisted kind of way, I've cultivated another link to our relationship. And maybe he'll be even more receptive when I come to him and have to ask him for something.

Complicated subject positions were produced for Willa within and through complex relations of power and discursive conditions of higher education leadership, including patriarchal ideology and culture as noted by her reference to the “good ol’ boy network” and the discourses of leadership, femininity, and whiteness. Thinking with performativity, I read Willa’s acts of helplessness, which included feigning ignorance, suppressing her directness and toughness, and deferring to her male colleagues, as citational practices drawn from the norms embedded in discourse. The discourses circulating were leadership discourse embedded with the norms of masculinity and whiteness, and a discourse of femininity embedded with the norms of compliance, dependence, and vulnerability that compelled Willa to repeat both, often conflicting, identity categories. Willa’s strategy of “coming in helpless” then was a choice to be recognized as a leader in the discursive field of higher education, though it was not necessarily an intentional choice. Willa’s repetitions of “playing the helpless card” spanned a good part of her career and eventually became compulsory for Willa as she negotiated complicated and narrow subjectivities. And although her repetitions of “helpless" seek to establish coherence in both Willa and her identity categories, Willa’s subjectivity is precarious and unfinished. It is this instability that makes agency possible and therefore, each time Willa repeats the category of helpless, she generates the opportunity for her resignification as a capable and influential leader. Western dominant discourses of femininity compel women to desire protection and care and produce the subject positions of dependent woman and vulnerable woman (Allan, 2012).

Willa became recognizable in the subject position of “helpless” through an almost parodic compliance with the norms of femininity and leadership discourse, although her recognition was a strategy of survival that came at the cost of acquiring “a certain order of social existence” (Butler, 2011, p. 82). Willa understood the more closely she adhered to the norms of recognition in her gender and racial performances, the more recognizable and

intelligible she would become as a leader. For Willa, becoming and remaining recognizable as a leader by “coming in helpless” came at the cost of missing out on opportunities for career advancement as well. She said:

> It has been a detriment to me professionally because I don't have the experience I would like to have, that I feel like I need to have, to move to a director position. There's a lot that I don't have hands-on experience with, I always have to find ways of getting more facility experience. But when I'm doing that, I still have to play that role of, “Can you please take a look at this?” Instead of being like I want to be, to advance and have really gained more knowledge.

Another cost to recognition Willa acknowledged was the excessive amount of time and energy it took to simply navigate the world to hold parts of herself back and hide her knowledge, skills, and personality. Her reflection highlighted the complex and multiple subject positions she must slip between as a Black woman in higher education leadership. Willa described this incessant shapeshifting as a condition of her reality when she said, “In my day to day, I don't think about it as being something I'm doing that’s special. I just have to think about it as, ‘this is what I have to do’.” Literature supports that Black women experience additional stress and pressure in higher education, and it has a detrimental impact on their mental health (Brown et al., 2017). Willa’s recognition within the constraints of normativity signaled agency operating, as a means for survival to secure recognition by making herself compliant.

Performativity as Stylization

Contrary to Willa’s experience, Veronica’s struggle for recognition within different normative constraints activated her agency to resist social norms, thus constituting herself as a different styling of gender, which I examine in this section. Butler (1990) proposes gender to be done through repeated *doings* within a highly regulated framework. To refer

back to Butler's (2004) description of gender, if we understand gender as improvisations within normative constraints, then this means subjects cannot freely choose their gender, but they are able to make choices within that framework. These choices that subjects have, within the constraints of discourse and power relations, determine their gender stylizing. In this section, I illustrate how Veronica makes herself into a leader in order to show how this process works differently for Willa.

At the time of the interview, Veronica had been working at her alma mater for just over a decade and her experience was not without frustration. She found that her male colleagues enjoyed a more generous interpretation and lenient enforcement of employment policies, while she struggled to receive the recognition and compensation she deserved. For example, a few years prior, a campus announcement was made announcing the appointment of an administrator to a high profile, top-level leadership position that had responsibility for Veronica's division. He received full backing and support of the administration, an interim title, and commensurate salary, and yet this man had no practical experience. Veronica shared, "Where I sat in comparison to that person was I had almost two decades of experience, he had zero." Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident and shortly after, some of the area's Veronica was responsible for were moved under another male colleague's purview. The man not only often presented her ideas, observations, and work as his own, but also reported to university leadership that Veronica was difficult and unreliable. Another male colleague was appointed to an interim position to cover a vacancy and received a reclassification to his position so he could retain his salary after the interim duties were reassigned. Veronica's experience being appointed to an interim position was vastly different and is included in a later section of analysis. While Veronica worked to prove her worth for her entire career, she recounted that these men "needed to make no demonstration of their requisite skill set or experience to carry out or

fulfill the duties of leading those areas. The organizational chart was just changed overnight."

Veronica's struggle for survival via recognition produced her as an intelligible agent: that of a "challenge" and "difficult" (Ussher, 2013; Weedon, 1987); however, this styling came with its own order of social existence, though it was very different from Willa's struggle. Veronica described her experience in the following way:

> I think when an institution is facing constraints and needing to implement change, a good professional is somebody who is on board with that change, asks no questions, is compliant, is maybe even a little complicit, and doesn't question. I personally don't think that is what it means to be a good professional. Thinking about the duty and responsibility we have to the students we serve, their families, and their financial commitment, being a good professional means asking the difficult questions that need to be asked about the decisions that are being made and the priorities that are being put forth, and contributing constructively to those conversations.

Veronica considers herself a leader within both her field and institution but feels she does not always "fit" the image of leader in the eyes of the administration. Butler (2004) proposes that the idea of "fitting in" (or not) signals the presence of social norms working to regulate the conditions of recognition that determine who is recognized and by whom. Social norms in leadership discourse work to interpellate Veronica to be a loyal disciple who is "compliant, maybe even a little complicit," and who stands in unwavering support and solidarity with institutional leadership. Veronica attempts to refuse the hailing to be the type of leader her institution wanted her to be, to deferentially fall in line and get "onboard," because she believes deeply that leaders in higher education have an obligation to challenge leadership in service of institutional accountability. Veronica shared that relationships were crucial to a leader's success and she relied on them to weather the

tensions inherent in higher education. Her leadership practices included challenging colleagues and administrators during organizational restructures and when making funding decisions that had the potential to impact students' futures. Veronica's leadership practices refused the norms of the discourses of excellence, femininity, and masculine leadership. This tension forced a rearticulation of what it meant to be a woman leader, and the conditions of higher education leadership produced a resistant *redoing* of leadership that contested social and cultural norms.

Veronica's experiences growing up, along with her keen acumen for systems thinking and organizational theory, focused her critique on higher education's failure to develop an infrastructure to make institutions more accountable to the financial impact they are making on the lives and futures of students who are committing to years of debt for the pursuit of higher education. Veronica explained:

> I always try to equate it to what a student might be paying interest on for the next two decades of their life. And so, when I see individuals not held accountable for their work, or lack thereof, or decisions, to make abject investments in programs or people or positions, without really thinking through the additional, even the layered consequences of those investments, that's frightening to me. And it sits in a place that fixes on unethical. Tuition dollars should be thought of at the five, ten, fifteen, and twenty year mark with interest.

Veronica recognized that in response to declining enrollments and increasing financial pressures, higher education has enmeshed a corporate business model into its organizational structures. She suggested this has resulted in staff increasingly being treated like they are "disposable resources" and a widening of the divide "between the way staff and faculty are treated, valued, evaluated, compensated." Giroux writes extensively about the departure from accountability in higher education in the neoliberal climate that Veronica

references. Giroux (2002) proposes that the embrace of neoliberal discourse by higher education means the shift away from accountability, social responsibility, and public service, and a focus on accountability to the institutional financial bottom line. Veronica's ability to identify and resist neoliberal discourse is closely tied to her childhood experience where heat, electricity, and food were not absolute. Even though Veronica's resistances were disruptions to the normalizing discourses of leadership, femininity, and neoliberalism, Veronica constituted herself as a high achieving agent of challenge and experienced long stretches of intelligibility as a leader within the constraints of normativity. For Veronica, power relations, normative discourses of leadership, femininity, masculinity, and neoliberalism, and Veronica's childhood experiences functioned as normative constraints for her as she negotiated her subjectivity as recognizable.

Butler (1990) proposes, "The effect of gender is produced through a stylization of the body" (p. 191), which means that subjects constitute their gender performativities within the normative constraints of one's social context. Gender as a styling indicates that while subjects do have choices about how to make themselves as women and leaders, there are limits to those choices if they wish to remain recognizable. Veronica fashioned herself as resistant, yet still intelligible because she cited norms of femininity that constituted her as a caring, communal leader who is invested in the welfare of the group. Veronica's intelligibility was reflected in how she described her relationships with her colleagues and supervisees. The performative stylizations that made Veronica and Willa recognizable were so different; as Butler (1990) asserts, gender is an attempt to create an external expression of its signification through enacted stylings of the body that are never wholly deliberate, because these "styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities" (p. 190). For example, Veronica's history with her institution dated back to her undergraduate years and she maintained strong relationships with people throughout her campus community and

beyond. She enjoyed many years of high intelligibility as a leader and her long history at her institution conditioned the possibilities for Veronica as a leader. Veronica is also styled through her history as a child growing up with multiple resource insecurities and her subjectivities as a white woman in the Northeast. The possibilities for Veronica as a leader had few limits during the majority of her time at her institution. She was able to challenge people in positions of leadership directly and publicly and remain intelligible to her upper administrators, and only experienced the closure of her subjectivities after administrative leadership change and significant institutional restructuring. Willa's possibilities for her subjectivity as a Black woman living and working in the South were shaped by multiple, conflicting discourses of masculine leadership, femininity, and whiteness and therefore were more constraining and narrower.

Veronica's failure to comply with normative ways of being and doing as a leader by questioning the status quo, demanding integrity, and expecting excellence resulted in an ongoing tension within competing discourses of femininity, excellence, and masculine leadership. However, Veronica's resistance also illuminated her commitment to justice and equity and exposed a social justice leader counter-discourse circulating. Counter and reverse discourses challenge meaning and power, and produce discourses of resistance (Weedon, 1987). Discourses do not operate as opposites of dominant/non-dominant or powerful/powerless, conflicting discourses become sites of resistance where something new can happen. With every iteration of the norms of discourse, there is the possibility to do something new. Veronica activated agency by disrupting discourse and making space to be seen as a new and resistant leader. Each time Veronica resists, it is an *undoing* of her subjectivity in new ways that loosen up the rigid leader category. This counter-discourse offered opportunities for recognition by accommodating her critiques of systemic inequities and demands for accountability for student learning and the financial burden students and

their families assume. Within this counter-discourse, Veronica was able to *redo* herself as a protector of students and their families, colleagues, university resources, and of justice. However, subjects only become knowable by conforming to "recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (Butler, 1990, p. 22).

Veronica can never fully refuse the discursive norms of woman or leader if she hopes to remain recognizable enough to be promoted. After each fragmented and uneven repetition, Veronica returns a slightly different version of herself, and with each refusal of the norms, Veronica is both generating agency and risking intelligibility. By citing the norms of leadership discourse, which privilege compliance, Veronica maintains recognizability as a leader even as she enacted a resistant *doing* of leadership. Schemes of recognition worked to do (and undo) Veronica as intelligible by alternately granting recognition when her subjectivity fell within the constraints of normativity as a high achieving challenger, and restricting recognition when her subjectivity exceeded the limits of social legibility as a difficult woman, adversary, and threat (Butler, 2004; Ussher, 2013). Who Veronica became in that moment was a resistant but recognizable leader; that is, until one day the terms of recognition shifted unexpectedly. She said,

> I was told that I would be receiving a promotion, in responsibility, in title, and in salary behind closed doors by institutional leadership. That information was not communicated with other campus community members and I believed that in order for me to do the job and do it well, that message needed to come from the top.
>
> So here I am, behind closed doors, being told, 'You will have an increasing responsibility, a change in title and increase in salary, and promotion.' And none of it happened. All I wanted was a charge and a letter of appointment...how do you know what goals you're not meeting if you never had goals presented to you to begin with?

In the absence of a public announcement of Veronica's new role, previously positive collegial relationships became antagonistic within these new conditions as tension and resentment developed. One colleague complained to the Chancellor that Veronica had become unreliable and was not following through on collaborative work. The Chancellor confirmed Veronica's performance with another colleague who reported that Veronica had become increasingly more difficult, demanding, and less collaborative in recent months. Veronica revealed that context was likely a factor in her fading out of recognizability, because her new responsibilities included the charge to reduce university liability by closing loopholes and policy gaps in several high profile departments. She had discovered there were significant issues in the departments of both of these colleagues and in an attempt to be a supportive colleague and not throw anyone "under the bus," Veronica had not yet disclosed the severity of their predicaments to campus leadership.

Research suggests part of Veronica's experience is due to the behavioral double-bind women leaders frequently encounter as a result of the conflicting demands of their subjectivity between approximating the ideal leader, whose stereotypes are grounded in masculinity, and the ideal woman, whose expectations are centered in femininity. This dilemma forces women to choose between being accepted as a competent leader or a personable woman; however, the double-bind is always a no win situation that ensures women leaders will inevitably fail to be accepted as either (Bierema, 2016; Catalyst, 2007; Channing, 2020; Eagly, 2007; Gordon et al., 2010; Madaan & Preethi, 2017; Oakley, 2000). As Veronica's colleagues cited masculine leadership discourse that insisted women leaders be held to higher and conflicting standards, not be trusted, and be compliant and complicit, they produced Veronica as a leader who was deviant and different from themselves. Meanwhile Veronica's performativity diligently and urgently cited the scripts of both

femininity and masculinity, attempting to accommodate conflicting demands and striving to meet heightened expectations of being a woman and a leader, but inevitably failed at both.

Similar to how Veronica previously became *done* by social and cultural norms of masculine leadership as recognizable as a strong and visionary leader, she became *undone* by the norms of femininity and masculine leadership as conditions outside and beyond her changed. The fall out that followed created an immense amount of stress, decimated trust, ruined relationships, and ultimately created for Veronica what Butler (2004) terms “an unlivable life” (p. 2). Veronica’s stories highlight how these terms of recognition are socially prescribed and malleable, and informed by conditions that are determined external to, in advance of, and beyond herself: conditions such as institutional restructuring, financial strain, and personnel changes. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, while the terms of recognition that valued assertive and authoritative leaders produced Veronica as unrecognizable, they worked to produce her male colleagues as highly intelligible and ideal leaders. Veronica described her struggle for recognition in the following way:

> I think that there's a discrepancy with the way that individuals are valued. And in my particular experience, I had a very real lived experience of being held to a different standard. And whether it was overtly discriminatory based on my gender, or subconsciously, I suffered the real repercussions of what it means for men to be provided opportunity based on the potential that they show and women being required to prove themselves in order to earn an opportunity.

Butler (2004) asserts that gender norms and practices can operate in different ways for different groups of people. Norms can work to inhibit or even eliminate the conditions for liveable lives, or they can authorize possibilities for recognizability, intelligibility, and survivability. They can even do both -- function to authorize and inhibit or eliminate simultaneously. Veronica’s experience demonstrated how gender norms worked to not only

inhibit conditions for a recognizable life as a leader, they eliminated the conditions for a livable life entirely within that particular context and power relations. Veronica was no longer seen or understood as a leader in any way by administrators and specific colleagues and she began to feel her career aspirations slip away from her.

Veronica's experience also illustrated how gender and gender performance, although cultural fabrications, are punitively regulated by consequences with very real implications (Butler, 1990). There were significant financial implications related to her sudden unintelligibility as a leader. This included: the $30,000 salary increase related to the new job responsibilities that did not come to fruition, the loss of her husband's job and salary because he had been working in a position that fell under her proposed reporting line, and an unexpected decrease in her salary when she was forced to step away from some of her interim duties. Veronica believed that it would be impossible to account for the long-term impact on her career path and salary trajectory. She noted that not only did the decisions made by her administration strip her of an opportunity to advance her career and scale up her salary (which has long-term, exponential impact), those decision made recourse and restitution virtually impossible. Veronica said,

> I don't have any real examples of how equity and opportunity shake out for women. If I bring forward a concern about a salary discrepancy, it's either going to be approved or denied and maybe there's a blip of salary increase, but an entire career path opportunity – how do you reconstruct that? You can't do it without the administration having to acknowledge that they made some significant, inappropriate decisions, and no administration is going to tackle that. And so, my opportunity, there's a price tag to that. When you go to your next institution, if you've left on challenging terms and you've burned every bridge for solid reference where you are, that makes it difficult

> to be seen as a highly valued employee in a potential new work environment. And you've had to totally uproot your family, so there's no win in this situation.

The snapshots of discourse within Veronica's lived experiences presented here exposed her inability to integrate discursive norms in a way that made her fully recognizable as a leader, ultimately resulting in her becoming "undone altogether" (Butler, 2004, p. 3). Veronica describes her *undoing* in the following way:

> If I ever were to write a book on my past year experience, I would call it *Dying to Lead,* because the experience just about killed me, it really did. When I think about the emotional toll and how it trickled over into my physiological health. And only six months later, am I starting to see how I literally couldn't breathe...

Butler (2011) teaches us that it is with these performative inconsistencies, multiple and conflicting iterations of *doing* leadership, that Veronica undermined the "sedimented effect" (p. xix) of what it means to be a leader and carved out space for new ways of being and doing that "escapes or exceeds the norm" (p. xix). Although Veronica could not reconcile her desire to be recognized within the prevailing norms of leadership discourse with her desire to live in her conviction, her fate was not sealed as unintelligible, nor was she stuck in the subjectivity of a difficult woman because "norms do not exercise a final or fatalistic control" (Butler, 2004, p. 15). While Veronica was not recognizable as a leader within that specific context, she was able to slip subjectivities into other contexts where she was a viable subject. She found recognizability as a leader and mentor with the professional team she supervised, as a mother and wife with her family, and as a friend and community member. As Veronica performatively constituted herself in disruptive, irregular, and discontinuous ways from the same norms that produced her, she generated agency to do things differently. This agency enabled Veronica to *remake* herself as a law student in pursuit of a different sort of recognition within a different context.

Conclusion

While Veronica, Gracie, and Willa's performative *doings* were interpellative responses to the "right" and "natural" way of *doing* leadership, they can never completely refuse, nor submit to, the norms that seek to hail them into a certain way of being. Therefore, the women opened up "the possibility of different modes of living" (Butler, 2004, p. 4) through the agentic power/knowledge practices of resistance and compliance.

Thinking with Butler's theory of performativity enabled my investigation into how Gracie, Willa, and Veronica constituted themselves as leaders within the complex conditions of higher education to address the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant discourses operating in higher education leadership?
2. What normalizations are produced, within dominant leadership discourses, which shape possibilities for subject formation for women leaders?
3. How do women do (and undo) their gender subjectivities through performative practices within and against normalizing, dominant leadership discourses?

My analysis illuminates how gender performativity works as a mechanism for exclusions and the production of reality, a strategy of survival, and a stylization of bodies. These findings are significant because they open up understandings of gender and leadership

The idea that performativity functions as a mechanism for the production of reality reveals how accessible change is for leaders. My analysis in this chapter revealed how discourse and performativity work together to produce reality. Since reality is socially constructed and constituted through performativities (actions), it is contingent and open to change. The women were produced in multiple ways and each had different options for challenging and showing up as agents of change. Agency is available to all leaders, albeit in different forms, therefore, leaders have the ability and obligation to change the conditions of our institutions to produce looser subject positions for women leaders.

Understanding performativity as a strategy of survival communicates the urgency for loosening up rigid subject positions, broadening the terms of recognition, so that more leaders can survive as leaders in higher education. As I discussed in my review of literature, many interventions have occurred to move the needle on gender equity, and all have failed. Each woman described survival as a leader in their own way, and their performativities manifested in different ways. Each subversive act by women, loosens up the subject positions available and makes leadership more survivable for all. Inviting more diverse perspectives and performativities into leadership promises to create conditions that are beneficial to a wider scope of individuals. In turn, possibilities for *redoing* leadership open up.

My research reveals how power and discourse work differently for different people and make different stylizations, variations of intelligibilities, available to women. As the women negotiated the conditions of their institutions, their improvisations within their normative constraints produced very different performativities. This is because parameters of discourse vary between the women and their expressions of norms resulted in different stylizations. Some stylizations, like Veronica's high achiever subject position, could push the limits farther, while others, like Willa, had to find creative ways to negotiate the norms and get what she wanted and needed. Stylizations are important because as these intelligibilities push the limits of normalizing leadership discourse, the category of leader perforates and opens up to new meaning.

My analysis illustrates that, much like language, meaning is not inherent in people, and instead meaning is generated through engagements within power relations and discourse. Leadership emerges as the dominant normative discourse operating for the women in my study, which is amplified at the intersections of multiple and intersecting discourses, including femininity, masculinity, neoliberalism, and whiteness. This illumination

of new and different performativities put the signifier “leader” under erasure because the notion of leader did not hold in the presence of the women in my study. This was evidenced through the women’s slipping of subjectivities between the multiple and complex subject positions available to them. Gracie slipped in and out of the subject positions of over accommodating colleague, supportive team player, dedicated employee, and resistor. Willa slipped between her subjectivities of being a confident, opinionated, black, southern woman who has taken up the subject position of helpless, but alludes to subject positions of competent, savvy professional and confident woman. Veronica resisted the subject position of compliant employee and chose instead to slip into and occupy the position of high achieving challenger. Multiple and complicated subject positions became visible in Veronica’s discussion of her work in relation to her family, childhood experience, concerns for students and their families, and relationships with colleagues. As a result, the subject positions that emerged for Veronica were wife and mother, protector of students and their families, and misunderstood colleague.

Using snapshots of discourse and scenes of gender improvisation as sites of analysis, I examined how Gracie, Willa, and Veronica constructed meaning about themselves as women (gender subjectivities), through ongoing citational acts of compliance and resistance resulting in the *doing* (and *undoing*) of their gender identities. This constructedness illuminated the instability of both gender identity and the women as subjects, a fragility, which opens up the possibility of being constructed differently.

My research also captured moments of the women paradoxically generating and activating agency to slip between subjectivities in order to remain intelligible (or not). As the women were produced as vulnerable (Willa), over-accommodating (Gracie), and difficult (Veronica) leaders, they only succeeded in producing an “illusion of an abiding gendered self,” and could not be sealed into those subject positions for very long.

The possibilities of gender transformation are found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction. This is because, as our social world positions femininity and masculinity as diametrically opposed, with masculinity attributed to the image of leader, the women were forced to approximate the norms of both categories. Becoming a woman leader, then, is a hostilely designed paradox, as well as an exercise in futility, because “woman leader” can neither achieve a “full and final recognition” (Butler, 2011, p. 143), nor ever fully describe what it names.

This disciplinary method of power distribution brings with it, “its structures and hierarchies, its inspections, exercises and methods of training and conditioning” (Foucault, 1980, p. 158) which are reflected in the standard training, supervision, and evaluation practices in higher education that the women described. The women exposed themselves as participants in a normative “system of surveillance” (Sarup, 1993, p. 67) which they unconsciously and unknowingly, yet efficiently and effectively, reproduced over the years.

Chapter 6: Poststructural Leadership

My ruining, or *undoing*, as a leader provided an energetic and fruitful location to begin my dissertation. Through my recall of the incessant, multiple, shifting, and conflicting demands made of me as a leader within my specific context, I exposed the discursive conditions that made me possible as a leader and examined my *doings* and *undoings* of leadership. I return to my *undoing* in this closing chapter as pivot point to move toward a *redoing* of leadership.

My *doing* as a leader took place slowly over the span of 20 years. Two decades of constituting myself as a leader every day with each citation of the norms and being pulled back into place with each resistant act by competing and converging dominant leadership discourses. I slipped subjectivities instinctively and necessarily as the conditions changed. In those moments of being *done* by the norms of leadership, the forces were mostly invisible and the process of making myself into a leader was so unconscious. I gave all of myself to my job. I worked long hours and many weekends, scrambled for resources, grew programs, and developed new ways to engage and support students, faculty, and community partners. During that time, I enjoyed the rewards that accompanied recognizability as a leader. I received raises and promotions, won awards, and was supported publicly by my supervisor and other upper level administrators. The dominant leadership discourses were difficult to detect because I was benefitting as a knowable, intelligible leader.

It was not until my *undoing,* my *ruining,* that I came to understand how stealthily leadership discourse operates and how deeply our performativities are impacted. I have been *undone* by the norms of leadership within the gendered power/knowledge relations circulating through the institution of higher education and the practice of leadership. Becoming unintelligible as a leader was unsettling, and everything I thought I understood about leadership fractured and fell apart. However, my *undoing* has provided me with

invaluable insight into higher education leadership and I have come to embrace this *undoing* as an opportunity for transformation and a gift of freedom, rather than a condemnation.

Sifting through my ruins while writing this dissertation opened up a fascinating world of new and endless "possibilities for different worlds that might, perhaps, not be so cruel to so many people" (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 1). By thinking with performativity, I learned that language is more significant than we might realize, and resistance is critical for reconfiguring norms and *redoing* leadership. As I work my own ruins, I also work the ruins of educational leadership. Therefore, by creating a new sense and knowledge about myself, I am also expanding possibilities for all women and for the *redoing* of leadership.

Upon reflection, I began *redoing* leadership long before I knew what that meant. I refused interpellations to fall in line to be the compliant, dedicated, nurturing, team player, and leader I had always been. My resistances included refusals of the following: meetings that did not directly relate to my job responsibilities, extraneous committee work, unspoken pressure to be present and productive at every moment, collaborations that are not mutually beneficial, relationships with colleagues who take credit for my work and/or attempt to off load their work, and volunteering my expertise or support to spaces unless I was asked directly. Acts such as these may not seem revolutionary however, these acts of resistance have changed everything about how I see higher education, leadership, and myself. I not only reclaimed a lot of time in my workday to focus on my responsibilities, but I have been able to break the trance of leadership in higher education and envision new possibilities for the way I approach my work as a leader.

My goal for this dissertation was to trouble leadership in higher education using feminist poststructural theories and concepts from Butler and Foucault. I organized this conclusion around three concepts that emerged from my analysis in the previous chapter. In the first section, I answer my three research questions by exposing the conditions that make

the *doings* of leadership in higher education possible and highlighting the *doings* and *undoings* of the women in my study. These questions include:

1. What are the dominant discourses operating in higher education leadership?
2. What normalizations are produced, within dominant leadership discourses, which shape possibilities for subject formation for women leaders?
3. How do women do (and undo) their gender subjectivities through performative practices within and against normalizing, dominant leadership discourses?

In the second section of this chapter, I present the *undoings* of leadership in higher education that reveal how the women in my study resisted and disrupted dominant leadership discourse and the leadership status quo. Their resistances provide insight into how poststructural theory and analysis can assist in *undoing* leadership in higher education. In the third section, I discuss the implications of my research, propose opportunities for future inquiry, and call for the *redoing* of leadership in higher education. Ultimately, I sought to explore how the conditions of higher education produced opportunities for resisting subjugation and reconfiguring knowledges about women and leadership to put to use in a *redoing* of leadership (Allan, 2012).

My feminist poststructural interrogation of higher education leadership illuminated the practice of leadership operating as a strategy of control to subordinate and marginalize people, in this case women and women of color, in service to preserving the status quo and gendered power relations to benefit those in power. The goal of my study has been two fold. First, to expose the discursive conditions that narrow possibilities for women leaders and second, to examine how leadership could be done and undone through women leaders' performativities. I utilized qualitative poststructural methodology to trouble the normalization and domination of white men in higher education leadership. My analysis revealed ways leadership could be undone through questioning and resisting the leadership status quo. I

discuss these possibilities for moving toward a redoing of leadership in the remainder of the chapter.

Connections to Literature: The *Doings* of Higher Education Leadership

In this section, I highlight the conditions that make the women's *doings* (and *undoings*) of leadership possible and how these forces work to shape possibilities for the subject formation of women leaders. Using common sense assumptions about gender and leadership as my starting point, I showed how the discursive conditions of higher education leadership make various subjectivities possible. The normalizing discursive conditions of higher education leadership and the categories of woman and leader had to be identified, described, and interrogated to examine how Gracie, Willa, and Veronica negotiated their performativities as they struggled for recognizability as leaders.

Dominant Leadership Discourses

Understanding and identifying discourses was critical to my study because discourses constitute, and therefore shape, subjects. Subjects are constituted and shaped within and against multiple discourses through their performative practices every time they "speak," as I discussed in the previous analysis chapter. Just as much as discourses make subjects possible, subjects make discourses possible. Discourses manifest in the practices of subjects within a certain context and make up the *doings* of leadership. Institutions, such as higher education, are structured by multiple discourses that may intersect and reinforce or conflict and compete with each other. Terms of recognition are determined by discourses within particular contexts through social norms which subjects are compelled to approximate. My analysis revealed that the dominant leadership discourses operating in higher education leadership are the dominant gender discourses of masculinity and femininity, whiteness, and excellence.

Through the interrogation of the discursive conditions that make women leaders possible, I was able to problematize the status quo of masculine leadership in higher education. By exposing how leadership functions to regulate women by narrowing and limiting subjectivities available to them, I disrupted the marginalization of women as deviant and inferior leaders. My study revealed leadership discourse to be a normalizing force that authorized what was considered worthy, valid, and natural. The discursive "voice" of authority influenced promotion, access to people and opportunities, representation, and workload. I further elaborate the normalizations that shape and regulate the possibilities for women leaders' intelligibility in the next section.

Masculine Leadership Discourse

A "think leader, think male" grand narrative persists within leadership in higher education that valorizes masculinity and narrows femininity (Hannum et al., 2015, p. 73). Dominant discourses of leadership and masculinity are so entangled that logic, rationality, and emotional neutrality are fixed as norms in both discourses. This creates conflicting demands for women who have been historically positioned and defined as the opposite of masculinity (Chowdhury, 2017). Gracie, Willa, and Veronica's subjectivities were shaped by these discourses and forced an adaptation of their *doings* of leadership to fit a "narrow masculinist definition of acceptable behaviour" (Burkinshaw & White, 2017, p. 6).

Femininity Discourse

Western hegemonic femininity, grounded in the subordination of women, produces specific ways of being for women, and demands conformity by presenting these possibilities as desirable. The common sense acceptance of the gender binary privileges masculinity discourse, which normalizes men as logical, rational, and unemotional subjects. As femininity is constructed as the binary opposite of masculinity, women are normalized within femininity discourse as illogical, irrational, and emotional (Chowdhury, 2017; Connell, 1987;

Mattsson, 2015). These feminine norms compelled Gracie, Willa, and Veronica to conform to the ideal of a woman who is sensitive, caring, nurturing, dependent, and prioritizes the welfare of the group over her own wellbeing. Gracie, Willa, and Veronica became recognizable as leaders in their particular contexts by closely adhering to and expressing these norms of femininity, and were produced as feminine subjects who were thoughtful, supportive, and kind leaders. Any leadership practices that exceeded the limits of femininity were deemed deviant and not received well by others. For example, Gracie's assertiveness and Veronica's intelligence were refusals of feminine norms that produced consequences for their intelligibility as leaders.

Whiteness Discourse

Whiteness discourse installs and maintains whiteness as the norm via a power strategy called the white gaze. The white gaze reinforces whiteness as the norm through the following mechanisms of power: imposition, presumption, veneration (celebration), and enforcement (Rabelo et al., 2021). The mechanism of presumption produces a reality where whiteness is the "normal," default expectation, while veneration reinforces whiteness as valued and preferred through practices that privilege whiteness. The mechanism of imposition works to regulate emotional expressions through white display rules, while enforcement makes whiteness authoritative by normalizing exploitive standards and expectations.

Excellence Discourse

As excellence discourse circulated through the interviews of my participants, it was faintly visible and often overshadowed by other discourses. Norms of excellence were exposed in the women's descriptions of their work environments. For example, when Veronica spoke about the duty she felt to her students and their families, she was repeating the norms of staying "close to the customer" as described by Lunenburg (2011). Willa was

conforming to the excellence norms of productivity, “bias toward action,” autonomy, and entrepreneurship by accepting new projects, working nights and weekends, always reaching for improvement, and doing what she needs to do to get the job done (Lunenburg, 2011). By building relationships with students, faculty, and families (customers), staying useful and valuable as an employee, working late to keep up with her cases, carrying a significant number of cases, and not challenging cultural norms that demanded she work so hard, Gracie was approximating the excellence norms of productivity, effectiveness, working close to the customer, and showing bias toward action (Lunenburg, 2011; Peters & Waterman, 2006).

Both my review of literature and my analysis revealed a nebulous and generalized description and conceptualization of what excellence is and how it operates in organizations. Excellence discourse manifests in an emphasis on effectiveness, action, productivity, independence, and innovation. The organizational culture expects and experiences little challenge to achievement and performance standards, functions with a minimal staff, maintains close relationships with customers, and advances their mission based on customer interests and needs (Lunenburg, 2011; Peters & Waterman, 2006).

Normalizations in Higher Education Leadership

According to Foucault (1977), the norm *is* a norm; therefore, I exposed what was accepted as normal and identified the underlying assumptions hidden within, and reinforced by, leadership discourse. My study revealed the normalizations produced within dominant leadership discourses to be the rigidity of the category of leader, male normed leadership, the leadership status quo, gender inequity in leadership, and leaders as docile and passive bodies (Beattie, 2020). Normalization occurs when power and discourse function to punitively regulate subjects for failing to conform to social norms. Foucault (1977) proposes that any non-conforming subjects are vulnerable to punishment for “non-observance, that

which does not measure up to the rule, that departs from it" (p. 178). In this way, normalization operates to regulate and discipline Gracie, Willa, and Veronica's performativities within a narrow range of possibilities. These possibilities include the subject positions of high achiever, over accommodator, vulnerable, and difficult.

Leadership discourse is embedded with a norming scheme of social power which Butler (2004) emphasizes, "only persists to the extent that it is acted out in social practice and reidealized and reinstituted in and through the daily social rituals of bodily life" (p. 48). As these norms become integrated into Gracie, Willa, and Veronica's ongoing constitution of themselves as leaders, their performativities reconstitute dominant leadership discourses of masculinity, femininity, whiteness, and excellence. Butler (1990, 2004, 2011) frames this understanding of subject formation as paradoxical because women are compelled to repeat and reproduce the discourses responsible for narrowing the possibilities for their own subject formation.

My analysis reveals that the women's *doings* of leadership within and against leadership discourse are conflicting and complex. Willa emerges as helpless, yet agentic, as she maneuvers to secure the resources that she needs to be successful. Gracie's performativities slip from high achieving hustler to difficult bully as her context and audience changes. Veronica is a dedicated team player who slips between difficult challenger and accommodating team player. Gracie, Willa, and Veronica slip between subjectivities as power relations and contexts shift and demand new things from them. These slippings are made possible through the women's performative practices that generate and activate agency by undoing, resist normalizing discourses, and redoing, produce themselves differently, as leaders in higher education.

Gracie, Willa, and Veronica are compelled to constitute their subjectivities in accordance with the social norms embedded in dominant leadership discourses of

masculinity, femininity, whiteness, and excellence. When the women's *doings* of leadership closely adhered to the social norms of masculine leadership (dedicated and unemotional), femininity (nurturing, compliant, communal, and approachable), whiteness (assumed, valued, and superior) and excellence (productive, resourceful, and efficient) as they constituted their performativities as leaders, they successfully negotiated the terms of recognition produced within the discursive conditions of higher education leadership. This successful negotiation meant that Gracie, Willa, and Veronica were done *by* the norms and produced as recognizable leaders in their particular contexts. These *doings* of leadership were unique to each woman, context, and moment; therefore, the subjectivities within which each woman constituted herself were different and tied to specific moments in time.

Done by Leadership Norms

Gracie, Willa, and Veronica were *done* by the norms of leadership in moments of conformity. Gracie reconstituted herself as a leader within dominant leadership discourses and those discourses produced her as an accommodating leader. While other subject positions were available to her, the ones that offered recognizability as a leader were confined to subjectivities that were least disruptive of leadership discourses. Gracie's *doing* of leadership produced her in that moment as an accommodating leader who fell in line, got the job done, supported colleagues, managed the office and team, and appeased multiple stakeholders. Her repeated *doings* of leadership, which included taking on additional work, staying late to complete her work, and being accessible and helpful to colleagues, both reproduced and reinforced the discourses that serve to narrow the possibilities for her subject formation. This has broad and far-reaching far implications because women, who are always positioned and located in multiple subjectivities, are engaged in this struggle for recognition as leaders.

Willa was *done* by the norms of leadership in her constitutions of herself as helpless. Willa conformed to norms that desired her to be vulnerable so her male colleagues would be compelled to protect and help her. Willa became recognizable in this vulnerable subject position through her *doings* of feigning ignorance, asking for help rather than telling her colleagues what was needed, and building relationships with her colleagues. Willa claimed her performativity to be intentional, and in many ways, it was a conscious collusion with dominant leadership discourses, but Willa's subjectivity can never fully be her own. The possibilities of her being are influenced by many factors outside of her control, such as her historical experiences as a Black woman growing up in the southeastern United States

Veronica was *done* by the norms of masculine leadership, femininity, and excellence as a high achieving closer. She constituted herself as a leader approximating the leadership norms of assertiveness, intelligence, and confidence; the feminine norms of communality and caring; and the excellence norms of productivity, resourcefulness, and efficiency. Veronica's doings of leadership produced her as a high achieving leader who was self-assured, worked quickly, looked out for others, and completed tasks and projects in a thorough manner.

Undone by Leadership Norms

Gracie, Willa, and Veronica became *undone* by the norms of leadership in moments of resistance. Gracie experienced an *undoing* in the moment of resistance against the expectation of taking on her colleagues' work because he was too busy. Her refusal of those norms made her slip from intelligibility in that moment as an accommodating leader, a recognizable subject position. Gracie's slip generated the agency to construct herself differently.

Veronica's *doing* of leadership produced her as a dedicated and productive leader for the majority of her career. However, Veronica's *undoing* of leadership, her continual

challenge to cultural norms and questioning of authority, resulted in a slip from intelligibility as a leader when the conditions around her shifted. The institutional restructuring and administrative leadership changes altered the discursive conditions of Veronica's context, which no longer accepted her resistant *doing* of leadership. Veronica became *undone* all together by the norms of leadership in the moment when she realized that she was no longer viable as a leader at her institution. This undoing was pivotal to Veronica's possibilities for being as a leader because her undoing actually generated agency. Veronica took up this agency to explore professional development and educational opportunities that produced new and different subjectivities for her, both within and outside of higher education. At the time of the interview, Veronica had just applied to law school, which she hoped would provide new opportunities for growth and career advancement.

Significance of my Research: The *Undoing* of Higher Education Leadership

In this following section, I present my contributions and connections to feminist poststructural theory and the field of educational leadership. The discussion of my findings is organized by the three concepts I presented in my analysis chapter, including performativity as a mechanism of reality production, performativity as a strategy of survival, and performativity as a styling. The importance of language, freedom, agency, and resistance in the undoing of leadership is also discussed. These concepts crystalize ways of understanding how women *do* and *undo* their subjectivities as leaders within and against conditions working to narrow the possibilities for their subject formation.

Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

A theoretical contribution of my research is the creation of space in nonacademic realms for a feminist poststructural perspective to inform leadership practices in higher education. Although theory has become more prevalent in nonacademic spaces, such as Student Affairs, there is no expectation of theoretical integration within practices of

leadership. There are certainly communities that value and reward theoretical discussion and application, but it is not fundamental to the field as it is with academic traditions. This is, in part, because the field of student affairs is relatively young compared to the academic disciplines which higher education was founded upon. While it is documented that there have been positions with responsibility for the holistic wellbeing of students dating back to the 1800s, it was not until the 1960s that a theoretical foundation was established for the knowledge and practice of the student affairs profession (Hevel, 2016; Long, 2012; Schwartz, 2010).

Niesche and Gowlett (2015) propose that educational leadership is "theoretically weak," and I argue that educational leadership in nonacademic spaces is similarly limited due to the field of student life's juvenescence (p. 373). Corley and Gioia (2011) contend that theorizing can influence the future, so theories should be responsive and innovative in order to move us forward as the world changes. As demonstrated in my analysis, women in unprotected mid-career leadership positions make ideal locations for thinking with poststructural theory because they are precariously caught within a web of power relations that seeks to keep them contained and in line. Poststructural theory illuminates the possibility of agency within that precarity; agency that enabled the loosening up of subject positions by the women's *doings* (and *undoings*) of gender and leadership. In this way, poststructural theory answers Corley and Gioia's (2011) call for a forward thinking theory by opening up possibilities and therefore shaping and influencing the future.

My research also makes a valuable methodological contribution to the field of educational leadership and to feminist poststructural theory. My review of literature revealed that traditional leadership ideologies persist in leadership research and practice. These ideologies are actively reinforced and reproduced as conventional methodologies continue to be used to study leadership. In order to disrupt dominant leadership discourse, the field of

educational leadership needs methodologies that can accommodate contemporary theories. My study provides one such methodology that decenters deeply embedded common sense truths in theorizing, such as identity and objectivity, and enables the examination of women leaders through an interrogation of the conditions that make them possible (Chelf, 2018; Storberg-Walker & Haber-Curran, 2017). While my study is not the first to make connections between Foucault's concepts of power and Butler's performativity, it contributes one possibility for research design in the poststructural tradition that does not offer ready-made methodologies.

Performativity as a Mechanism of Reality Production

Understanding performativity as a mechanism for the production of reality problematizes the norms of leadership and the category of leader as stable and predetermined. Performativity refuses a reality that is being done *to* women leaders and exposes a reality that is being done *by* women leaders. By using performativity in my analysis, I was able to highlight the active role women leaders play in how they show up in particular spaces. This agency is at the heart of performativity and serves as a reminder that the freedom to choose is always within our reach.

The snapshots from Gracie, Willa, and Veronica's interviews illuminate the lack of control we have over the forces that shape us. For example, Veronica's socioeconomic status as a child factors into her performativity as a historical experience outside of her control. The knowledge produced within these experiences became a part of her performativity and shaped (and will continue to shape) her *doings* as a woman and leader. By shifting the focus of my analysis away from women leaders and onto the conditions that produce them, I expose how leadership functions to gender women leaders through its policies, practices, and processes. However, while these forces that shape us are out of our control, thinking with performativity illuminates the choice we have to resist the call to

conform so that we might constitute our subjectivities differently. This element of agency is key to producing a different reality for ourselves and, in the way that our resistance alters discourse and loosens up authorized subject positions, a different reality for others. Therefore, by framing performativity as a mechanism of the production of reality, Butler (1990, 2004, 2011) claims that we create our own realities, at least to some extent, through our choices regarding resisting or conforming to discourse.

This piece of my analysis led me back to the question of power and discourse: *how were they working and what were they producing?* Butler's (2004) concept of recognition provided the platform for exploring those questions that I discuss in the next section as a strategy of survival. Butler's (2004) recognition highlights the possibility for change through the agency we generate within and through our performativities. Agency offers the choice to disrupt discourse even as the power and discourses that make us possible are inescapable. Performativity is a more nuanced understanding of subjectivity that reveals how accessible the opportunities are for *redoing* ourselves as women and leaders.

Performativity as a Strategy of Survival

Butler's (2004) claim of performativity as a strategy of survival is connected to the assertion that every subject requires some amount of recognition in order to live full and successful lives. As we struggle to be seen and understood, we are struggling to survive as particular subjects within specific contexts. For Gracie, Willa, and Veronica, they were immersed in a struggle to be seen and understood as leaders by their colleagues, students and their families, and administrators within their departments, divisions, institutions, and society. Weedon (1987) proposes that institutions are "sites of contest, and the dominant discourse governing the organization and practices of social institutions are under constant challenge" (p. 109). Leadership discourse and its effects were made visible through my analysis and Gracie, Willa, and Veronica's *doings* of leadership highlighted the

challengability of discourse Weedon suggests. This pliability stems from the social construction of both discourse and the terms of recognition. Therefore, a key finding of my analysis was that although leadership discourse produced powerful effects for the women, their performativities could alter the terms of their own recognition.

Although leaders cannot eradicate nor escape power and discourse, we can challenge the status quo and reconfigure the terms by which leaders are recognized within our specific contexts. A renegotiation of terms could include a critical examination of hiring, training, evaluation, and promotion practices in order to examine what is being valued and rewarded and how that is connected to recognition for women (Butler, 1990, 2004, 2011). Acts of *undoing* were revealed as critical to increasing the survivability of leadership in higher education. Each resistance of dominant leadership discourse forced a rearticulation of performativity and discourse. These acts, as they are repeated over time, can produce new realities and reconfigure what it means to be a woman and a leader. This potential for change moves us forward in a hopeful direction.

Performativity as a Stylization

Performativity as a styling illuminates subjectivities as conditional and regulated by the discursive conditions they are situated within. Discursive rules function in divergent ways that produce particular limits and possibilities for different groups of people, so the contours and availability of subjectivities are varied between subjects. That is, because social norms interpellate us toward coherent identities that we attempt to approximate through repeated and ongoing citations, our gender stylizations are the external manifestation of those social norms. How we express those norms is contingent on the interplay of “discourses, power relations, historical experiences, cultural practices, and material conditions” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 72). The differences between our stylizations result from both the external forces working to constrain us and the choices we make within the constraints of our

contexts as we constitute ourselves through our *doings*, *undoings*, and *redoings* as women and leaders.

In my analysis, I discussed the differences between Willa and Veronica's stylings, which were produced via agentic improvisations within constraints that were specific to each woman and particular to their workplace. As a white woman with longevity and strong interpersonal relationships at her alma mater, a more generous range of subject positions were made available to Veronica and she was allowed to express social norms in more liberal ways than Willa. This afforded Veronica the ability to push the limits of intelligibility as a woman by being opinionated and direct, which are expressions of masculine leadership norms, in order to become intelligible as a leader. Conversely, as a Black woman in the South in a male dominated environment, Willa encountered tighter constraints on her performativity and was provided with a selection of more narrow subject positions. Willa, who was not able to push the limits of intelligibility in the same way as Veronica, became recognizable as a leader through vulnerability, which is an expression of femininity. Thinking with performativity exposes Willa and Veronica’s stylizations as shaped by both the conditions they constitute themselves within and their agency.

Freedom and Agency

Thinking with Butler and Foucault opens up intriguing and exciting possibilities for creating change. Thinking with Foucault’s theories of power releases us from the understanding of power as wholly repressive and reigning from above. Although Foucault’s analyses may sometimes feel dystopian and fatalistic, he cautioned about these negative interpretations of his work (Fenwick, 2002; Jouet, 2022; Sawicki, 1991). For Foucault, freedom is a condition for the exercise of power wherein freedom refuses to surrender to power (Foucault & Faubion, 2000). With freedom and resistance at the core of his philosophies of power, his scholarship actually proposes radical transformation (Jouet,

2022). Butler's (1990) adaptation of freedom, discursive agency, is positioned as a permanent possibility accessible in every "move" we make as we constitute ourselves as women and leaders. It is through these agentic moves that performativity becomes a mechanism for the production of reality.

In Butler's (1990) perspective, agency is generated paradoxically as we constitute ourselves via performative practices. Our performative acts both reproduce and contest norms and discourse in ways that produce more possibilities for our subject formation. In this way, agentic resistances are not a refusal, but an introduction of multiplicity to our ways of being. This conception of agency helps us understand that we are freer than we realize, even though a total escape from power and discourse is impossible. Butler (2004) contends, while gender may be the binary through which we are produced, it "might well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized" (p. 42). This positioning of gender, power, and agency by Butler makes performativity just the type of futuristic theory Corley and Gioia (2011) call for, as I discussed in the previous section. Performativity as a hopeful and transformative notion crystalized in my analysis via three generative concepts of performativity that facilitate change − performativity as a mechanism, strategy, and stylization − which I present in the following section.

Welch (1988) suggests that we cannot make change and progress as leaders by avoiding "entanglement in power and particularity" (p. 208). Instead, we must seek to understand our condition of entanglement because our ability to critique and resist comes from our participation in various power/knowledge practices. Our resistances and critiques are generative because as we deconstruct dominant systems, we are resurrecting subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980; Welch, 1988). I believe my research can be helpful to leaders in education because although it illuminates how our ways of thinking about and *doing* leadership are entangled in power, it also shows how our opportunities to resist are

limitless. I believe that all leaders in higher education need a way out of humanist assumptions of truth in order to create new and reimagine different realities for ourselves. My research provides a perspective from which to critique and disrupt humanist understandings of identity and language.

The intersections of leadership, femininity, masculinity, and excellence discourses and neoliberalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy ideologies provided energetic locations for the creation of meaning for educational leaders. Power works within these locations to actively limit and shift possibilities for the women's subjectivity, resulting in narrowed options for the women to become and remain recognizable leaders (Allan, 2012). Thinking with performativity offers educational leaders an enhanced understanding of the paradox of subject formation; that is, how the women both are constituted by, and dependent on, social norms to become socially viable beings. Performativity also exposes how power and discourse worked to shape possibilities for women leaders and how women leaders negotiated their subjectivities within multiple, complex, and shifting power relations. Butler's (1990) proposition that the constitution of gender is a "social temporality" (Butler, 1990, p. 191), provides a helpful framework for understanding the spaces of conflicting subjectivities that served to contest the foundations and origins of stable identity categories. This was illustrated in how Gracie, Willa, and Veronica's performativities stayed in constant motion as they accepted (or refused) hailings to conform, cite, and repeat norms (or failed to).

Implications of my Research: Towards A *Redoing* of Leadership

The global COVID-19 pandemic has presented higher education with significant challenges that have underscored the need for change that is long term and sustainable (Baker, 2021). This difficult time has also provided an incredible opportunity to rethink dominant definitions of leadership in higher education that are grounded in common sense assumptions of gender and leadership, and built on ideal worker norms that valorize

unfettered dedication and long hours worked outside of the traditional workday (Acker, 1990; Sallee, 2020). Ideal worker norms disproportionately disadvantage women because they do not account for the domestic responsibilities that still most frequently fall to women, such as childcare and home management (Adisa et al., 2021; Deryugina et al., 2021). These norms uphold and perpetuate a patriarchal institutional culture therefore, as Baker (2021) proposes, a *redoing* of leadership is needed now more than ever. Women stand to benefit most from the disruption of harmful leadership norms and the transformation of institutional culture into one that rewards and recognizes women for their talents, ability, and expertise.

While performativity is a helpful and hopeful theory to trouble higher education leadership, Butler (2004) cautioned against the urge to replace one oppressive structure with another, stating, “it would be a mistake to subscribe to a progressive notion of history in which various frameworks are understood to succeed and supplant one another” (p. 4). Foucault had similar concerns about making universal judgments. Through a historical lens, Foucault understood that power and discourse could be used for different purposes and what seems like a positive change for some, may have negative consequences for others. While the direct goal of poststructural work is not to emancipate, it is a provocative approach to research that creates new opportunities and spaces to identify, examine, and challenge oppressive discourses. That is, in order to overturn rigid structures and replace them with looser and more inclusive ones, we have to deconstruct the ways in which power functions to sustain discourse.

Foucault (as cited in Foucault & Faubion, 2000) teaches us to remain suspicious of power and ask the “double question: what is power, and where does it come from” (p. 337)? Sawicki (1991) is careful to point out that Foucault was even suspicious of his own work, stating, “as Foucault urged, one must look for the effects of power produced by all discursive practices, including his own” (p. 98). Therefore, to propose recommendations without

critique for leadership practice would ignore the danger of re-inscribing dominant leadership discourses that narrow possibilities, reinforce rigid categories, or produce new binaries.

An increasing amount of research is being conducted using feminist poststructural theories to study gender and leadership in higher education in the United States and around the world. The focus of the research varies, and I have encountered educational research on organizational change (Blackmore, 2020; MacKillop, 2018) policy and discourse analysis (Allan, 2012; Przybyla-Kuchek, 2021), and subjectivity (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Kelan, 2010). My dissertation claims a bit of a unique position in the field, in that I focus on women leaders in mid-career, non-academic leadership positions that are unprotected by and at the will of the university.

My research is grounded in a feminist poststructural framework using Foucault's concepts of power to interrogate the conditions that both make women possible and work to narrow their subjectivities, and Butler's theory of performativity to expose how women negotiate their performativities within dominant leadership discourses. Due to its relatively infrequent use in non-academic leadership spaces in higher education, my research offers some promising implications for the field of educational leadership and feminist poststructural theory. As I described previously, the dominant leadership discourses and conditions of higher education leadership are productive and create understandings of who is authorized, what can be spoken, and what can be done by leaders.

A Possible Future for Poststructural Leadership

Conditions have shifted across the world in the last two years, and the current state of higher education is untenable for many professionals. Leadership discourses in higher education have fluctuated and new discourses have been generated. Looking to the future of educational leadership, I consider my recent *undoing* as a leader. Upon completion of my analysis, I reflected on how significantly my *doings* (and *undoings)* of leadership have

changed since I finished gathering data in the summer of 2019 and decided an update on the participants in my study was warranted. I was curious to learn how their doings and undoings of leadership changed, how their conditions shifted, and what new knowledges the women were able to produce about themselves and leadership. In the section that follows, I provide brief updates the women describing how their performativities have evolved since our interview.

Participant Update

Willa has received a promotion and a raise in salary since her interview. At first, Willa was thrilled because she felt that her hard work, abilities, and dedication were finally being recognized and rewarded. However, after some time and reflection she admitted, “I now feel it was a way to set the stage for giving me work beyond the scope of what is reasonable for one person to accomplish with any degree of sanity.” Willa is unsure of what lies ahead for her professionally, but she has been struggling under increased pressure and unrealistic expectations in recent months to “keep giving and keep going.” She attributes the lack of institutional support, her inability to say no, and her discomfort in asking for help to this work related stress and discontent. Willa said,

> I would have loved to have been in a better space professionally at this point following our initial interview. The total stress of all of this has been personally and professionally challenging. And I have been frustrated with myself at what I feel is a lack of strength and fortitude.

Willa’s update exposes her recent raise and promotion to be an act that benefits her institution more than Willa and serves to keep her subordinated. Her subjectivity is revealed to be in tension with the norms of masculine leadership, femininity, whiteness, and excellence discourses. Masculine leadership discourse demands Willa to be unemotional, self-reliant, and authoritative, while simultaneously being pulled to be accommodating,

communal, and give more of herself by femininity. The norms of excellence discourse press Willa to stay motivated and maintain a high level of productivity in order to “keep giving and keep going.” The white gaze uses exploitative leadership practices to narrow possibilities for Willa’s leader subjectivities by restricting her ability to make mistakes, ask for help, and acquire the resources she needs to do her job.

Veronica is in the same role as she was at the time of her interview but reports that she is an overall better place and is more confident of her value to her institution. Working remotely in an already isolated position during the pandemic was extraordinarily challenging for Veronica and since returning to campus, the pandemic continues to have ripple effects. This past year, in addition to her own workload, she covered the duties of two colleagues, one who was on leave and one who had transitioned out of their role. Veronica shared the following thoughts about how the pandemic has impacted her and her campus:

> Through the pandemic and upon return to an open campus that was facing enrollment and financial challenges, I have observed women doing the heavy lifting without the recognition or employment security that is afforded to men who are paid more and have fewer qualifications. While remote work has afforded some flexibility for women to be able to work from home or have hybrid work arrangements, it can sometimes come at the cost of stepping away from the precarious seat at the table.

Although there is no more certainty about Veronica’s position than there was at the time of her initial interview, Veronica is still open to taking on duties for a promotion and additional pay. Moreover, while she appreciates serving in public education, her career trajectory is yet to be defined. Veronica will be completing her juris doctor degree in just a few months, which could take her career in any number of directions. However, Veronica is not certain that she is prepared to sacrifice her current quality of life, geographically speaking, to leave her community to pursue a different career path at this time.

Leadership norms and discourse continue to hail Veronica to be loyal, dedicated, and motivated compelling her to work twice as hard (or, three times as hard in her case) for no additional reward or recognition. The norms of excellence pull her to maximize her skills and talents, work efficiently, and to operate at top capacity to keep the doors of the university open. At the same time, femininity discourse demands Veronica prove herself capable and worthy, and show up as a team player who is willing to pitch in to cover duties. In her personal life, Veronica acts in nurturing and caring ways by making decisions that serve the best interests of her family, even if it means she must remain less intelligible in her professional sphere. She is continuously continues produced within and against leadership discourse as a high achieving (over achieving) closer who gets the job done for her institution, regardless of the personal cost. Veronica's observations about the pandemic's influence on the experiences of women, allude to the precariousness of her subjectivity. Norms of femininity pull her to be a good mother and put her family's needs before hers, which conflict with her subjectivities as a leader in her workplace and the breadwinner in the family. Veronica's pursuit of a law degree is a resistance that promises to alter discourses of leadership, femininity, and excellence, as well as introduce new ones and make new and different subject positions available to her. However, she is caught continuously between the subjectivities of a high achieving leader and a difficult one, and her doings as a leader threaten the possibilities of more accommodating subject positions.

The pandemic was also difficult for Gracie, who reports she is still tired from the increased pressure and heavy workload resulting from covering the duties of several vacant positions. However, Gracie enjoyed the flexibility of working from home and having time away from demanding and dependent coworkers, while still supporting students. Additionally, she and her coworkers received an unexpected 20% raise because a new administrator recognized the value of the work they were doing.

Gracie's attitude towards her work has changed significantly since the pandemic. While she was eager to advance her career into positions of leadership before the pandemic, Gracie no longer desires to be the boss or be in charge in anyway. The pandemic has helped her to have better boundaries around work and treat her job as just that, a job. She says,

> I go to work, do a good job, and then go home to be with my wife. We don't talk that much about work at home any more. I still like my job, I still like my employer, I want to do a good job for students, and I want to inspire the staff to do a good job, but I don't want to do that much extra work really. I'm not sure if the pandemic put a reset on how much work I am willing to do, I mean I still have a lot of work to do, but I don't work at night or on the weekends anymore.

Gracie has learned the difference between "living to work and working to live," and plans to retire as soon as she is able to, which is in just over 12 years. Gracie's performativities are an *undoing* of leadership as she resists the pull to take on more work, stay late, and invest herself fully in her professional world.

Though dominant leadership discourses set me, Grace, Willa, and Veronica aflame and burned us to the ground, these ruinings are not our end. While we did find ourselves in ashes, the embers that remain promise to reignite and reconfigure what is possible for us as leaders. These embers are agentic and produce new beginnings from what seems like total wreckage. Like phoenixes rising, we are able to *redo* ourselves as leaders and pursue a *redoing* of leadership to widen the scope of legibility for women leaders' performativities.

I hope my study arouses curiosity about the usefulness of feminist poststructural theory in educational leadership and inspires the *redoing* of leadership in higher education by scholars, educators, and practitioners. I believe my findings open up possibilities for

future inquiry and practice in the field of educational leadership in several ways, which I discuss in the following section.

Poststructural Leadership Inquiry

My review of literature revealed that a considerable amount of literature has become available in the past 50 years on women in leadership across multiple sectors, including business management, medicine and health care, K-12 education, the nonprofit field, and higher education. While an appreciable amount of this literature focuses on women in leadership in academia, specifically faculty and upper level administrators, there is a paucity of research available on women in mid-level positions of leadership without the protection of tenure. My research suggests that further inquiry is needed in this area because power and discourse produce different constraints for women in at-will positions that offer no protection from termination. This lack of a safety mechanism means that women take on significantly greater risk when they resist and/or become unintelligible as leaders.

Another recommendation that emerged from my research was the urgent need for further poststructural interrogation of the academic affairs/student affairs binary (Rodems, 2011; Voyles, 2015; Zalman, 2021). A clear oppositional academic affairs/student affairs binary materialized within the literature on women in leadership, as a majority of the research focused on the realm of academic affairs. There is much to be gained for women on both sides from the interrogation of this binary because sustaining this binary relationship serves to keep women leaders separated, disorganized, and subjugated. This enables leadership discourse in higher education to maintain the status quo by keeping women docile, compliant, and less likely to disrupt. Upsetting the force and influence of the academic affairs/student affairs relationship as a taken-for-granted truth, holds promise to positively impact the conditions and possibilities for women, including the broadening of current, as well as the creation of new, discourses and subject positions available to women.

Poststructural Leadership Practice

Literature on women in literature in higher education highlights that job satisfaction for women peaks in mid-career when opportunities, engagement, and mentoring is more available than in earlier or later stages of their careers. There is an increasing need to consider leadership as a form of resistance to white patriarchal conceptions of leadership and Niesche (2013) proposes that Foucault's notion of counter conduct holds significant promise for leadership in higher education. Foucault (2007) describes counter conduct as "the sense of struggle against processes implemented for conducting others" which moves us a step beyond resistance to intentional action (pp. 200– 201)**.** Counter conduct can be understood as any action that challenges dominant discourses, practices, policies, and attempts to reorient them towards goals of justice (Niesche, 2013).

Leadership can be *redone* as a disruptive practice, as a form of counter conduct, which broadens understandings of leadership practice that are more nuanced, contextual, situated, and theoretically informed (Niesche, 2013). A prevailing belief in the United States holds that gender is no longer an issue in higher education nor leadership. This is troubling because when gender disappears from our conversations and consciousness, it is at risk of erasure. If we are to advance gender equity in leadership and create social change, we must encourage resistance by cultivating spaces of freedom where counter conduct can thrive.

Leaders in higher education need an escape from humanist claims to truth in order to reimagine different realities for our organizations. Invested leaders are needed to create intentional spaces of freedom that can serve as sustained poststructural communities of practice to rethink issues and produce alternative knowledge about women, leadership, and higher education. My experience has shown me that poststructural thought takes time, attention, intention, and practice in order to engage with it in a meaningful way. The

literature reflects that experiential approaches to learning, communities of practice, policy design, and solution-focused action planning are linked to positive organizational culture and change; spaces leaders have the ability to create (Mousa et al., 2021; Rowlands et al., 2020). These spaces need not be physical, nor have a formal structure, they just need to offer the opportunity to discuss the influence of gender, race, and other identity categories on leadership, and consider alternative models of leadership that challenge dominant understandings of our social worlds.

Non-hierarchal spaces of freedom can strengthen organizational cultures by creating opportunities for women to connect with other individuals invested in changing conditions for women and other marginalized people. Belonging to a community provides women the opportunity for socialization as well as the support, guidance, and resources to best manage responsibility, challenge, and transition. A sense of personal connection with other women emerged as significant for Gracie, Willa, and Veronica. They described relationships they had with colleagues that could operate as spaces of freedom. These included, Willa's trusted colleague in human resources who she used as a sounding board and confidant, Gracie's colleagues that she described as the other strong women she worked with to get the job done, and Veronica's positive relationships with her supervisees. Identify allies, or skeptics, to join conversations, activities, and opportunities to develop a critical vigilance and practice thinking differently in whatever way works for your community (Marsh & Wilkerson, 2021). Critical vigilance supports the development and integration of new ways of speaking, writing, and thinking about leadership and may involve deep introspection into leader subjectivities in the face of conflicting interests. Other possibilities for counter conduct include narrative resistance and counter storying (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2017).

Concluding Thoughts

Foucault proposes that there is an urgent need to “refuse what we are” (Foucault & Faubion, 2000, p. 336); that is, to critique what has been accepted as natural and common sense, which Foucault believes is a practice of freedom. In response, I submit this feminist poststructural deconstruction as an act of freedom and my contribution to the expanding reservoir of poststructural critiques on educational leadership. The findings of my research support that thinking with feminist poststructural theory, specifically performativity, supports this freedom by offering educational leaders a way to move out of humanist truths, binaries, and common sense understandings of the world that keeps us confined to narrow and rigid gendered and racialized subject positions.

Women leaders are confined to dichotomous conceptions of gender, which keep women on the wrong side of the binary and at the center of the problem in leadership. While advances have been made for women in leadership in higher education, gender equity remains elusive and still far out of reach (Kelan, 2020; Storberg-Walker & Haber-Curran, 2017). Gender as a category and leadership as a practice are both exclusionary and normalizing, so they require interrogation to loosen the parameters of who and what counts and is recognized; however we must take care not to overthrow the system so completely that we arrive at “an equally problematic quantification of gender” (Butler, 2004, p. 43). It is my hope that this research supports the rethinking, redefining, and reconfiguration of social norms and discursive conditions of higher education leadership and shows what is made possible through local acts of resistance. Resistance in our everyday lives opens up of the category of leader with the promise of massifying possibilities for women’s knowing, being, and doing as leaders.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

How Women Negotiate the Ongoing Constitution of Subjectivity Within Leadership Discourse in Higher Education

Dear Participant:

Kate Johnson, a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at Appalachian State University, is conducting a research study to explore the experiences of women on pathways to leadership in higher education. I am writing to invite you to participate in this study.

Introduction and Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how women experience leadership discourse in the context of higher education. This poststructural feminist qualitative study will explore how women on pathways to leadership in higher education participate in leadership discourses while negotiating the ongoing constitution of their subjectivity. In particular, this study will examine how women take up and use various aspects of leadership discourse, then investigate and interrogate the conditions of higher education that enable various practices and produce possibilities for subject formation. Participants will offer insight into how power operates, the conditions that support it, and subsequent subject positions it produces for women.

Description of Study Procedures
As a participant, you will be asked to participate in up to two individual, private interviews lasting 60-90 minutes. These interviews will be audio recorded. All interviews and other materials will remain confidential and will be stored on a secured computer in a locked office.

Risks of Participation
It is not expected that you will experience any discomfort as a result of your participation in this study. Under no circumstances will your interview data be shared with anyone without your explicit permission. The results of this research project may be presented at academic conferences, professional meetings, or in publications; however, your identity will not be disclosed. Presentations and manuscripts typically contain participants' quotes, but participants will not be identified. Your involvement in the research project is entirely voluntary. You have the right to discontinue participation at any time.

Benefits of Participation
The findings of this study have the potential to provide a fuller understanding of women's experiences on pathways to leadership in higher education and consequently offer opportunities for the revisioning of inequitable policies, practices, attitudes, and programs that undergird leadership discourse in higher education.

Contact Persons
If you have any questions concerning this research project, please contact Kate Johnson (Principal Investigator) at (860) 510-3781 or johnsonka1@appstate.edu or Alecia Jackson, Ph.D. (Faculty Advisor) at (828) 262-6037 or jacksonay@appstate.edu. Thank you for your time and consideration!

Appendix B: IRB Exemption

IRB Exemption
IRB irb@appstate.edu via adminliveunc.onmicrosoft.com
Wed, Mar 6, 2019, 3:21 PM
to: johnsonaka1@appstate.edu
cc: jacksonay@appstate.edu

To**:** Kate Johnson

Doctoral Program ACT Volunteer Program

CAMPUS EMAIL

From: Robin Tyndall, IRB Administrator

Date: 3/06/2019

RE: Notice of IRB Exemption

STUDY #: 19-0055

STUDY TITLE: How Women Negotiate the Ongoing Constitution of Subjectivity within Leadership Discourse in Higher Education

Exemption Category: 2. Survey, interview, public observation

This study involves minimal risk and meets the exemption category cited above. In accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) and University policy and procedures, the research activities described in the study materials are exempt from further IRB review.

All approved documents for this study, including consent forms, can be accessed by logging into IRBIS. Use the following directions to access approved study documents.

1. Log into IRBIS
2. Click "Home" on the top toolbar
3. Click "My Studies" under the heading "All My Studies"
4. Click on the IRB number for the study you wish to access
5. Click on the reference ID for your submission
6. Click "Attachments" on the left-hand side toolbar
7. Click on the appropriate documents you wish to download

Study Change: Proposed changes to the study require further IRB review when the change involves:

- an external funding source,
- the potential for a conflict of interest,
- a change in location of the research (i.e., country, school system, off site location),
- the contact information for the Principal Investigator,
- the addition of non-Appalachian State University faculty, staff, or students to the research team, or

- the basis for the determination of exemption. Standard Operating Procedure #9 cites examples of changes, which affect the basis of the determination of exemption on page 3.

Investigator Responsibilities: All individuals engaged in research with human participants are responsible for compliance with University policies and procedures, and IRB determinations. The Principal Investigator (PI), or Faculty Advisor if the PI is a student, is ultimately responsible for ensuring the protection of research participants; conducting sound ethical research that complies with federal regulations, University policy and procedures; and maintaining study records. The PI should review the IRB's list of PI responsibilities.

To Close the Study: When research procedures with human participants are completed, please send the Request for Closure of IRB Review form to irb@appstate.edu.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Protections Office at (828) 262-2692 (Robin).

Best wishes with your research.

Websites for Information Cited Above

Note: If the link does not work, please copy and paste into your browser, or visit https://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects.

1. Standard Operating Procedure #9:

   http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/sites/researchprotections.appstate.edu/files/IRB20SOP920Exempt%20Review%20Determination.pdf

2. PI responsibilities:

http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/sites/researchprotections.appstate.edu/files/PI20Responsibilities.pdf

3. IRB forms: http://researchprotections.appstate.edu/human-subjects/irb-forms

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Appalachian STATE UNIVERSITY

How Women Negotiate the Ongoing Constitution of Subjectivity within Leadership Discourse in Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Kate Johnson
Department: Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership
Contact Information: johnsonka1@appstate.edu
Faculty Advisor: Alecia Jackson, Ph.D.
Faculty Contact: jacksonay@appstate.edu
IRB Number: 19-0055

Consent to Participate in Research
Information to Consider About this Research

I agree to participate in a study that will explore the experiences of women on pathways to leadership in the context of higher education. I understand that I will be one of eight participants. I understand this study will ask me to participate in up to two individual, private interview sessions (60-90 minutes) which will be scheduled at a date and time convenient for me. I understand that the individual interview sessions will include questions about my experiences as a woman in higher education.

I understand that there are no foreseeable risks associated with my participation in this study. I also know that this study may help provide a fuller understanding of women's experiences on pathways to leadership in higher education and consequently offer opportunities for the revisioning of inequitable policies, practices, attitudes, and programs that undergird leadership discourse in higher education.

I understand that my interview will be audio recorded.

I give Kate Johnson ownership of the audio from the interview(s) she conducts with me and understand that tapes and transcripts will be kept in Kate's possession that will be securely protected by a lockable desk and a password-protected computer. I understand that de-identified information or quotations from tapes might be used for future publications beyond this research project and all identifying information will be removed and each participant will be given a pseudonym. I understand I will not receive compensation for the interview.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I can end it at any time without consequence. I also understand that I do not have to answer any questions and can end the interview at any time with no consequences. Furthermore, I understand that my responses and data will not be shared with my employer.

If questions arise about this research study, I understand that I may contact Kate Johnson (Principal Investigator) at (860) 510-3781 or email johnsonka1@appstate.edu. If I wish to speak with the faculty advisor associated with this research, I may contact Alecia Jackson, Ph.D. at (828) 262-6037 or email her at jacksonay@appstate.edu. I may also contact the

Appalachian Institutional Review Board Administrator at (828) 262-2692, through email at irb@appstate.edu, or via mail at Appalachian State University, Office of Research Protections, IRB Administrator, Boone, NC 28608.

By signing below, I acknowledge I am at least 18 years old, have read the above information regarding confidentiality, and agree to continue to the research procedures as a participant.

I agree to participate in the study.

_____
Participant's Name (PRINT)

_____ _____
Signature Date

Appendix D: Participant Background and Demographic Information Form

Participant Background and Demographic Information Form

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study titled "How Women Negotiate the Ongoing Constitution of Subjectivity within Leadership Discourse in Higher Education." As stated in the consent form, your participation is voluntary and confidential. To assist with this research project, please answer the background and demographic questions below.

Name: _____

Pronoun: she/her he/him they/them ze/zir I prefer not to use pronouns

Email: _____ Phone #: _____

Institution: _____

Department, Division, or Unit: _____

Title/Position: _____

How many years have you worked in higher education? _____

How many years have you worked at your current institution? _____

Highest level of educational degree completed: _____

What is your racial identity? _____

What is your gender identity? _____

What is your sexual orientation? _____

What is your relationship status? Single Partnered Married Other: _____

Do you have children? YES NO Other: _____

How old are you?
_____

Are you a first generation college student? YES NO

What is your socioeconomic status (SES)? _____

What is your religious or spiritual identity? _____

[IRB number: 19-0055]

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Primary Investigator: Kate Johnson, Doctoral Student
Purpose Statement: In this qualitative study, I will interview women on pathways to leadership in higher education in order to explore how women have navigated their leadership journey while negotiating external influences and messages from the world around them.

Interview Guide

1. Take me back to the beginning of your career as a new professional in higher education, what stood out to you? (Including decisions, people, circumstances, etc.).
2. What was influential in your decision to pursue a career in higher education?
3. What tensions have you experienced between the culture of your upbringing and the culture of higher education?
4. What are the most rewarding aspects of your work in higher education? What are the most frustrating aspects of your work in higher education? How do these correspond (or not) to your personal life?
5. What does it mean to be a “good professional” or “good leader” in your department? How well have you “fit in” to this definition? How has your understanding of what this means changed over time?
6. Are there parts of yourself you put away, keep hidden, or change in your decision-making or general work context?
7. Can you share a time you reframed something you had to say to make it more palatable for others in a professional setting?
8. Tell me about a time that your ability to lead was affected by someone else’s leadership (style/approach/goals)?
9. What happens when you register complaints about issues of inequity (potentially without any hard evidence)? To whom do you go? What recourse is available to you?

10. What do you want others in higher education to know about your experiences as a woman/leader in higher education?
11. Is higher education what you expected? If not, how has it differed? Did you know what to expect?
12. Is there anything I should have asked, but did not?

Vita

Kate Ann Johnson was born in Hartford, Connecticut to William “Bill” and Joanne “Joanie” Murray Johnson. She joined a large Irish family with familial roots in Hartford’s south end and in Manchester, New Hampshire. As a young child, she moved to Wethersfield, Connecticut where she developed a love of reading as well as a passion for learning about the world around her.

Kate earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Human Development and Family Studies with a minor in Education and a concentration in Early Childhood Development from the University of New Hampshire in Durham, New Hampshire. Her career goals shifted from K-12 to higher education in her senior year when Kate became a Resident Assistant. This position led to a graduate assistant position at the Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri where she earned a Master of Science degree in Education.

Kate has over 20 years of experience working in higher education in the functional areas of residential education, student conduct, community engagement and development, international and domestic service learning, and student leadership development. Kate’s career in higher education led her to professional growth opportunities in Tennessee, Colorado, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and North Carolina, where she has resided for fourteen years.

Kate currently resides in Asheville, North Carolina and works at the University of North Carolina Asheville in the role of Director of the Key Center for Community Engaged Learning.