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Quantitative data gathered in numerous studies shows women in higher education are not advancing in their careers as frequently or to the same levels as men (Gerdes, 2006; Maschke, 1997; Perry, 2000; West et al., 2006; Wilson, 2004). Women remain in high numbers in mid-level positions as either assistant/associate faculty members or staff. While gains have been made in the number of women who hold upper level leadership positions (Bornstein, 2007; June, 2007), these changes are not reflected at all institutions or for women of all races and ethnicities.

The purpose of this study is to share the personal stories of the career trajectory for women in mid-level management positions at one higher education institution in order to better understand their career path; motivation or road blocks which compelled them to remain at a mid-level management level; unwritten rules around expectations for women as employees in higher education and finally, personal stories of career growth as they relate to their ability to advance to senior-level leadership positions. I interviewed ten different women regarding their career paths and how they thought and felt about the journey to their current job; including any advice, joys, regrets, or nuggets of wisdom they wished to share with women on a similar journey.

Questions involving the lack of women in leadership positions in higher education arise over and over again on college and university campuses and in current literature but remain unanswered.

Before change occurs that will eventually lead to gender and racial equity in higher education, personal descriptions of women's experiences as mid-level managers and insights – in their own words – are needed to gain understanding and context in regard to the questions above while helping to explain the complications inherent in progressing to senior-level leadership positions as perceived by those who face them.

Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: First, I will look at the broader question of, “How do lived experiences of women in mid-level management positions shape their careers in higher education”? Then I will focus on answering:

1. “Why do women make a personal choice not to pursue senior-level leadership positions?”;
2. “Do some women make a deliberate choice not to move into higher level positions?” and;
3. “What is it about institutional culture in higher education that makes it so hard for women who desire a higher-level role to move into senior-level leadership positions?”

WOMEN MID-LEVEL MANAGERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION:  
A STUDY OF INEQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Jennifer E. Jones-Goodwin

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Approved by

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Committee Chair

This dissertation is dedicated to my father Wayne C. Jones, the perpetual student,  
and to all of my family and friends who have supported and encouraged me  
along my journey in pursuit of higher education.  
Thank you for never giving up on me and always cheering me on!

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by JENNIFER E. JONES-GOODWIN has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Committee Members \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Life events force each of us to make decisions regarding what we value in our lives. But, our choices are constrained beyond just making decisions on what we value. Social and institutional structures heavily shape our decision-making, regardless of our values. Only by gathering thick, rich descriptions of events or turning points women mid-level managers have experienced in their professional lives and are willing to share with others can we gain insight as to the meaning women make of advancement to higher level leadership positions. Some of the data, which can only be gained from personal stories, include the value women place on family and career, beliefs regarding the importance of personal commitment to the local community, how individuals feel about the lack of female mentors in higher education leadership roles, and what meanings are made of experiences when working in organizations which are inherently biased. Collecting, listening to, and studying the personal stories of women mid-level managers in higher education will allow for the collection of this type of information.

The terms manager and leader are used throughout this paper. I believe that the two are distinct formal roles when it comes to the positions and levels of staff and faculty on campuses of higher education. Individuals can have the formal title and responsibilities as designated by the institutional office of human resources which denotes the position in which they work one of manager or leader. This distinction is

important when considering equity and balance between women and men who hold positions designated as those of a leader by individuals in higher education. “ It is generally held with little disagreement that leadership is a process for influencing decisions and guiding people, whereas management involves the implementation and administration of institutional decisions and policies” (Taylor & Machado, 2006, p. 137). However, I also believe managers can be leaders when speaking about the roles from an informal standpoint. “The symbiotic interdependence of leadership and management in higher education is an important element in understanding either concept (Clark 1998; Millett 1989; Peterson & Mets 1987). Each depends on the other for support and to provide the institution with the multifaceted decision-making, policy development and administrative roles necessary to function effectively” (Taylor & Machado, 2006, p. 138).

Women in higher education, regardless of their role or level, are seen as the “doers”, or managers who meet the goals and plans set by their male “leaders”. Men in higher education are viewed as the visionaries who plan strategically and solve problems, or the “leaders.”

Management is often seen as a relatively structured process for achieving organizational objectives within the parameters of prescribed roles. Leadership is more often viewed as an interpersonal process of inspiring and motivating followers with a focus on long-term institutional aspirations and changes” (Taylor & Machado, 2006, p. 142).

Longman and Madsen (2014) point out,

Some leaders are born female. Despite this fact, many women who could develop into highly talented leaders find their potential dampened by an array of internal

and external factors, and those constraints are evident even in the field of higher education (p. ix).

They go on to point out,

Reasons for the significant under representation of women in senior-level leadership roles across all sectors are complex and multifaceted...Specifically related to the experiences of women in higher education, many of the factors emerge from ‘the male norms that define the academy [which] can be daunting’ (p. ix).

In fact, Longman and Madsen offer a wonderful illustration of the cultural norms which influence the roles individuals gravitate towards as an explanation for why women tend to lean towards managerial or “hands-on” types of positions and men towards leadership positions by comparing women to cheerleaders and men to quarterbacks, stating, “The implications of these deeply ingrained and societally recognized roles are profound” (p. x).

### **Statement of the Problem**

#### **Gender Inequity in Higher Education**

Gender inequity exists on campuses of higher education across the United States. This inequity is especially noticeable when studying the minimal number of women who hold senior-level leadership positions. Johnson, Flood, Ross and Wilder (1991) observe,

The advancement of women into leadership positions is a complex and diverse process in higher education. It is an accurate assessment that women have made advances in the academy, but they have not climbed career ladders with the same speed or ease as their male counterparts (p. 164).

Longman and Madsen (2014) also indicate,

Women are the majority in the leadership pipeline yet are vastly underrepresented in leadership positions...a major contributor to the lack of women in positional leadership roles is due to continued inherent biases against women as leaders (p. 9).

Several authors agree that while women continue to make gains in equity in higher education, the rate at which they are advancing through the ranks and the number of women in upper level leadership positions remains well below that of their male counterparts (Longman, 2014; Morahan et al., 2001; Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001; Oeltjen, 1991; Perry, 2000; West et al., 2006). In fact Johnson et al. (1991) point out women,

...are in the lower-level positions of lecturer and assistant professor and only account for 24% of the full professor positions. In addition, women only make up approximately 22% of [higher education] presidents (p. 164).

In 2019 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) emeritus biology professor Nancy Hopkins realized her work to bring gender equity to the campus had not progressed as far as female faculty members hoped, “[Hopkins’] efforts led to drastic changes at MIT and other universities, but Hopkins said her institution is still plagued by gender bias” (Gluckman, 2019, p. 1). The goal was to ensure MIT was a better place for women to work by providing equitable salaries, lab space, and other support. Hopkins started by studying inequity in the early 1990’s within her own college, “Hopkins’s work on equity started when she realized that some of the obstacles she had faced when she tried to advance her career were not unique to her: They were shared by other women in the sciences at MIT” (2019, p. 3). When it became clear in 2019 that sexism existed at

the highest levels for faculty at MIT, Hopkins and her colleagues were devastated, The fact that this situation was even thinkable at MIT is profoundly disturbing, and is symptomatic of broader, more structural problems, involving gender and race, in MIT's culture...It is time for fundamental change (2019, p. 3).

Perry's (2000) study of focus group discussion supported the idea that women face roadblocks in progressing to leadership positions in higher education due to organizational structure. Some unsurprising reasons why women may not advance to leadership positions included the following: Women do not progress along what is considered by most to be a traditional academic [faculty] career path; they take time for family and/or to have children; they choose to become center or institute directors instead of department chairs and/or deans (p. 2). Women in this study viewed leadership positions as being housed in isolated, unsupportive environments where they are not rewarded or recognized the same way as their male counterparts and are excluded from the informal networks of "intellectual leadership" more often than men (pp. 2-3). Perry's study focuses solely on structural reasons women don't advance to senior-level leadership positions. What it doesn't report are individual women's stories, thoughts and feelings for a more in-depth look as to why women do not progress to higher levels of management. What drives women to choose nontraditional academic paths, director positions and family over career? Is it cultural, societal pressures, or personal choice? Are there women who resent the decisions they make in their career when a choice is made to focus on family, not to fight unwritten rules or join biased informal networks? Answers to these types of questions won't be found in quantitative data. We must turn to

personal stories for understanding of choices which affect career trajectory and advancement.

As a female who holds a mid-level management position in higher education, I can attest that hearing stories of why career choices were made and advancement has not occurred from my counterparts is imperative as they are the ones who can best enlighten all of us as to the subjective reasons' women are not progressing past mid-level management positions in higher education. We need to learn more about the lack of women leaders in higher education by hearing from women who are fully capable of being leaders, but who choose not to or have not been able to, advance past a mid-level management level.

### **Need for the Study**

In order for a cultural shift to occur, we need to hear individual stories regarding personal experiences of women in mid-level management positions. Why do so many not progress beyond this level? Is it by choice? Do life circumstances - which may or may not be determined by gender – play a role? Were decisions regarding career made deliberately or did circumstances dictate career path? Did family influences play a part in career decisions? This type of information can only be obtained through life stories told by women who hold or have held mid-level management positions in higher education. They, and possibly close family members, know why choices were made during their career which affected their career path. Knowing if the choice to become and/or remain in mid-level management was intentionally made is something which can be learned from an individual's personal life story, which is made up of their experiences. Listening to the



stories of women in higher education regarding what happens to individuals in mid-level positions to deter them from actively seeking and being promoted to advanced positions in higher education is of utmost importance if change in who is leading colleges and universities is to occur.

### **Career Aspiration/Motivation**

Cejda (2008) gave us much needed qualitative data in regards to what motivates women who work in higher education to gain leadership positions when she conducted interviews with six women chief academic officers at community colleges. A key finding that emerged from Cejda's study was the realization the women interviewed did not begin their careers with an aspiration to become the top leader of an organization or with the goal of gaining the personal power inherent to the position. I call out this revelation as it's imperative to understanding why women make some of the decisions in their career trajectory. As Cejda points out, women leaders tend to choose to focus their careers on how they can make a difference in the lives of others at, or connected to, their institution. Cejda reasons this is what ultimately led to the subjects in her study to obtain the position of president (p. 183). Cejda's argument seems likely as I reflect on the experiences of most of the women I know who work in mid-level management positions across higher education. These women value a career that is personally meaningful over one in which they will gain recognizable status and power. If this holds true for a majority of women in higher education, then women may not be moving from mid-level management simply because they find personal benefit in this level position and have no desire to deal with the power struggles, stress, and ongoing political and social games

which tend to be a large part of senior-level leadership. In fact, in an interview of female presidents, Elizabeth Meade, president of Cedar Crest College shared (Silver, 2018)

It's safe to say that there is still a proverbial boys' club lurking in each of America's cities and towns. Sometimes, they exist through connections, networks, and an unofficial shorthand. Other times, the boys' clubs present themselves in physical form as places where a small number of mostly white businessmen golf together, drink together, and do business together, often all at the same time. I have to consciously interject myself into their conversations at public events and find ways to get time with them one-on-one to achieve what the male presidents in my area can usually achieve with less effort. I must often work twice as hard to overcome the natural marginalization not just of women in leadership positions, but also of my institution, a small women's college, in its place amid larger co-ed institutions and some of the sports-powerhouse universities throughout my region. Indeed, the biggest challenge I face as a woman college president is needing to wrench open doors that might open automatically for my male counterparts. But I do this, and I make progress — as I lead, make myself heard, and assert myself in pursuing my goals (p. 5).

How many women are willing to put themselves in the position president Meade describes above? Not only is she fighting a bias towards women in leadership but doing so in what she describes as a boys' club. Silver (2018) shares that Roslyn Artis, President of Benedict College adds,

Among the many challenges associated with being a female college leader, perhaps the greatest is the additional effort required to demonstrate competence and engender the support and confidence of the campus and community. While qualified by virtue of our credentials, experiences, and achievements, few women are fortunate enough to come into office with the presumption that they are highly skilled and competent to lead in the complex environment that is a college or university. Women often have to prove themselves in multiple ways before the scrutiny subsides (p. 5).

If women have leadership abilities which could assist institutions in becoming higher functioning, more equitable environments, like those interviewed in both Silver

(2018) and Cejda's (2008) studies, it is a shame organizational structure and culture in higher education are such that they dissuade women with similar abilities from moving up the career ladder. Susan Herbst, president of the University of Connecticut stated, "...all leaders need to actively seek talented women for top jobs. Not simply because they are women, but because they are highly qualified and happen to be women. It is the single most important way to fundamentally alter a university" (Silver, 2018, p. 7).

### **Institutional Organizational Structure**

Thinking about how and why women are tapped or choose to become leaders naturally lends itself to thinking about how much women's career paths are impacted by the organizational structure of institutions of higher education. What types of "unwritten rules" and structural barriers really exist for women pursuing positions in leadership in higher education? Ana Mari Cauce, president at the University of Washington, states, "My path to leadership was almost accidental — the result of saying "yes" when administrative opportunities presented themselves. In almost every case, these opportunities arose when the people — all men, incidentally — in those roles departed unexpectedly" (Silver, 2018, p. 8).

When considering organizational structure as a barrier, the lack of women who serve in the traditional academic roles which lead to presidency is clear. "The significance of the absence of ladders for women within higher education administration is revealed by the statistic that approximately 70 percent of college presidents have been faculty members. Although 44 percent of all full-time faculty are women, only one-third

are in tenured or tenure-line positions; a mere quarter of all full professors are women” (Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers, 2017, p. 8).

Could organizational structure, and the inherent unwritten rules of promotion, behavior and the right of passage associated with achieving tenure combine to keep women from seeking leadership positions? Or are there other factors at play? Judith White (2005) used her professional position as a faculty member on the Duke University campus to study why a greater number of women on that campus do not progress past mid-level management positions. She points out that women have been working in the academe as faculty members for many years, but in the positions of instructor, lecturer and “non-rank” faculty, which are viewed as less prestigious and are lower paying (p. 26). White poses the overarching questions: What is happening within the academic ranks to cause the number of women in lower rank positions to increase and why are women choosing to remain in lower paying and less powerful faculty positions (2005, pp. 22-23)? What she finds are all the small inequities in higher education have built up over time to create an institutional culture, leading to formal and informal organizational structures, where women feel powerless to move into upper level faculty or leadership positions. Her arguments are based on the idea cultural bias exists towards the types of work women are expected to do, the result being the creation of social patterns regarding what jobs it is anticipated women should hold within an organization.

White (2005) explains that these thought patterns become engrained traditions in the organizational structure and are not easily changed. She also suggests that in order to combat these bias researchers need to develop studies to collect “richer data” from the

diverse pool of women in mid-level management and non-regular-rank faculty positions. The qualitative data collected can then be used to influence those in power to realize campuses are not perceived as equitable environments by women and minorities (pp. 26-27). I hope to add to the richer data by sharing the personal stories and thoughts of ten women in mid-level management positions in higher education. Hopefully, if others join me, we can begin a shift in the culture of higher education and ultimately make a dent in the inequitable gendered organizational culture that currently exists.

Should we consider more than just individual personal decisions when thinking about the number of women in mid-level management leadership positions? With only 30 percent of college and university presidents in the United States who are women (Silver, 2018), are these individuals appointed accidentally as in the case of the University of Washington president? Or do they make a conscious choice not to fight the battle for gender equity and against bigotry and systematic suppression and move into senior-level leadership positions?

Years after I earned a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley and held senior cabinet level positions, I still had colleagues question my qualifications. Perhaps even more shocking were the racist and sexist statements that some work peers felt entitled to say, some directly to me. Since my appointment as president, I have been called many things, including a 'genetically inferior weed' (Silver, 2018, p. 4) said Judy K. Sakaki, president of Sonoma State University.

How many women make a choice not to move into higher level positions simply because they have no desire to fight cultural and organizational stigmas, racist attitudes

and/or possible harassment? For answers to these questions' honest narratives from women in higher education need to be collected and shared.

An analysis of organizational culture and unwritten rules should be taken into consideration along with individual stories when considering a cultural shift in higher education for women's career trajectory and growth. Each of the themes discussed above, gender/cultural inequity, career trajectory and motivation and institutional organization, impacts a woman's career path. When taken together they can be seen as insurmountable road blocks to a career as a senior leader in higher education.

Ultimately, as a mid-level manager who sat in numerous meetings in a room full of male leaders as the only women present, I began to wonder why there weren't more women at the table. I had many female colleagues and managers who could have contributed to the discussions I was a part of but they weren't invited to attend. I was present because of the role I played in many of the divisions' events, communications, relationships and internal strategies. Many times, I acted as a glorified note taker during meetings. I was at the table in the physical sense; however, my presence was ignored unless there was a specific question around a task I was assigned or an initiative/event of which I was in charge. Women worked all around me handling important tasks, leading teams, and collaborating with one another on a regular basis. Where were they during these high-level discussions? There were very few female leaders on the campuses where I worked who held positions of department chair, dean, associate vice president, vice president, or president. I wanted to hear from individuals their stories regarding personal experiences in order to understand why there were so few women in these types

of senior-level positions. Did my colleagues remain in mid-level management positions by choice? Did life circumstances - which may or may not be determined by gender – play a role? Were decisions regarding career made deliberately or did circumstances dictate career path? Did family influences play a part in career decisions? This type of information can only be obtained through life stories told by women who hold or have held mid-level management positions in higher education. They, and possibly close family members, know why choices were made during their career which affected their career path. Knowing if the choice to become and/or remain in mid-level management was one intentionally made is something which can be learned only from an individual's personal life story.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In order to narrow down the focus of my study, I generated a visual map of key concepts in the study of women in mid-level management and leadership positions in higher education. The map helped generate key concepts and questions I wanted to answer through research and participant interviews (Figure 1).

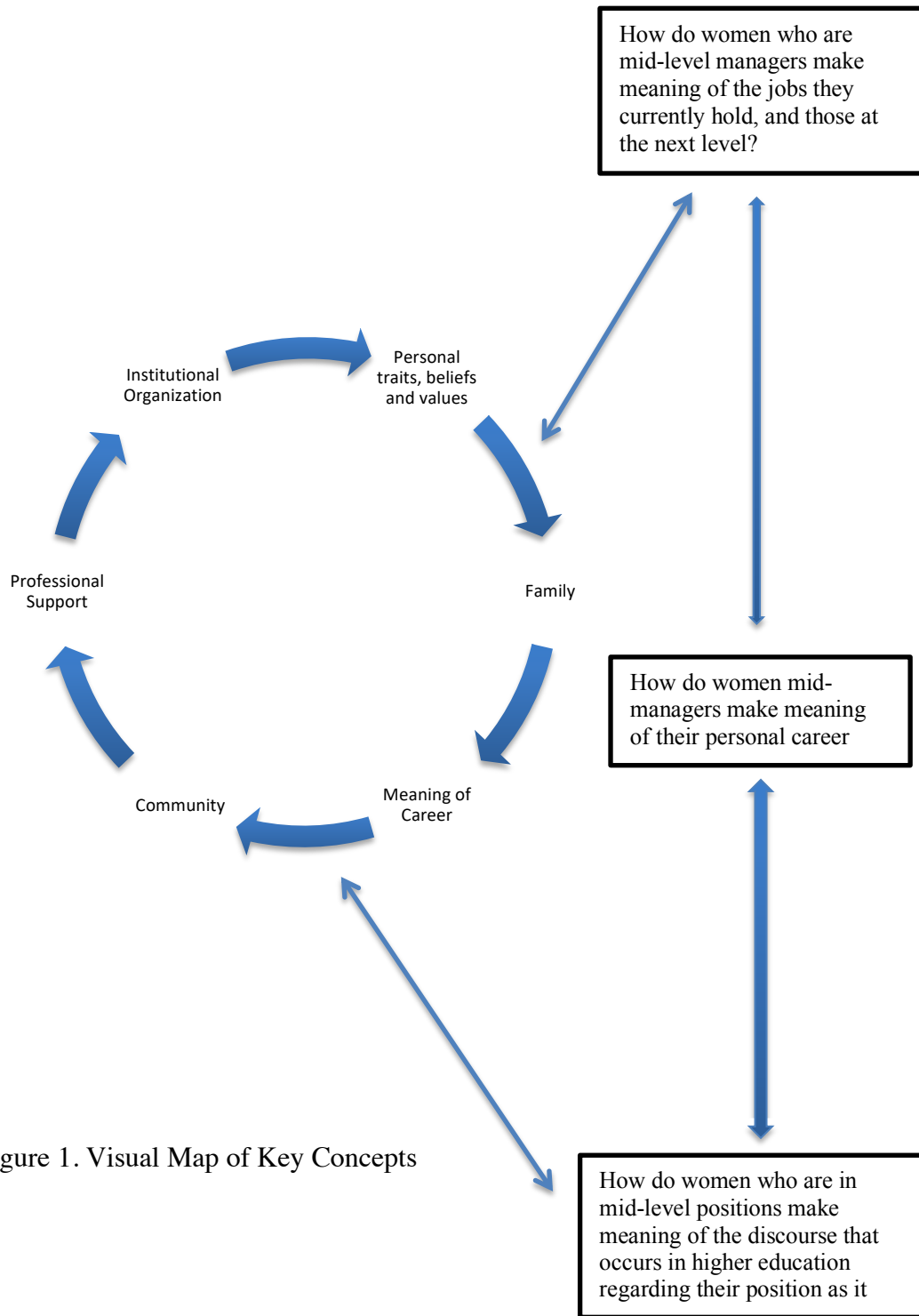


Figure 1. Visual Map of Key Concepts



## Research Questions

As was discussed during the introduction, questions which arise over and over again on college and university campuses, as well as in current literature, but remain unanswered are as follows. First, I will look at the broader question of: “How do lived experiences of 10 women in mid-level management positions shape their careers in higher education”? Then I will focus on answering:

1. “Why do some of these women make a personal choice not to pursue senior-level leadership positions?”;
2. “Do some of these women make a deliberate choice not to move into higher level positions?” and;
3. “What is it about institutional culture in higher education that makes it so hard for these women who desire a higher-level role to move into senior-level leadership positions?”

Interviews were conducted with ten women who are current employees of an institution coded by the Carnegie Classification as “Research 1”. Participants were pulled from the institutions' Human Resources categories-based job classification and/or salary bands which denoted them as “professional staff” and “mid-level managers”. Due to the nature of the study and the fact there was a certain level of trust needed between the interviewer and interviewee, participants were chosen based on relationships formed during my tenure at the institution. I worked at the institution from which the participants were recruited for many years and have a network of colleagues on the campus. My familiarity with the institution and the women allowed me to capture truthful, frank, forthright stories from colleagues willing to share their very personal experiences.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This chapter presents a review of relevant literature including the role of gender and cultural inequity on women's career paths, how career aspiration affects career trajectory, organizational bias, existence of "unwritten rules" and racial/cultural bias, the management styles/attributes of women in leadership positions and a brief look at the stories/career journeys of women in higher education who hold senior-level leadership positions, defined for this study as those in roles with titles above executive director [non-academic departments] or chair [academic departments] such as dean, associate/assistant vice-president/chancellor, vice president/chancellor, or president/chancellor. In order to better understand the stories of the women interviewed, it's important to understand the world in which they work on a daily basis. Through a glimpse into the often-privileged world of higher education, it becomes easier to understand the barriers which exist based on gender and some of the choice's women make.

It became apparent when researching women leaders in higher education that the majority of positions above that of executive director or chair were held by individuals with advanced degrees and career trajectories that took them through the faculty ranks. Emma Whitford (2020) cites a report which looked at the hiring pipeline for the positions of "...presidents and CEOs, provosts and chief academic officers, and chief human

resource officers” (p. 1) from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources which showed, “Nearly two-thirds of presidents and CEOs were hired from an outside higher education institution, while the remaining third were promoted from within a college. A quarter of presidents and CEOs held the same title prior to their current position, 20 percent were formerly provosts and 13 percent were deans. Women's representation in college administrations is growing. More than half of administrators are women, according to the report. But they remain underrepresented at the top of the organizational chart -- they hold less than 40 percent of executive leadership roles (p. 1). As this most recent study shows, the majority of upper level leaders, those with a title above director or chair, come through faculty ranks. Given this fact, there is significant literature around the career trajectory of women through the faculty ranks but not as much around women classified by most institutions as professional staff. “But if you look at the specific positions they [women] occupy, they occupy the lowest-paid administrative positions and the least-senior administrative positions...Rod McDavis, managing principal at AGB Search, expects this to change. He pointed to the growing number of women and people of color in doctorate programs and faculty roles. ‘Those tend to be the grounds [from] which we select our future leaders in higher education,” he said” (p. 2).

A second recent study echoed these findings. “Women presidents are more likely to have served as a CAO/provost or other senior executive in academic affairs. Male presidents are more likely to come from outside higher education or have had a different senior campus executive role than women presidents” (Johnson, 2017, p. 11). This

brings out an interesting point, women who do hold senior-level leadership roles tend to come up through the academic ranks while men may not follow that path. Therefore, if we follow the path which has historically been taken to the highest level leadership positions in higher education by women, specifically president/chancellor, chief academic officer, or vice president, studies show what Johnson (2017) also found, “A woman CAO [chief academic officer] is more likely to have previous CAO experience and to have served as a senior academic officer or other senior executive outside of academic affairs. Male CAOs are more likely to have previously served as an academic dean or other campus executive in academic affairs” (p. 12). As will be shown throughout the review of literature, there are “...intangible systematic barriers that prevent women from obtaining senior-level positions. Despite the number of female gradates available for leadership positions...the data show that women are not ascending to leadership roles, given that they hold a greater share of the entry-level, service, and teaching-only positions than their male counterparts” (Johnson, 2017, p. 4). Consequently, the majority of studies of women leaders in higher education who hold positions above executive director or chair have focused on women faculty as that is the career path for the vast majority of female senior-level leaders in higher education.

### **Gender Inequity in Higher Education**

While the casual observer, students, parents and others who don't work in the academy may not notice the gender gap in higher education, it is clear that one exists.

...despite conservative critics charging that colleges and universities are bastions of liberal progressivism, progress for women in the upper administrative ranks of academia has been just as stagnant. The proportion of women serving as college

and university presidents is at odds with student demographics. According to research conducted by the American Council on Education, women have earned more than half of all baccalaureate degrees awarded since 1981 and half of all doctorates awarded since 2006. While the percentage of female college presidents more than doubled between 1986 and 2006, increasing from 9.5 percent to 23 percent, it increased to just 26.4 percent by 2011. During the most recent five-year period, the proportion has remained essentially unchanged: just one in four presidents are women (Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers, 2017, p. 8).

Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017) also point out female presidents exist in greater numbers in community colleges (pp. 8-9), which are viewed by many in academia as institutions with leaders who hold less power and prestige than those who lead four-year institutions. The authors also cite several studies which have found women are judged on appearance and personality traits when being considered for leadership roles, unlike men who are considered based on their potential to succeed in the job. Both of these issues, the authors argue, are barriers women face in advancing to leadership positions in higher education. Add to this fact, “The absence of leadership opportunities for women at the earliest stages of their careers contributes to what Kate Berheide has called the ‘sticky floor’, miring women in low-paying jobs with limited opportunities for moving sideways or for upward mobility” and there seem to be road blocks for women based solely on gender at every level of their career (Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers, 2017, p. 8). The authors go on to point out the many hidden biases based on gender and societal norms that result in a lack of opportunities for women to progress in their careers. “Societal norms also include the expectation that women leaders will build consensus and focus on both interpersonal relations and work satisfaction. By contrast, the expectation of male leaders is that they will focus on task achievement and performance outcomes”

(Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers, 2017, p. 10). Why aren't women expected to focus on outcomes and achievements when those are the very results for which leaders in higher education are held accountable? To change societal norms and gender biases which exist in higher education is a challenge, to say the least. Women in leadership positions have to work harder than their male colleagues to acquire a senior-level leadership position and once they are in a leadership role, to keep it. Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers argue, "Every one of these biases contributes to demand-side and institutional barriers in the form of sticky floors and glass ceilings that block women's access to high-level male-dominated networks and to women mentors in administrative positions that facilitate advancement to higher education leadership" (p. 11). Change starts with everyone acknowledging barriers based on gender and societal norms exist on every campus and then coming up with ways to ensure more women have the support, networks and policies to overcome them.

In "Bridging the Gap: 16 Years of Academic Leadership Development of Women" Johnson, Flood, Ross and Wilder (2010) described and discussed a leadership development program called BRIDGES, which was designed specifically for women in higher education (p. 164). The program included female participants from both public and private institutions with particular attention paid to ensure women from Historically Black Colleges and Universities were invited to take part. Johnson et al. pointed out by citing various studies that women in higher education are often impeded in their career path to senior leadership. This impediment may be generated from the male model of

leadership that continues to exist; or by institutions organizational structure that leads to women finding it almost impossible to advance to leadership positions.

Johnson et al. (2010) conducted an email survey of graduates of the program in order to, "...gain a sense of the degree to which BRIDGES graduates advanced in the academy" (p. 174). The sample was small (275 emails were sent out) as the program has only been in existence since 1993 and the number of applicants accepted to take part each year is limited; but there was a 20% response rate (p. 174). The results showed 69% of those who responded had moved up the career ladder after participating in BRIDGES and many believed their participation in the program led to promotions (p. 174). After reviewing their own results as well as results of similar studies, Johnson et al. point to the BRIDGES program as a successful way to encourage and assist women to move into upper level administrative and/or leadership positions in higher education (p. 176).

What is interesting about the BRIDGES program is the idea that it is necessary to train women how to be leaders. Where is this type of program for men in higher education? Why was it deemed essential to develop a training program exclusively for women in higher education whose goal is to move into senior-level leadership positions? After reviewing an agenda for the program and talking to a couple of BRIDGES participants, it was obvious the program helps build networks for personal and professional support while training women how to work through the politics, policies, gender bias, and unwritten rules which dominate higher education.

The need for programs like BRIDGES becomes apparent to women working in higher education in mid-level management positions when they try to move into higher

level leadership positions. There is a need to understand the politics in play as well as any unwritten rules which exist on each campus in order to successfully navigate to a senior-level leadership position. In fact, many women view their campus as, "...a place in which the terms of hire, tenure and promotion, salary negotiation, and advancement to leadership positions are based on an anachronistic male breadwinner model. Women are systematically disadvantaged in this male-normed environment because they present a different lived experience" (Ford, 2016, p. 500).

These types of disadvantages for women leads to the question of what is often referred to in the human resources area as access to a "pipeline" of candidates for certain positions. How do institutions identify women who aspire to upper level leadership positions? The larger question becomes do institutions have programs and policies in place to identify and train women who are interested in advancing in their careers or is a lack of interested candidates in the pipeline used as an excuse as to why there are not more women candidates for leadership positions? Gender bias plays a large role in the scenario of the supposed lack of women in the pipeline who are interested in and qualified for leadership roles. In fact, in Ford's (2016) article "Two steps forward, one step back? Strengthening the foundations of women's leadership in higher education" the argument is made that:

Descriptions of the problem are often appropriated as explanations – if only there were more women in the pipeline there would be more women at the top; the pipeline has leaks because women leave or are driven out of the workplace by family obligations; women's careers resemble a labyrinth rather than the traditional ladder acknowledged and rewarded; women are found in greater numbers at the bottom of the pyramid where jobs are more plentiful but more likely part-time with lower wages; the glass ceiling prevents the most talented



women from reaching the top; and the sticky floor keeps the majority of women from ever aspiring to leadership. While there is a resonant truth in each of these descriptions, I argue that overt bias of the type most easily addressed in the past with equal opportunity policy and law has been driven underground and replaced by a more sophisticated form of discrimination expressed today in normative institutional rules (Ford, 2016, p. 501)

In fact, many times gender bias and the supposed pipeline issue are pointed to when answering questions regarding the lack of female leaders at the very top positions in higher education of president, chancellor and board of trustee chair. Johnson (2017) pointed to the fact that while the number of women presidents has increased over the years to 30%, “Women presidents are less likely to be married, less likely to have children, and more likely to have altered their career to care for dependent, spouse/partner, or parent” (p. 11), pointing to choices these leaders made which may keep some women from entering the pipeline of candidates for senior-level leadership positions. She also argued females at the highest leadership levels have had to fight to be considered for these positions, even while many hold higher degrees and more years of experience working in higher education than their male colleagues.

Johnson (2017) also reported women are outnumbered two to one on governing boards making up only 30% of the membership (p. 13). As those in higher education are very aware, governing boards drive policy and hiring decisions for upper level leadership roles. If women are underrepresented on governing boards, then not only do their female colleagues in higher education face a tougher struggle to advance to positions of power than their male counterparts, but they also have fewer female advocates to assist in changing the higher education policies and culture. Johnson provided action steps for

governing boards and senior staff who wish to “...identify, support, and advance women” into senior leadership positions including the need to diversify search committees; consider data on the status of female leaders in higher education; ensure diverse candidate pools; look beyond the typical candidate; look beyond tenured applicants; and more (p. 16).

Looking beyond gender bias as one of the foremost reasons women are not advancing to upper-level leadership positions in higher education, as a female who has held mid-level management positions in that world, I can attest that hearing stories of why career choices were made and advancement has not occurred from my counterparts is imperative as they are the ones who can best enlighten all of us as to the reasons women are not progressing past mid-level management positions in higher education. We need to learn more about the lack of women leaders in higher education by hearing from women who are fully capable of being leaders, but who choose not to or have not been able to, advance past a mid-level management level.

### **Career Aspiration/Motivation**

In “Their Own Words: Women Chief Academic Officers Discuss the Community College and Their Career Experiences”, Cejda (2008) conducted interviews with six women chief academic officers who discussed the motivations and challenges of obtaining a top executive position in higher education. These women gave examples of what motivated them to become leaders, the personal skills and abilities which are needed to be successful in this type of career as well as recommendations for aspiring female leaders.

Cejda (2008) points to the fact that community colleges have seen an increase in women leaders with "...53% of the senior student affairs officers and 42% of the chief academic officers at community colleges" (p. 171) self-identifying as female. He chose to interview staff at the level of chief academic officer as this group is one that most often progresses to top level leadership positions, especially that of president. He also states that one by-product of the study could be answers to the question of why some women are choosing not to move into the office of president.

Cejda (2008) cites other studies focused on female community college presidents throughout the article in order to reinforce his arguments. What he found especially interesting were the women interviewed who pointed to successful career paths and attributed that success to completion of doctoral degrees, networking, strong relationships with other faculty, mentors, having a wide variety of experiences in higher education on which to draw knowledge and their access to professional development (p. 173). He conducted an interpretive study using data collected in interviews with six women chief academic officers employed by different community colleges located across the United States. The women share 59 years of experience in administration in community colleges. The interviews consisted of five set questions followed by follow-up questions. Responses to the questions were coded using Biklen and Bogdan (1997) coding families.

Data from Cejda's (2008) interviews show women chose to remain in the community college environment for the majority of their careers, and reported their contentment and desire to remain in a two-year college (p. 176). Another outcome, which appears to mirror other studies Cejda reviewed, was that the women did not begin

their time in the community college with the goal of obtaining leadership positions. The respondents also pointed out that the two-year institutional environment was conducive to women moving upward in the administrative ranks. A wide variety of experiences through the academy were noted as necessary for advancement to upper level administrative positions. Also needed was a good understanding of organizational structure and culture. Having the skills to communicate with a wide range of individuals from varying backgrounds was also viewed as imperative. One of the most important discoveries Cejda made was that the women interviewed did not aspire to move into the role of president of an institution. They truly enjoyed the positions they held because they felt as if they were making a difference in the lives of others on campus (p. 183).

Cejda's (2008) study has a wealth of relevant information as it indicates women at the top level of leadership many times don't begin their career aspiring to hold that position. In fact, many in this study progressed through the ranks to the level of president almost by happenstance. What is most apparent from each of the interviewees is the lack of planning and aspiration to hold a senior-level leadership position. Why is that the case? Why do women gravitate towards roles where they think they can make the most difference in the lives of others rather than beginning their careers with a goal of advancing to top leadership positions? This may not be true for all women, but from various studies cited throughout this study, it seems to be the norm for the vast majority of women who work in higher education.

In fact, Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017) go so far as to argue women are held to a different standard than men in terms of career progression. "It is usually an

accumulation of small and large incidents that marginalize female administrators. They call this phenomenon the ‘snow-woman effect,’ observing that ‘the layers of missed opportunity, family obligations, and small and large slights build up over the years, slowing their [women’s] career progress compared with men’” (p. 9). This seems to indicate women in higher education not only begin their careers with no aspiration to move into leadership but through lived experiences and gender/organizational bias are also not encouraged to pursue opportunities which lead to senior-level leadership positions.

Luna and Medina (2006) looked at the issue of women advancing in their careers to leadership positions based on the type of institution in which the women worked. What they found is not surprising. Their study showed women leaders in the most competitive higher education environments are not moving into senior-level leadership positions at the same rate as their counterparts. The authors cited articles reporting that an increase in top female administrators was found mostly in public colleges, although not in research and doctoral institutions, with significant growth in community colleges. The study consisted of interviews with 12 women from two large public universities who moved back to faculty positions from mid-career/management administrative leadership. These women held varying roles such as department chair, director, and associate dean for an average length of 8 years (p. 6). The researchers understood their own bias and concentrated on understanding the personal stories of the women they interviewed and the need “...to listen to the voice of experience” (p. 6). The women interviewed were not given exit interviews by their institutions when they moved from administration back to

faculty rank, a point on which the researchers reflect several times throughout the paper as this limited many individuals from sharing with both human resources and senior-level administrators at the institution their personal stories of lived experiences and explaining why they made a choice to move out of leadership positions.

What Luna and Medina (2006) found was that the women they interviewed felt their service, loyalty and work at the institution went unrecognized, and their work was unappreciated, which led to disenchantment with the institution and with higher education in general. The majority of women in the study were angry and disillusioned with the role of upper level administrator, leading them to move back to lower level leadership positions (pp. 6-10). The type of narrative provided by this study reflects the stories of individuals that numbers in quantitative research have no way of expressing. What is missing from the article is a more complete snapshot of the personal lives of the interviewees, a fact the researchers admit. According to the researchers all of the women interviewed were happy in their faculty roles, although the transitions from administration back to the rank of faculty member was not always smooth, and their stories are seldom, if ever, told or heard by other higher education faculty or staff. I wholeheartedly agree with Ford (2016) who contends, “The entire career trajectory must be re-imagined around essential human needs rather than essentialist models of the gendered workplace....(p. 500).

### **Institutional Organizational Structure**

The studies above lead me to thoughts about the impact policies, procedures and politics, which create the organizational structure of institutions of higher education, have

on women's career paths. Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers (2017) point out, "...the extent to which ostensibly gender-neutral, universally applicable rules regarding hiring, tenure, promotion, salary negotiation, and leadership opportunity are expressions of the gendered university, [are] grounded in the anachronistic model of the male as the primary breadwinner supported by a full-time caregiver at home" (p. 11). The idea that the male in a relationship provides the primary source of income and therefore naturally assumed leadership positions in, and created policies for, higher education supports the theory that organizational structure in higher education was and is built based inherent gender biases. One result of this type of gender bias is that leaders at the highest level of higher education tend to be, "...[a] college or university president [who] is a sixty-one-year-old, married, white male with a doctorate in education. Unlike their male counterparts, 89 percent of whom are married, only 63 percent of women presidents are married; 24 percent, excluding those in religious orders, are either divorced or have never married" (p. 11). Ford (2016) supports Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers' argument that gender bias shapes how organizations function through social and cultural norms, "Though assumed to be essential attributes of an academic career, in fact these normative institutional rules and practices are social constructions that can and must be changed" (Ford, 2016).

J. S. White (2011) asserted in "HERS Institutes: Curriculum for Advancing Women Leaders in Higher Education" that when reviewing data concerning the number of presidents and chancellors in higher education who will retire in the next 10 years, as well as individuals in senior leadership positions, 2011 was the right time to make a change in the make-up of leaders in colleges and universities in the United States (p. 2).

In 2019 with women holding only 30% of higher education presidencies (Johnson, 2017), it is apparent the period White referred to as crucial to develop women and minorities to take on increased levels of administrative leadership in higher education was a missed opportunity. The Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) Institute, which first began in 1976, has a goal of training female faculty and administrators to serve in leadership positions. White's article focuses on how the world of higher education changed over the preceding 10 years and how the institute revamped its' programs in order to meet the need for new pedagogy and program development which addresses the necessity for more women in leadership roles.

The study outlines a proactive approach to training women to take on the responsibilities of leadership positions. Questionnaires consisting of closed and open-ended questions were distributed to 2,887 HERS alumni with a 51% response rate. 88 follow-up telephone calls of survey respondents were also conducted. The data showed that not only were respondents satisfied with the HERS institute but achieved successful career growth following their participation in the program (White, 2011, p. 14). Even more interesting is a study conducted by the HERS board members as they began to revamp the program. The study was conducted with phone surveys of 25 leaders at colleges and universities. The respondents job level was not given. The phone study participants were asked what they considered to be barriers to women advancing in administration in higher education, how women could overcome these barriers, and how the institute could help leaders in education address the barriers (pp. 14-15). These women indicated that:



HERS participation helped them to understand how their positions fit into the larger institutional mission and helped them to increase their credibility and influence on campus. ...70% of alumnae were either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their career progress since attending the HERS program. Even more significant was the credit given to HERS for assisting with career advancement. About 60% of the alumnae indicated that an obstacle had impeded achieving career objectives. Of those who identified an obstacle, almost 60% indicated that the HERS program helped them to address that obstacle. Those in the position of dean, provost, vice president, or president were even more likely to credit the HERS experience with helping them to address barriers to move into senior leadership roles (pp. 14-15).

The HERS (White, 2011) study gave hard data to back what most women in academia already had a gut feeling exists – barriers to career advancement for the majority of women. It also demonstrated the need for support programs which allow women to share how to overcome the barriers in their organizations.

Another interesting part of the HERS (White, 2011) study was the question of why women in mid-level management positions did not advance to senior-level positions. Interviews of 50 mid-level women revealed their belief leadership positions were still viewed as a man’s role and that executive positions remained blocked to women. Respondents also agreed that women still bear the brunt of family responsibility (p. 13). From personal experience, I know many women who made a conscious choice not to advance in their career to a more demanding position, especially one which was viewed as a male established role, as they felt it would require even more demands on their already limited time and energy. Given the majority of the women interviewed in White’s (2011) study responded they were the main care givers for their family unit, not wanting to increase time and energy spent at work makes sense in terms of personal well-being.

White's (2011) study ended with a snapshot of changes and adjustments to the HERS program planned for 2012, as well as discussion of a new initiative to provide women in mid-level positions the skills and knowledge to successfully advance to senior-level leadership positions. What is sad is that it is apparent these programs are still needed in 2019. In a recent online article that is part of a series on female leaders in higher education produced by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Lee Gardner (2019a) points out, "Although academe has a progressive reputation and in the past couple of decades has seen more women assume leadership roles, they're still in the clear minority at the top. Only 30 percent of all college presidents are women, a figure that is bolstered by the portion who are at two-year institutions, where female leaders make up 36 percent, according to the American Council on Education. Recent surveys show women are better represented in the C-suite than in the presidency, but still make up fewer than half the chief academic officers and an even lower proportion of deans (p. 2)".

Figure 2 below supports the perception that even as women have served in the senior-level leadership role of president, the growth of the number of women in those roles has remained slow.

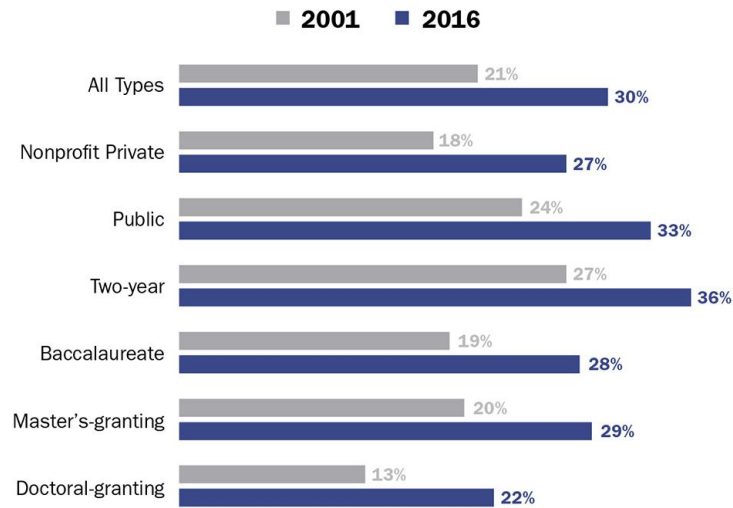


Figure 2. “More Female Presidents, but They're Still Vastly Outnumbered by Men” (Gardner, 2019a, p. 3).

The questions remain, how do institutions encourage women to consider and apply for leadership roles and how can individuals in higher education help affect this type of broad organizational and cultural change? Carmen Twillie Ambar (2019), president of Oberlin College, thinks change will happen if we:

Listen with the intent to understand, not with the intent to respond. This dialogue is required among men and women, and with the institutions to which they belong. It's the only way to gain perspective, and to begin to formulate a collective way forward. Second, it's past time to ask: Do our structures contribute to the perpetuation of these problematic dynamics? From handbooks that are decades old, processes that are unclear, and a common quasi-judicial review process that asks peers to discipline their colleagues, there are obvious deficiencies. Our unwillingness to tackle them has supported the status quo (pp. 4-5).

In his recent article “What Happens When Women Run Colleges?” Gardner (2019b) wonders how women mid-level managers would respond if asked on a regular

basis, “What would higher education look like if male-dominated leadership were not the default reality?” (p. 4). He asserts, “Some colleges led predominantly by women offer hints. The differences illuminate higher education’s lingering structural sexism and illustrate the potential benefits that more gender parity in leadership could bring” (p. 4). An organizational structure fashioned by men decades earlier persists on the majority of college and university campuses in 2019. Changing this structure is a challenge, to say the least, but attainable if women are frequently asked how they think their campuses could begin to enact change and were then supported in their quest for change. However, women need to reflect and realize that change will not occur if they themselves don’t continue to push for it. Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017) remind women in higher education that they cannot rely on others to initiate and enact change. A realistic view of how the academy exists organizationally along with personal self-reflection is needed, “As a means of confronting hidden biases, we also need to validate authentic forms of leadership that involve self-awareness, balanced processing, internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency. Rather than personalizing environmental assumptions, we must understand structural limitations that reflect hidden biases and promote organizational understanding from the viewpoint of structural, rather than internal, dynamics” (p. 12). Women in positions of power can help enact change, but only if they truly recognize and understand their own assumptions and biases around gender and leadership which impact how and when change occurs.

## **Beyond Gender: Struggles of Minority Women**

Minority women in higher education face an even more daunting path to senior-level leadership than white women. In a website post as part of an electronic blog series Keisha Blain (2019), assistant professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh, points out:

All women do not wield power on campus equally. For women of color in academe, power is elusive. The dynamics of power in academe reflect the society in which we live — one that is shaped by hierarchies of class, gender, and race. It is not surprising, then, that whites occupy positions of leadership on college campuses at a far greater rate than their nonwhite counterparts. It is also not surprising that as opportunities for women in leadership expand, white women have been the primary beneficiaries. While more white women hold the powerful position of college president, the number of presidents who are racial and ethnic minorities is disproportionately low — a fact that remains unchanged since 1986.

Rick Seltzer (2017) echoes Blain's (2019) opinion, "...less than a third of college presidents were women in 2016. Less than a fifth were members of a racial or ethnic minority group - and that low portion is driven up significantly by presidents at minority serving institutions, who tend to be members of minority groups in greater than average numbers themselves (p. 1). When looking at the overall number of minority presidents in higher education in 2016, the numbers are dismal. African American presidents rose from 5.9 percent in 2011 to 7.9 percent in 2016; the number of Hispanic, American Indian and Alaska Native presidents remained the same; and the number of Asian-American presidents rose from 1.5 percent to 2.3 percent (pp. 2-4).

When Roslyn Clark Artis, president of Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina, was asked what she thought was the largest barrier facing women of color in

their effort to become a president in higher education, her response was simple – perception. “There is a perception that there are certain characteristics that define women, particularly women of color, that may not necessarily be accurate, but people hold those perceptions. You know, the ‘angry black woman,’ the chip on the shoulder, the always trying to prove something, always has to be right. Those kinds of stereotypes are a challenge” (Gray, 2018, p. 3). How do we fight perception? Alvin Schneider, former chancellor of Winston-Salem State University noted that with most of the senior-level roles being held by white men, “...increases in diversity are unlikely without major efforts. ‘I just think that, given the history, that’s going to be a tough climb unless there are some aggressive steps’” (Seltzer, 2017, p. 4).

In order for minority women to become senior-level leaders in higher education, there needs to be a pool of mid-level management level individuals willing to take the “tough climb” (Seltzer, 2017, p. 4), as Dr. Schneider noted above. Supporting Dr. Schneider’s theory that a large pool of candidates is necessary to increase the numbers of minority women leaders, Kathryn Moore (1990) in “Creating Strengths Out of Our Differences: Women and Minority Administrators” looks at the existing large pipeline of women and minorities in mid-level administrative positions and why they tend not to move into senior-level jobs. One assertion, which is often made and that Moore points out in her article, is the lack of qualified candidates in the hiring pool (p. 90) which leads to a low number of women and minorities in upper level leadership positions. I have not found data that suggests this assumption to be reality. Another theory as to why there are so few minority women in leadership positions is that senior-level leadership positions,

which have long been held by white men, will only open up as individuals retire. Given that individuals in higher education tend to remain at the same institution and many times, in the same job, for decades, it may be true that women tire of waiting on male leaders to leave a position so they can apply.

Moore (1990) brought forward the idea that women, and minority women in particular, may choose not to advance to senior-level leadership positions because they do not want to deal with "...tokenism...greater personal isolation and accentuated opportunities for influence combined with greater risk of making mistakes" (p. 91). These women make the choice not to take a position for fear of being seen as that one minority individual expected to speak for the group they are seen as representing. Along with being the lone voice in senior-level leadership, there is an unwritten rule that these minority women are the voice of all minorities on their campus. Having been the lone female administrator in a room full of men, I understand the fear and hesitancy associated with the expectations and unwritten rules Moore discussed in her article. It's not a comfortable role.

In one section of Moore's (1990) article she gives ideas for steps women and minority administrators can take in order to use their roles positively to increase visibility and respect for minorities on campus while also taking the opportunity to teach others about a different culture and heritage. Her ideas and advice are valuable for individuals who wish to change campus culture to one of acceptance of minority female leaders.

The final issue Moore (1990) tackles is that of power. She points out that all administrative positions come with some form of power, and women and minorities need

to use that power wisely. She discusses the importance of mentors, and of observing seasoned leaders in action, in order to learn how to use power effectively to run an institution of higher education.

Why is it so important to consider minority women when thinking about the lived experiences of women administrators? These individuals will have different experiences and personal stories than their white counterparts. Based on the studies above, these women tend to have a harder time building a career which will lead to the role of senior-level administrator simply due to perception, cultural bias, and the fact there are not enough role models to support and guide them through the processes of becoming a leader as a minority woman.

### **Cultural Bias in Higher Education**

What is “leadership” in higher education? This is a question to consider when thinking about the ways in which effective change which leads to gender equity in higher education can be accomplished. In “A window into the culture of leadership within higher education through the leadership definitions of women faculty: A case study of ELAM women faculty alumnae,” McDade, King, Chuang, Morahan, Nooks, Sloma-Williams, and Richman (2009) created a study to find out how women in academic leadership, “...articulated, understood, and enacted within the culture of leadership in higher education” (p. 74). The authors analyzed 283 definitions of leadership from fellows who participated in the Hedwig van Ameringen Executive classes held between 1996-2004. This appears to be one of the first attempts to form a definition of leadership as it pertains to higher education. McDade et al. argue individuals assume knowledge of



what the term “leadership” means from their own lived experiences; however, a true definition of the term as it applies to individual career areas doesn’t exist (p. 76). Therefore, the authors choose to use themes of leadership developed by another researcher to understand how women faculty view leadership.

Participants for the study cited above were identified through a database from Women’s Health and Leadership program at Drexel University’s College of Medicine (McDade et al., 2009, p. 79). According to the authors, this program, which ran from 1996 to 2004, identified women in leadership positions who were recognized as having potential to move into senior-level leadership positions at their institutions.

The study helped describe how women view the culture of leadership in higher education by how they defined leadership. It is useful when building questions and thoughts regarding how and why women move into leadership positions in higher education as it helps define what leadership is in broad themes, such as “change or development within a person, team or organization”; “establishing and achieving group goals”; “structured processes” and “influence as the ability to move and inspire a group through relationships, not power” (McDade et al., 2009, p. 78). These themes, “...speak to the expectations that society has of leaders, what leadership entails, and the resulting culture of leadership” (p. 78).

Understanding how leadership is defined and understood by women is important when considering why women choose to become leaders in higher education and when they are considered to be successful in a leadership role by other women, and possibly their male colleagues as well. McDade et al. (2009) found:

A new framework can be created from the data assembled from the ELAM women. They eschew a leader who merely dictates her wishes upon an organization. Nor do they equate leadership with management or as simply implementing goals within an organization. For them, leadership has an equal emphasis on who a leader is (traits) and what a leader does (activities). A leader must have the intellect to analyze situations, the insight to understand conditions, and the independence to make difficult decisions. A leader must have integrity derived from a personal set of values. These women see leadership as a collaborative involvement with followers in a process of envisioning an organization's future, and co-creating goals that will change an organization as it accomplishes that future. To be successful in this definition a leader must communicate (listening and speaking) with followers and constituencies to ensure progress by all elements of the organization (p. 94)

How do women, who wish to move into positions of leadership in higher education, combat the cultural biases around what makes an individual a “leader” and even more importantly, a “good leader”? As Smith et al. (2018) found in their research, out of 28 leadership attributes, “...men were more often assigned attributes such as analytical, competent, athletic and dependable, women were more often assigned compassionate, enthusiastic, energetic and organized. Consistent with our results, societal attitudes suggest that women leaders are described as more compassionate (the most assigned attribute overall) and organized than men leaders” (p. 4). However, the authors are quick to point out that when individuals are asked to picture a leader they describe a male. If men are viewed as leaders even when leadership attributes assigned to women are those most appreciated in a leader, how do women get around this stereotype of a successful leader being equated with gender? This stereotype equates to an obstacle for women to overcome before they even apply for a leadership position.

## **Managing Gendered Roles**

Another stereotype facing women in the workplace is that of primary caregiver both in their household as well as in the work place. Hardy et al. (2018) found, “Consistent with findings for a broad range of occupations, research suggests that a primary caregiving role can result in reduced promotion opportunities, lower rates of pay rises and negative judgments from peers and colleagues in the workplace” (p. 625). In fact, Hardy et al. shared, “Those primary caregivers who stay in academia are documented as...less likely to get promoted or be granted tenure. While academic work offers primary caregivers flexibility, many academics report anxiety about their careers when they start talking about having (or postponing) children or taking long periods of family leave” (p. 626). The stereotype of female as primary caregiver and the anxiety that goes with that responsibility came across loud and clear during the interviews I conducted. The majority of women with families made career choices based on their role as caregiver. In fact, Ford (2016) supports the idea of women as primary caregiver with his research which found, “Seventy percent of women in dual-earner couples report taking greater responsibility for routine childcare than their male partners (New America Foundation 2004). The American Psychological Association (2013) estimates the percentage of informal family caregivers who are women at between 59% and 75%” (p. 501). She points out when women in academia who are, “governed by these gendered institutional norms and practices...are at a distinct disadvantage” (p. 501).

If women are at a disadvantage due to stereotypes and biases based on the role of caregiver, how do they manage work life balance and have a successful career?

Especially in mid-level management to senior-level positions where many times demands on their time, knowledge, and leadership skills can be constant? Sarah Marshall (2009) studied how women administrators in higher education managed their roles of parent and professional in “Women Higher Education Administrators with Children: Negotiating Personal and Professional Lives”. Marshall’s study consisted of women who held positions of dean or higher and had school-aged children. She claimed this type of study was needed in order to respond to the “...perceived lack of qualified individuals in the college and university leadership pipeline” (p. 188). She points to studies which showed 49% of university presidents and 29% of chief academic officers were set to retire in the ten years after her articles was published (p. 189).

The goal of Marshall’s (2009) study was to assist women with families who are interested in pursuing leadership positions in higher education in understanding how those who preceded them were effective in managing work and family while advancing their careers (p. 189). She chose to develop a study using life study research to answer two research questions dealing with how family affects the reality of working as a professional in higher education and the rewards and frustrations the administrative role poses. Marshall interviewed 17 women who reported directly to a vice-president or president and identified as having school age children (pp. 195-196). She asked participants if they would be willing to share personal items such as resumes, published works and photographs in order to better understand each individual on a more intimate level (p. 196). Marshall’s data was analyzed using the constant comparative method. Findings indicated that, as expected, professional compromises were made by the

respondents in the form of limited involvement in professional organizations, delaying education, and taking jobs that accommodated family needs (p. 198). The women surveyed made a deliberate choice to place their children's needs ahead of personal career choices as well as facing limited time for anything outside of career and family (pp. 199-200). Also not surprising, many of the women felt guilt for having a career and denying their children the amount of time they thought was deserved (p. 204).

This study mirrored insights gained from the individuals in mid-level management level positions I interviewed, providing understandings of the personal lives and choices of women who have achieved senior-level administrative positions in higher education.

### **Women in Positions of Power**

“At Harvard University, Judith B. McLaughlin remembers hearing a joke: ‘You used to go into a room, and if there were largely women in the room, you thought, Well, nothing important’s going to happen at this meeting’. Women were relegated to mid-management levels, [and were not found at] senior-levels, and so you thought, ‘The decision-makers aren’t here’” (Gardner, 2019b, p. 5). This is a sad statement on the view of power women hold in higher education. They are not seen as decision makers or leaders. Why then would women be promoted to senior-level leadership positions when they are viewed by the majority of the academy as powerless? From experience, women are viewed as the “doers” not the “visionaries” or “thought leaders”. Having been the only woman in a room full of men making decisions on various topics, even as an Executive Director, I was seldom asked my opinion prior to a decision being made,

unless it involved logistics or feelings of a person and/or group, such as lower level staff or students.

In order to understand the ways in which women in higher education have managed to gain positions of power, Pasquerella & Clauss Ehlers (2017) took an in-depth look at how far women have progressed as leaders in higher education. In their article “Glass Cliffs, Queen Bees, and the Snow-Woman Effect: Persistent Barriers to Women’s Leadership in the Academy”, the authors point out while many individuals within the academy applaud advances made by women administrators, “...progress for women in the upper administrative ranks of academia has been...stagnant” (p. 8). When studying the most senior-level position at an institution of higher education, that of president or chancellor, the authors acknowledged even as women have been awarded more degrees in higher education in the past decade than their male counterparts, indicating a pipeline of well qualified applicants for jobs in academia, “...the percentage of female college presidents...increased to just 26.4 percent by 2011. During the most recent five-year period, the proportion has remained essentially unchanged: just one in four presidents are women” (p. 8). The authors also pointed out that many of the presidents in the study lead community colleges, as opposed to the more political, high powered doctoral and research institutions (pp. 8-9). It is clear from this study that women continue to be shut out from the highest levels of leadership in higher education, especially at what some consider “top-tier” institutions. The question is, why? Is it due to the perception of power and privilege the individual who holds position acquires? Is it because women are seen as unable to lead complex organizations? Is it a lack of networks and mentors?

Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017) theorized that due to lack of opportunities to lead at the start of their careers and hidden bias, also referred to by women I worked with as “unwritten rules,” women are stuck in low to mid-level positions. The authors stated women are “...evaluated on their past performance” while men are “...judged on their potential” (p. 8), leading to fewer opportunities for women to advance their career. Assumptions are made that men will do well in senior-level leadership positions based on gender rather than actual job performance.

Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017) were also interested in the inherent bias towards women leaders in higher education, which Mary Ann Mason refers to as the “snow-woman effect” (p. 9), an appropriate name. Women are judged on how they present themselves via appearance, clothing, tone of voice, weight, etc. and not on the work they are doing. I learned early in my career when working in Student Activities at the University of Kentucky that there were certain things my male colleagues could do, that their female colleagues could not, such as: yelling to a student in the hallway; dressing casually during the workday (women were allowed to wear university issued polo shirts or t-shirts on certain designated days); walking barefoot or in shoes other than “dress shoes” (heels for most women); arriving at work without makeup in place; missing work for sickness – all of these actions, and much more, were frowned upon for women but allowable for men. I was informed of these “unwritten rules” by the lead administrative assistant in a firm manner. After all, I was told, “This is THE University of Kentucky and it’s just how things here are done.” I was a fast learner and soon realized these rules for women transcended institutions and the professional organizations

and associations connected to them. As Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017) point out, “Hidden biases that result in a lack of opportunity for women to move up the ladder into leadership roles, the active discouragement of women, and differing expectations imposed on men and women within academia take a toll on efforts to increase the number of women presidents,” (p. 10) and I would argue the number of women in both mid-level management and upper level leadership positions.

However, Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017) also question norms accepted by society as a whole which affect the progress of a woman’s career. For instance, women are held to a double standard of not taking chances and being innovative but are viewed as less effective leaders when they follow the rules. “Societal norms also include the expectation that women leaders will build consensus and focus on both interpersonal relations and work satisfaction. By contrast, the expectation of male leaders is that they will focus on task achievement and performance outcomes” (p. 10). How can women lead if they aren’t focused on task achievement and performance outcomes? As anyone who has held a leadership position knows, these items are measured and reported on at every board meeting. There is almost never consensus when it comes to how to achieve strategic goals in higher education, so the expectation that women leaders will always build consensus is unattainable as well. It is clear these types of expectations are unfair, but most women who have served in leadership positions can relate to this total mismatch of societal norms and institutional expectations. Higher education leaders have strategic goals to meet, they may have key performance indicators (KPIs) set for staff and return on investment (ROI) to show for the departments they lead. Yet when a female leader



demonstrates what is perceived as aggressive behavior to meet these types of goals, she is often accused of not being a “team player” while her male counterpart is praised for his “tough leadership”. “...the agentic qualities of confidence, control, assertiveness, emotional toughness, and achievement-oriented aggressiveness posited as necessary for effective leadership are considered incompatible with the communal characteristics associated with women and women’s leadership” Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017, p. 10).

In 2017 when Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017) published their article, men still dominated the highest levels of leadership in higher education with, “The typical college or university president [as] a sixty one-year-old, married, white male with a doctorate in education” (p. 11). Why was this? It’s not surprising when we stop to consider that: “10 percent of women presidents reported stepping back from their careers to provide caregiving, as compared to 3 percent of male presidents; 21 percent of women, but only 9.5 percent of men, reported adapting their career plans to accommodate a partner or spouse. These data confirm what we already know: ‘In the university world as well as other professions, marriage and children appear to boost the careers of men and slow or stop those of women’”(p. 11).

Many women in the academy are also the primary caregiver for their family. Does this mean they should be penalized when their career presents a choice between the role of caregiver and advancing in their career? Or can societal change happen where women are accepted as both manager, leader, “bread-winner” and caregiver? Can we advance societal norms to a point where it is excepted, and even expected, for men and

women to take time-off when a child is born or parent needs additional care or a family member is ill? When will society be able to view a leader who is also a caregiver as just as capable to perform his or her duties as someone without those additional responsibilities? “As a means of confronting hidden biases, we also need to validate authentic forms of leadership that involve self-awareness, balanced processing, internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency. Rather than personalizing environmental assumptions, we must understand structural limitations that reflect hidden biases and promote organizational understanding from the viewpoint of structural, rather than internal, dynamic” (Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers, 2017, p. 12) .

Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017) challenge each of us to come to the realization that change can happen but only through the continued pressure to transform societal norms and views of women and work.

### **Summary**

Through the interviews I conducted with women in mid-level management positions in higher education, I hope to add detail and narrative from their lived experiences to support many of the points made in the literature reviewed above around gender inequity, career aspiration and motivation, institutional organization structure resulting in bias, cultural and societal biases about women working in academia and assumptions in regards to how women function in positions of power.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Site**

Research was conducted at a private institution classified by *The Carnegie Classification* as a “Tier I” institution (Classification). Tier I status is defined, in part, by how a university ranks in the Carnegie Classification, which is a leading framework for measuring institutional characteristics. Tier I universities are regarded as the top universities, known for their academic and research excellence.

#### **Sample and Selection**

My sample consisted of ten women who are current employees described by the institution’s Office of Human Resources as “professional staff”. I had a working relationship with all of the women who agreed to take part in the study. My familiarity with the institution and the women allowed me easier access to both a comfortable and convenient location for the interviews as well as suitable time frames in which to conduct them. The women had titles which differed depending on department, job function, and type of work and were spread across a large range of human resource classification bands. Therefore, I elected to select interviewees who held positions labeled by the institutions’ Human Resources division as pay categories 14-19. Women who hold positions in these levels were identified as mid-level managers, or those in positions with managerial duties. Identification of the women was made with the assistance of the Office for Institutional

Equity yearly report. I compiled a cross section of women ranging in age from approximately 25 to 55, from a variety of educational, social and religious backgrounds. The women's training was as varied as the positions they held.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

Due to the length of the participant descriptions, which are needed to fully appreciate each individuals' unique lived experiences, I am going to discuss the method of data collection and analysis prior to describing the women who participated in the study.

I collected data through a series of semi-structured individual interviews using a set of open-ended questions. My hope was to gather "rich data", described by Maxwell (2005) as "...data that are detailed and varied enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on" (p. 110) through a series of individual interviews. My study was intended to collect, "A personal experience story" or the "...narrative study of an individual's personal experience found in single or multiple episodes, private situations, or communal folklore" (Creswell, 2004, p. 476). I used narrative inquiry viewed through an interpretive, critical lens. Creswell (2004) describes the use of a theoretical lens in narrative research as a, "...guiding perspective or ideology that provides structure for advocating for groups or individuals and writing the report" (p. 476). Narrative research is defined as a focus on individuals' personal stories with "...the aim to understand how people structure the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives" (Schram, 2006, p. 104). Schram (2006) adds that the use of, "...a critical approach is consistent with the view that researchers should engage in inquiry with the expectation that their work will be instrumental in bringing about

change” and in the end will push the researcher “...and others toward the question of what could be” (p. 45). I used a critical paradigm to deconstruct meanings made by individuals, which illuminated power structures that exist in higher education. My hope is others will look at the personal stories gathered from these women in mid-level management positions and think about what they reveal about personal struggles and decisions made as they progress along their career paths.

In order to gather narrative data, I conducted semi-structured interviews which included an open framework where basic themes or topic areas were predetermined but where, “...only a first, topic-introducing question is asked and the remainder of the interview proceeds as a follow-up and expansion on the interviewee’s answer to the first questions” (Kvale, 1996, p. 127). This helped to ensure the topic areas of family, career, support, and organizational structure were covered during the interview. I developed a protocol using semi-structured questions (see Appendix A), which were based on the main focus of my study, the meaning women make of their progression along career paths in higher education. Using the semi-structured interview method of data collection provided the ability to obtain similar data across interviews; allowed for a comparison of key themes; and retained the flexibility to probe certain participants’ stories for more in-depth answers and details. In fact, “The questions on a semi structured interview guide are preformulated, but the answers to those questions are open-ended. They can be fully expanded at the discretion of the interviewer and the interviewee, and can be enhanced by probes” (Schensul, 1999, p. 149).

While I initially planned to conduct more than one interview with each participant it turned out that was unnecessary. The women were more than ready to share experiences, feelings, observations and prejudices in ways that led to an increase in my understanding of the meaning each interviewee made of her experiences; and ensured me she felt safe telling me her personal story. I strongly encouraged follow-up via email or phone if the interviewee wished to add to her story as well as to allow me the opportunity to clarify any confusing parts of the first interview.

By asking women to share personal life stories related to their career in higher education, my goal was to collect data that will help make meaning of why intelligent, capable, skilled individuals are not advancing to senior-level leadership positions in higher education.

Table 1

Matrix of Research Methods

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Selection</b>	<b>Data Collection method</b>	<b>Kinds of analysis</b>
How do lived experiences of women in mid-level management positions shape their careers in higher education?	10 women mid-level managers at a Research I institution who were found in Human Resource levels 14-19.	Semi-structured interview using a protocol consisting of open-ended questions and clarifying probes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcribing interviews</li> <li>• Reading transcripts</li> <li>• Developing coding categories and applying to themes found in transcript</li> <li>• Writing memos</li> <li>• Member checks</li> <li>• Peer review</li> </ul>

## **Justification for Study**

Higher education needs to hear individual stories regarding personal career experiences in order to understand why women remain in mid-level management positions. Do life circumstances - which may or may not be determined by gender – play a role? Were decisions regarding career made deliberately or did circumstances dictate career path? Did family influences play a part in career decisions? This type of information can only be obtained through life stories told by women who hold or have held mid-level management positions in higher education. Hearing from the women themselves and their understanding of their careers avoids what Ford (2016) described as the problem of appropriation, “Descriptions of the problem are often appropriated as explanations – if only there were more women in the pipeline there would be more women at the top; the pipeline has leaks because women leave or are driven out of the workplace by family obligations; women’s careers resemble a labyrinth rather than the traditional ladder acknowledged and rewarded; women are found in greater numbers at the bottom of the pyramid where jobs are more plentiful but more likely part-time with lower wages; the glass ceiling prevents the most talented women from reaching the top; and the sticky floor keeps the majority of women from ever aspiring to leadership” (p. 500).

Ford’s (2016) explanations above are supported by quantitative data, but they can’t tell us the personal stories of women’s choices in regard to their ability and desire to break through the glass ceiling or stay stuck on the “sticky floor”. Only women in the role of mid-manager, and possibly close family members, know why choices were made

that affected their career path. Understanding if the choice to become and/or remain in mid-level management was intentionally made or a product of the culture of higher education and/or societal norms can only be learned from individual life stories, which are a compilation of personal experiences from women who work in these roles.

### **Methods of Data Analysis: Single-Case Analysis**

Each interview was transcribed and then read through in order to code for domains, or categories, of cultural meaning, and relationships between domains. I also searched for attributes associated with each domain. Creswell (2004) points out that a narrative researcher is more interested in exploring the experiences of an individual than the individual herself. In fact, "...these experiences in narrative inquiry are both personal - what the individual experiences - and social - the individual inter-acting with others. Thus, narrative researchers focus on understanding individual history or past experiences and how they contribute to present and future experiences" (p. 479). I show a chronology of events for the women interviewed, telling their stories through the use of a time line of career related events when possible. I use restorying or "...the process in which the researcher gathers stories, analyzes them for key elements of the story, and rewrites them...to provide a causal link among ideas (p. 480). Spradley's (1979) method of semantic structure analysis was used in combination with Atlas qualitative software to assist in coding the data to track words and/or phrases that emerged in interviews and group them into domains (categories) under broader themes as well as considering the relationships which exist between them. "The identification of themes provides the



complexity of a story and adds depth to the insight about understanding individual experiences” (Creswell, 2004, p. 483).

Some of the themes which emerged are: advice; benefits; career choice; family; unwritten rules; senior leaders; personal compromises; career choice; community; perceptions; support; unwritten rules; work life balance; lifestyle choice; and family support. Relationships between categories are noted where appropriate. Coding and building matrices of categories and themes allowed me to recognize emerging patterns from each individual interview.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

Cross-case analysis was used to compare categories and themes found across interviews. One way in which narrative research is analyzed is by pulling themes or events from across interviews and using them to build a single narrative or story: “The basic idea is that the researcher can construct a coherent narrative out of the diverse thoughts and commentaries contained throughout interview material” (Schram, 2006, p. 104). In order to check validity of individual data, domains and patterns from interviews were compared to one another using the matrices constructed with semantic structure analysis (Spradley, 1979) in Atlas. This provided the ability to build a single story using similar themes, or patterns of meaning, from individual interviews.

### **Researcher Ethics and Positionality**

Some who read this study might ask how I could have based a study on women whom I both know well and who worked on the same campus as I for over ten years. It is because of the fact that I was a part of the campus culture and “family” for so long, as

well as my personal and professional relationship with these women, that I had the ability to gain access for interviews and collect honest, meaningful stories that many would never share with a “stranger”. It is vital, therefore, having gained their trust, that I protect the identities of these women. Revealing personal details that could allow them to be identified could be disastrous for their careers and my future as a researcher. One never knows how an administrator on campus will react to stories of personal struggle by women she has previously or currently manages.

### **Positionality**

As Madison (2005) reminds researchers, “Positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects. A concern for positionality is sometimes understood as ‘reflexive ethnography’: it is a ‘turning back’ on ourselves (Davis, 1999). When we turn back, we are accountable for own research paradigms, our own positions of authority, and our own moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation” (p. 7). In short, positionality is fundamental when conducting a study for the researcher to consider, to discuss with participants and to reveal to the reader. It is the way in which one is situated within the intersections of their identities and understands the power and politics of race/ethnicity, language, class, culture, gender, sexuality, ability, and other socio, cultural, political, and environmental forces. Having served as a mid-level manager in higher education for many years, I understood my biases based on the fact that I am a white, middle-class, middle age woman who worked in various leadership roles in higher education. It was while in these roles I realized that

there was a dearth of women who held positions beyond the director, executive director or associate/assistant vice-president level. As a result, I undertook my research with the knowledge that I would have my own viewpoints, opinions and bias when thinking about why this was the reality as I knew it. I took all of this into consideration when thinking of the research method I would use; forming interview questions; when asking the questions of study participants; while hearing answers to the questions; and finally, as I went through the stories and discussions I collected.

My goal was for the women in my study, many of whom were colleagues, to gain their trust so that they would feel comfortable telling their very personal stories. I hope they perceived that we were in a safe space and they were speaking to a trusted individual. I needed their trust in order to gather the rich and descriptive data required for my study. My background in higher education and educational counseling, gained through work in my undergraduate and graduate classes and in Student Affairs, helped me encourage participants to tell me their private stories. I knew I was asking interviewees to share information with me which is generally only shared with individuals they know well. The stories I sought are those one only hears in a one-on-one lunch meeting, coffee chat or cocktail hour. I wanted those truths people share with one another when looking for someone to confide in. I also wished to allay any fear that I would use the information they told me against them either in their personal life or career. “Why share at all?” you may wonder. For me, and the women with whom I worked, it was a way to acknowledge the biases based on gender, ethnicity, race or sexual orientation that we all knew existed and shaped policies, our careers and our lives in

higher education, but that no one talked about openly. I hoped to uncover and share some of these rarely discussed biases and unwritten rules as a result of my conversations with study participants but also did my best to keep an open mind throughout the research process. I wanted to find proof that at least some of the assumptions and beliefs I held about gender and leadership in higher education held true, but I was also open to the idea that others may not think or feel the same way as I do. When that happened, which it did during two of my interviews, I had the privilege of uncovering how others genuinely viewed the world in which I had been immersed during my entire career.

I acknowledged to each person who participated in the study my role as a researcher, colleague, and in some cases, friend and any biases or assumptions that may influence me during the research process. While I am not an overt feminist, I also let participants know that I tend to look at the world through what many would refer to as a feminist lens.

In order to understand the positionality, I brought to this study, one has to understand how I was raised. I firmly believe that, as Tisdell (1993) states, “Higher education imitates the societal power structure of the arena in which it is located” (p. 143). In other words, higher education imitates the larger society in which it functions. I have always been taught to keep an open mind, to learn from those around me, and have the confidence I can do anything I set my mind too. My father made sure his daughters grew up with the belief that there was no job we could not do and do well. I knew from a young age I could do anything a boy my age could do. When I played sports, my father was the person who went to the athletics director to complain that the women’s teams

were not treated fairly with shortened practice times, uniforms handed down from the men's teams, made to wait on the men's team to play the second "late" game when we traveled, etc. His view was not popular but he stood by the belief that men and women deserved equal treatment. These values and beliefs were instilled in my sister and I from a very early age, and therefore tend to slant my viewpoint when studying gender equity issues. However, these beliefs also lend to my certainty that women are capable of, and deserve to be, senior-level leaders in higher education. Given my upbringing and personal views of women and equity, it was a given that I wanted a better understanding, beyond the quantitative data, around why there are so few women in higher education who hold senior-level leadership positions.

What I was initially most interested in finding out from women who were in positions similar to the ones I held were their personal stories. Numbers just don't tell the entire story. For women who held director level (mid-management) positions, did they wish to move into higher level leadership positions and if so, how did they plan to obtain those positions? As far as career goals, were these women where they thought they would be at the point in their lives/career path when they were interviewed? Did they plan to become administrators or did they just happen to move up the ranks and into the leadership position they held? Was their career plan to move into or remain in higher education? My gut, personal experience, and limited research on the topic prior to my study told me many women never planned to hold the positions they were in when they participated in my interviews. Many of the women I worked with or knew through conferences or other work-related events and activities who held a mid-manager position

would tell me they never planned to become a director, executive director, department chair, or senior manager and had no plan, and sometimes no desire, to move into senior-level leadership roles such as associate vice president, vice president, or dean. These women would share that they worked hard and their current position is just where they happened to end up. In contrast, prior to my study, the women I met who were driven to hold upper level leadership positions all sacrificed in some way – family, children, personal freedom, ideals and more – for a dream. Were the perceived sacrifices really the reason there were not more women in senior-level leadership positions? Were there other barriers or life events which kept many women from having career goals of becoming senior-level leaders? While I had my own ideas surrounding these questions, I recognized my positionality and inherent biases around the topic and wanted to learn more about the experiences of other women to see if they mirrored my own or were different.

I also knew from personal experience that women with families tend to be the individual who holds the family together as a unit no matter what level position they hold or in which occupation they work. These women grocery shop, do laundry, take the kids to school, make sure everyone is on time for sports/music lessons/ tutoring, etc., etc., etc. Some lucky women have a nanny or mother's helper along with a very supportive spouse but they still seem to do the lion's share of the work when it comes to managing the family unit and/or caring for elderly parents or children. I recognized that this too was a bias I needed to watch out for as I did my research. I understood that when I worked in higher education, I often felt as if I didn't have the time needed to devote to plan and act

on advancing my career. I tried to ensure I didn't project this sentiment onto the women in my study. I also needed to make sure I didn't assume all of the women in my study wanted to move into senior-level leadership positions. Several women I have managed and worked with over the years have had absolutely no desire to hold senior-level positions. When presented with an opportunity to advance, they let leadership know they were happy in their current position.

It is fair to think a reader who does not personally know either the interviewer or the subject could be concerned about researcher bias. As Kvale (1994) points out, one of the criticisms of qualitative research is the strong possibility for the interviewer to bias the subject through leading questions as well as show favoritism to a personal hypothesis through interpretation of responses based on personal experience and knowledge of the interviewee and subject matter. However, Kvale (1994) goes on to state, "...leading questions do not have to reduce the reliability of interviews, but may enhance it" (p. 156). I also think, as Kvale (1996) suggests is important during an interview, I was more concerned with being attuned to the participant than asking the set of questions I developed. In fact, I began the heart of the session with, "...a first, topic-introducing question...and the remainder of the interview proceeds as a follow-up and expansion on the interviewee's answer to the first questions" (p. 127). There was significant small talk which occurred before I asked my first in-depth interview question. This was due to the culture of the geographic location in which the participants worked and the fact that all of the women were colleagues with whom I had some type of personal relationship. Had I interviewed participants with whom I did not have an existing relationship, I would guess

that the conversations would not have been as honest or open. The small talk that occurred at the beginning of each interview seemed to have set the stage for the type of conversation I was trying to capture – two women in the same field discussing one individual’s personal experience in a work environment. It was a time to share personal, private, inner thoughts that are – for the most part – not talked about outside of small, intimate meetings.

I kept all of this in mind as I interviewed my study participants. I was careful not to ask leading questions but to use prompts such as, “Tell me more” or “Why do you think you made that decision?” or “Can you tell me more about your feelings at that time?” depending on the individual response to the open-ended question asked.

There is always the possibility that positionality can affect how the researcher interviews, looks at the data, and writes the results. However, as Kezar (2002) points out, “...although women have multiple identities, they also share certain experiences and parts of their identity. Positionality emphasizes interconnections, dialogue, and relationships and provides a place for them to unite...” (p. 561). Positionality is not always negative as it can also lead to the researcher having an easier time gaining participants trust in order to have an open and honest conversation as well as the ability to better understand the participants experiences.

Transparency was key in both my research and the final study. I hired a transcriptionist to transcribe the recordings after I took out the interviewee’s name and identifying information so I would have word for word what was said and wouldn’t be tempted to add to the participants story with my own presumptions. Once the interviews



were transcribed I reviewed each interview several times, going back to recordings to ensure what I was reading had been transcribed correctly. I coded as I went through the transcripts with themes I found coming to the forefront over and over. I began with a long list of themes which came out in each recording and narrowed them down to those I would include as subsections in my study through straight counting of how many times they occurred when I looked at an overall combined grouping of themes from all the interviews. Following coding, I had fellow graduate students review interview transcripts to ensure my coding was unbiased. I hoped to find themes emerge that I was not expecting. For instance, in my pilot interview the theme of “community” was seen several times throughout the life of the participant. I was not expecting this particular theme to come forward as an integral part of this study, and yet how she made meaning of the world around her as it related to those in her neighborhood, city and her place of employment. This was true to the point that she declined a job offer for an upper-level leadership position based on the fact she would have to leave the community where she felt most comfortable. I thought this finding provided a new perspective on women in higher education and found that other participants echoed her sentiments about the importance of community. This process allowed me to place my positionality to the side when choosing which themes came to the forefront and would be highlighted in my study.

Rich data was collected from interviews conducted over the period of one year from 10 women who were working at a level categorized as mid-management. I did my best to create a trusting environment so the women interviewed felt comfortable

providing an honest account of their lives. In the pilot interview conducted, the participant chose to be interviewed in her office and was comfortable and very forthcoming with confidential information once she was assured any information collected during the session that could identify her name or position would not be used. This proved true for the rest of the interviews as well. By ensuring this level of privacy respondents were open about their personal experiences.

Many individuals who are employed in higher education tend to stay with the same university in one role or another for the majority of their professional lives. This lends to internal generalizability, or "...the generalizability of a conclusion within the setting or group studied" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 115). The values and meanings women have made in regard to the monetary and emotional benefits, a strong feeling of community, and sense of family which is very much a part each individual campus' culture comes across to those outside the institution as a strong sense of internal pride. With so many women choosing to remain at the institution regardless of opportunities at other institutions to advance their career, it could be argued these individuals have found value in the meanings made of their work experiences regardless of job level and/or title. This acceptance of, and pride in, the work environment - even as it remains inequitable - may be unique to the culture of the institution at which the women in this study worked. This idea lends itself to internal generalizability for female mid-level managers at this institution.

## **Participants**

I interviewed ten participants classified by the institution for which they work as mid-level staff for their thoughts and stories related to their career trajectory and satisfaction in higher education. At the time of the interviews, each of the ten women participants in this study held either a mid-level or senior-level position at a four-year public, doctoral granting institution on the East Coast. Each of the participants was interviewed and asked to reflect using semi-structured interview questions.

Summary information about participants is presented in Table 2. The women in this study are colleagues, friends, and in many instances, confidants. Their stories are private, personal accounts of coping with bias – gender, racial and socioeconomic – as they work their way up the “career ladder” in higher education. Many are colleagues whom I have known for 10 or more years. The academic part of the institution where these women work is a close community, with an environment similar in feel to a small Southern town. After having been a part of this community for 10+ years and establishing relationships with a wide range of individuals on campus, these women were more than willing to share personal insights, thoughts, experiences and feelings with me. Several let me know during the interview they would not have been inclined to disclose so much personal information to a stranger. In order to establish a comfortable rapport, and gather thick, rich descriptions of personal experiences, the interviews were conducted one on one in a private setting. The interviews were conversations between colleagues who were of diverse age, gender, race, and economic groups. However, these conversations capture only a small sample of the thoughts and feelings needed to gain

some understanding of decisions made by resilient, hard working women whose top priority, for the most part, was supporting others.

The results of my conversations are shared as a collection of stories rather than as facts and figures in order for readers to gain deeper insights into the choices these women made in their careers. Due to the personal nature of the conversations, interviewees will be identified throughout by initials.

### **Participant Overviews**

The table below offers an overview of participants and self-reported information about their gender, race, time working in their current field and highest level of education attained. Below the table are brief descriptions of each woman’s career history and educational background.

Table 2

Overview of Participants

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Time Working in Higher Education</b>	<b>Time at Institution</b>	<b>Time in Current Position</b>
SC	Female	White	11	11	4
RE	Female	White	11	14	2
NG	Female	White	12	12	3
RU	Female	White	8	6	3 months
JH	Female	White	20	6	6
KL	Female	White	20	20	3

MG	Female	White	15	15	6
SF	Female	White	39	24	24
EG	Female	White	14	3	3
KP	Female	African American	27	27	27

### **Participant Bios**

Below are descriptions and thoughts from each participant regarding the career path to her current position as well as thoughts on lived experiences during the journey. While I asked each person the same set of questions, found in Appendix A, some participants were more forth coming with details and thoughts during the interview. For this reason, some of the descriptions of participants work life and lived experiences are more detailed than others. In Chapter Four participant answers to questions beyond the general background information included in this chapter are shared along with analysis of the responses.

SC has worked at the institution for eleven years, and when she was interviewed had been in her position almost four years. Prior to her current institution, SC lived and worked overseas for 15+ years. She held positions as a software developer, an international systems project manager, and as an organizational consultant. She holds a B.S. in Computer Science and a M.S. in Organizational Psychology.

SC moved into higher education after a successful career in information technology in order to provide a better environment for her family. While she made “several times more” than her salary when interviewed, she also had to travel extensively

and didn't have benefits. She explained that she accepted a "low-level" position, "...way below my level of education and everything just to have a foot in the door. And I would do it again."

SC assumed her predecessor, "...who was at least 10-12 years older than me, would probably retire at some point" and in the order of natural progression, she would be offered the job. She, "...never came in thinking, 'I'm going to move around to different departments and make big career leaps.' But I could see myself learning this program and then taking over the reins when this person decided to retire." In reality, due to her educational background and experience, SC was handed additional responsibilities and promoted much more quickly than she had anticipated. In fact, she related that she, "...wasn't really looking for a high stress position because I was a single mother and I had the house and the kid and I wasn't really looking to have to take my work home. But it was good to earn more because [the salary] was ridiculous." The only way to earn more at the institution was to take on more responsibility, which SC did, changing jobs several times over the years.

RE has worked at the institution for a total of eleven years. She has also worked at independent K-12 schools. She holds a bachelor's degree in liberal arts but her career interest has always been philanthropy. She enjoys her role as a manager. At the time of the interview, she had no aspirations to move to another position or different field.

NG has worked in higher education for twelve years. She began her career in public relations (media relations, special event management, video production, editing,

news and speech writing, publications production) working for a state agency and owned her own consulting company for over thirteen years.

NG holds a bachelor's degree in political science and has "... a lot of PR background [and] communications knowledge." However, she chose to switch job fields specifically to work at the institution where she is currently employed.

RU has worked in various roles at the institution for six years. Prior to her current role she worked for a private foundation. RU shared that she hadn't planned on working in higher education or her current field. "Working in higher education was something that just fell in my lap. I did not see myself doing this. I actually probably saw myself going back to graduate school. And I haven't done that. And I don't really have intentions of doing it unless someone were to pay for me to do it. So, I did not expect this when I graduated from college."

JH earned her undergraduate degree and master's degree in Public Relations. She started her career in Media Relations. From there, she moved into communications at a higher education institution followed by working for seven years at the same institution as Director of Events for a university president's office. To be closer to family, JH made the decision to move across the country to a new higher education institution for a new job.

When JH started her career, "...[her] mindset at the time was [to have] a career in public relations, not a career in higher education." However, JH shared that over the years she has worked in higher education, "...it definitely evolved for me to think of

myself as [having] a career in higher education. And I definitely have that mindset today, but that's not where I started.”

JH would like to remain at her current institution. She has, “...worked really hard in building a reputation for [herself]. That takes a long time to do, especially in a complex organization such as [this one]. So, I definitely would like to stay here. I'd like to stay in this particular department if there are continued career opportunities.” In her current role, JH added staff and reorganized her department, which she viewed as, “...an amazing opportunity to be able to grow those teams. And then, on the other side, see the output.”

At the time of the interview, KL worked at her current institution for over 20 years in various roles. “I was looking for something different,” she said. “I think you feel like you're making a difference wherever you work at [this institution], but for me I'm really going to feel like I'm making a difference...” She majored in Criminal Justice and never thought she would work in higher education. KL shared that over the years her, “Aspirations changed. [I] never had a [career focused] goal and enjoyed what [I] was doing. [Now I am] looking towards retirement [so I] don't want to leave this office. [I want to] stay in [this] office but not in necessarily in this job.” Her personal mantra, borrowed from Eleanor Roosevelt, is that “nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent.”

MG had been employed at a Research I institution for over 16 years when the interview was conducted. She worked in both entry level and administrative roles. For six years prior to working in higher education, MG was founder and Executive Director



of a non-profit organization which acted as a public/private catalyst for excellence in workforce preparation. In that role, she developed programs connecting businesses and public schools in order to improve the educational and workforce opportunities for the city's youth.

MG also worked for a state government, both as a federal grants administrator and as a program officer for workforce preparation. Prior to her positions in state government, she worked as a consultant in grant program evaluation for national foundations. MG has a B.A. and an M.A. in anthropology.

At the time of the interview, SF had worked for over 34 years at several Research I institutions. She holds a bachelor's degree and also has a master's degree in social welfare administration. SF is one of the interviewees with the longest tenure in higher education and at the institution. Interestingly, she was also one of the most reluctant to share her story.

EG worked at the institution for a little over two years at the time of our conversation. Prior to that, she worked in higher education for seven years and at a medical clinic for four years. All of her work experience has been in one field. EG holds a bachelor's degree in communications and a master's degree in higher education administration.

EG started working in higher education when she was 24 in a position the institution, "...had never ...had before, and my office was a renovated broom closet. And it was the 80's. ...a lot has changed since then. (laughter) We didn't even have our own computers. My aspirations, I think, at the time, were to be somewhere maybe in higher

ed., but not really sure of what population I wanted to serve.” When asked if she knew what she wanted her career trajectory to be at that time in her life, she answered, [I wasn’t sure what I] exactly wanted to do, or what position I wanted to be, I don’t know that I knew that, but I kind of knew pretty quickly that it was kind of surrounding [giving back] I guess.” EG shared that she really enjoyed teaching people the importance of philanthropy. “I’m really into the psychology of what motivates people to [give back], which is why I’m kind of doing what I’m doing now, but when I had kids it was just a happen-chance that I moved into K-12 philanthropy arena. Someone...recruited me to work at an independent school.”

EG advanced in her career through happenstance. Several family members had illnesses which exposed her to the field of healthcare and education of medical students and residents. She began to explore the field of healthcare philanthropy because, “You know there’s some inner thing that says, ‘You’re needed there.’ There’s a purpose. There’s a higher purpose for your being there. So that’s how I launched into health care. And that has followed me since then because - you know I still like student stuff - but it doesn’t hold my passion like it used to, like health care does.” EG was motivated to move to different jobs based on the need she viewed the institutions and/or clinics as having that she could help fill. Her motivations were not driven by salary, or position title or type of work as she experienced a wide range of all three.

EG states that in one position, “[I] subsequently ended up there because then they didn’t have enough money to run that program and all the things they dreamed in this great big vision. So, then I ended up doing things there that I had done in my very first

job when I was 24.” This wasn’t viewed as a demotion or decrease in career trajectory, but as a position where she was needed and had the experience and energy to make an impact.

KP had worked in one field at a Research I institution for 27 years at the time of our interview. She worked on a bachelor’s degree in liberal arts, but was unable to complete the degree. Prior to the role she held at the time of the interview, she worked as a manager for twelve years at a bank and as an assistant personnel manager in retail.

When KP started working in higher education she states, “Quite honestly I did not think that this was going to be where I ended up. Because my whole career [had been in] banking. And so, I thought, ‘okay, this is just kind of a stop-gap until I can get back into banking’. And then I came here, and to start working within my current realm, and loved it!” She also shared that she started as a “generalist” having no idea where in her field she wanted to concentrate her career. Thus, “Coming in the door, it was, well I think the position was called initially an office manager, so it was, it was much more geared toward facilities and IT. And I guess as the department started to grow, I was the only person doing work in my current field. So, the other functions kind of took a back seat and we would contract out the IT part of it, and the facilities kind of took care of itself because we were always in a leased space, so we always had those people to talk care of it.”

KP continued to talk about the growth of her role over the time in higher education. “...and so [my] role began to grow. And as it began to grow, I also began to realize certain aspects of the job that I preferred more than anything else, and so my role

expanded a little bit outside of the department, because then I became a trained mediator [at the institution], and I became someone who was called upon to sit on the panel for dispute hearings and to chair those panels. Bringing that experience back into the department, the role grew even more. [And] it is still growing I think.” KP also manages one full-time position on a regular basis and additional part-time positions as needed.

While some of the participants were glad to share lengthy, detailed descriptions of their career trajectory interspersed with thick, rich descriptions, others had very little to share regarding their path to the position held when I interviewed them. Some of the reluctance was simply that the individual didn’t see how knowing about her individual journey could help others as they moved through their careers. Other individuals had been in the same role on the same campus for the majority of their career and as a result didn’t feel they had a lot of information to share. The descriptions of each woman’s journey, like the women themselves, are unique to that individual and should not be judged on length or verbosity of the individual.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The purpose of Chapter Four is to discuss findings and common themes among the participants related to my research questions. Basic interpretative qualitative research methods, described in chapter three, were used to define themes and categorize participant responses. Working for the good of others, impact of family on career choice, institutional community, the overarching impact of family, unwritten rules, institutional norms, gender bias, career aspirations/motivations and advice for others were major themes related to my research questions which emerged from the interviews. Each theme is discussed below.

Women in higher education are not advancing in their careers as frequently or to the same levels as men. A wealth of literature points to the fact that it has been a continuous struggle for women to ascend to positions of leadership in higher education (Dunn et al., 2014; Gardner, 2019a, 2019b; Lepkowski, 2009; Marshall, 2009; Moore, 1984; Silver, 2018; Smith, 2017; White, 2005; Woollen, 2016). This is especially true for women who aspire to hold senior-level leadership positions. There are various reasons this has remained true through the decades - there is a strong tradition of men as leaders in higher education; unwritten rules which perpetuate gender prejudice towards women exist on the majority of campuses in the United States; unfavorable policies that directly impact women are viewed by most in higher education as “normal”; and finally,

the hidden, and sometimes overt, beliefs, norms, and stereotypes that create gender prejudice (Allan, 2011; Bingham, 2010; Farmer, 1993; Weyer, 2007). As a result, women remain in high numbers in mid-management level positions. Several authors agree that while women continue to make gains in equity in higher education, the rate at which they are advancing through the ranks and the number of women in upper level leadership positions remains below that of their male counterparts (Dominici et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2010; Morahan et al., 2001; Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001; West et al., 2006). In fact, Dominici et al. (2009) goes on to point out, “While such problems have been observed at many universities, businesses, and governmental agencies, few studies have formally probed the experiences of senior women faculty leaders and reported their views of the root causes of the underrepresentation of women in academic leadership positions”(p. 1).

Changes in the perception of and number of women leaders on campuses of higher education have been identified by many studies over the last ten years (Bingham, 2010; Gagliardi, 2018; Gardner, 2019a, 2019b; Lyness, 2018; Savage; Seltzer, 2017; Silver, 2018; Wardell, 2010), but have these changes been enough for women who wish to do so to advance to senior-level leadership positions, including the highest position of president or chancellor? Dunn, Gerlach and Hyle (2014) pointed out, “The underrepresentation of women in academic administration suggests that masculine practices and leadership norms function to exclude women. In terms of senior administrative positions, only 22% of all four-year university presidents are women, 40% of all chief academic officers, and 43% of all other senior administrators. Even fewer

women serve in senior administrative roles at the more research-intensive and prestigious institutions” (p. 9). Women outnumber men in higher education as students, staff and faculty members at all levels except when it comes to leadership positions (Johnson, 2017). What is it that is stopping women from moving into senior-level leadership positions in higher education? Are there so many barriers in place to keep women from attaining these positions that it is simply impossible for all but a select few to break through the proverbial glass ceiling? Or is there more at play and women on the career path towards leadership positions make a conscious choice not to move beyond mid-level positions? What are the stories behind all of the noise that are the much studied and reported on numbers and rhetoric found in the majority of the literature around the topic of women leaders in higher education?

I found during my interpretation of the interviews that Pasquerella and Claus-Ehlers (2017) were correct, “Interestingly, among women who indicate that they are not interested in a leadership role because it exacts too high a price, many either fail to identify the gender discrimination in their own experiences or consider acts of discrimination to be individual events, rather than a function of institutional structures of gender discrimination” (p. 11).

Several of my participants also confirmed what Longman and Madsen (2014) conjectured, “Factors that hinder women’s advancement into leadership often relate to a disconnect between the values of many women and the reward structures and goals that shape the culture of most organizations...reported research findings indicating that women’s identity is often oriented around giving rather than drawing attention to

themselves; this dynamic can negatively impact women's motivation to pursue leadership" (p. x). There are both individual and organizational/structural issues at play in higher education for women who either aspire to hold leadership positions or, as several of the women I interviewed told me, unintentionally assume a leadership position. The organizational and structural barriers are apparent to anyone who has spent time working on a college or university campus, if they choose to pay attention to the policies, rules and regulations in place (Allan, 2011; Luna, 2006; Weyer, 2007). Not so apparent is each individual woman's choice in work role based on her values, ethics, self-fulfillment and personal situation. One of the respondents in my study let me know she had no desire to move into a position where she felt she would be unable to have an impact on the lives of others. This individual was clear the choices she made in job selection and level were more about fitting her ethical and moral standards and wishes than the ability to provide leadership. She was fine managing a staff and working for the greater good of humanity.

### **Working for the Good of Others**

As seen in the example above from my own study, research (Airini et al., 2011; Dominici et al., 2009; Longman, 2014; Madsen, 2012; Tonin, 2015) shows many individuals base career decisions on the ability to contribute to society through work in higher education. One example of this type of personal need to contribute to society comes from a female president of an institution who shared with her interviewer, "I wasn't interested in just being a college president to be a president. I had no ambitions for that at all, but when [the institution] asked me to think about it, I mainly did it because



I cared a lot about advancing the cause of women's liberation and progress in the world" (Longman, 2014, p. 159). Individuals who work in higher education tend to remain at one institution, and in similar roles, for the majority of their careers (Dayna Catropa, 2013). This leads to a very strong sense of community with other employees, regardless of job category or level. It also tends to lead towards a sense of love for the institution itself, including the values, mission, and beliefs espoused by institutional leaders and accepted as truth by the campus community. One unexpected result of my discussions indicated women serving as mid-level professionals in higher education was the strong, unwavering sense of community the individuals had with others at the institution and in regards to the institution as an organization. As Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017) this staunch support of the actual institution and its' employees may have led to several of the women interviewed not associating institutional policies/bias or gender discrimination as possible reasons related to choices made to remain at their current level. This became apparent when interviewees were asked about "unwritten rules" at the institution. Some looked puzzled and had no idea what I was asking about while others immediately began to nod and talk before I finished asking the question. However, only two of those interviewed associated "unwritten rules" with gender bias and/or organizational limitations based on gender.

So why would these women stay at one institution, possibly in one department and/or job for years at a time? Many times, individuals have a feeling they are working in order to help the greater good, which is more important to them than the job level, title or salary. In *USA Today* online article Edwards (2013) points out:

In addition to awarding degrees, universities work with a greater mission in mind. 'Job satisfaction is more than a paycheck,' says Elizabeth Marsh, a fundraiser at Wake Forest University. 'It's knowing that the work I am doing provides opportunities for others to grow and make an impact in the world.' Whether it's working in a fundraising role, managing a residence hall or advising students, you can believe in what you're doing. In fact, you'll be able to see your work in action by simply walking around the campus.

In fact, when specifically looking at why individuals move into or choose to remain employed in higher education when they could be earning a better salary if they held jobs in the private sector, a survey regarding why individuals choose to work in higher education conducted by *Inside Higher Ed* Catropa (2013) reported responses showing individuals worked in higher education because they, "...love the mission/culture and/or atmosphere of higher ed" and included examples from respondents such as, "It's a living lab for great and meaningful ideas." As one participant who works in the healthcare division of the higher education intuition shared,

You know there's some inner thing that says, 'You're needed there.' There's a purpose. There's a higher purpose for your being there. So that's how I launched into health care [in higher education]. And that has followed me since then because - you know I still like student stuff - my daughter's in college, so that makes sense. But it doesn't hold my passion like it used to, like health care does. So, the reason I took [this job] was I felt some higher calling. And I know that sounds stupid, but yea. I felt some higher calling for it.

Working for the greater good, in this study reflected by the length of time a woman chooses to remain in one division/department and at one institution, is important. Many times, more important to the women I interviewed than their job title or level. Several of the study participants shared they stayed in their mid-level position simply because they were working for a higher cause that they believed in – students, research,

healthcare, supporting other staff and faculty. Whatever the cause, these women believed in the impact they were having enough to stay in the positions they held with little or no thought of moving up the career ladder to a more senior-level.

### **Impact of Family on Career Choice**

The values and meanings the women interviewed for this paper made in terms of the personal importance of emotional benefits, a sense of being part of a close-knit community, and the flexibility to concentrate on their family was apparent and echoed the examples above. These women made career choices based on the significance their work experiences afforded regardless of job level and/or title. These women chose to enter or remain in high education even if there was no chance for promotion to a higher-level position for various reasons, but for the majority in this study the choice was about the ability to “make a difference”, family and community. Several women made the choice to move into higher education due to the demands of work in corporate or government sectors which would not allow them the flexibility to care for their children. This included the understanding afforded to them of the demands on their time and resources needed to serve as the primary care giver for their family. The interviewees felt the academy understood the need for malleable schedules and offered a community of support which wasn’t found in other job sectors. Several shared that in order to move into and/or stay in higher education they gave up job opportunities and/or career growth in return for the ability to serve as a care provider. One woman stated:

I came here [to the institution] because I decided that I should be divorced, which meant that I would be probably raising my daughter pretty much by myself. I was a self-employed consultant, and I made several times more than what I’m making

now, but I had to travel, and I didn't have the benefits. And so, I needed to have a 9-to-5 and I needed family benefits so that I could be a single mom. I just really wanted that. I came in at the lowest [level]. I took a coordinator position. I went way below my level of education and everything just to have a foot in the door. And I would do it again.

It is obvious family took precedence over career for this individual. She gave up a lucrative career in order to become a single parent who could be with her child. Most of the women with whom I worked were not inclined to share this type of information with co-workers or managers until a level of trust was reached so that sharing the importance of caring for family couldn't be held against them in some way. These women were afraid of losing their jobs. This is where unwritten rules were discussed as several of the women with families looked after one another to enable flexibility as care providers to attend school events, be with a sick family member, or just take a long lunch to buy school supplies or pickup groceries. Why would the women interviewed be concerned about colleagues learning of their need for flexibility in their work day to serve as a caregiver? I witnessed first-hand many times at different institutions men who were applauded for taking time to be with their children for a school play or athletic event while women in the same department were viewed as taking advantage of the system for taking time away. This led to the women being viewed by colleagues, both men and women, as taking too much time away from work to serve as the primary care giver and as a result considered not dedicated to their jobs and certainly not in a position to take on a higher level of responsibility, i.e. be promoted to a higher-level position. These types of scenarios frequently took place at the institutions where I worked. While the Human Resource policies and values stated on webpages and in print indicated institutions were

dedicated to supporting “work life balance”, in truth there were very few policies in place to ensure that balance occurred. The unwritten rules in place at the institution where the interviews were conducted made the ability to balance work, life and family almost impossible.

Another example of how hard it is to achieve work life balance comes from a woman who was held back in advancing her career because she was the primary caregiver for her children. This interviewee shared that her career took a backseat to her family when they had a major cross-country move.

When we moved to California we moved for *his* job and, for instance, there was a position I really wanted to take and it would have been a professional growth opportunity [but it] was across town and logistically not going to work with our life, our child care needs, that kind of thing. So, I took a job for an independent school which I could not wait to leave. (Laughter) For better or worse, at the end of the day I don't think it was a setback in terms of what my opportunities were after that job, but I certainly think that had I had the other job I probably would have had some additional opportunities available to me.

This woman deferred her career growth in order to serve as the primary caregiver for her children. While it was apparent she loves her husband, I could also tell from her tone of voice and body language that having to work in a job that was a step down in terms of responsibility and level when she could have furthered her career was not a choice she would have made in other circumstances. She and her husband made the choice to move across county for his job while putting her career on the back burner. Another example of a woman's choice to support and care for her family regardless of the impacts to her career.

We find the same type of situation with another interviewee but with a different theme. This woman turned down a job offer for a higher-level position at another institution in another town and state and chose to remain in a community her family loved. The move would have meant leaving this beloved community, both at the institution and in the town where she lived:

I was offered fabulous position [at another institution] and decided not to take it. Yeah, it was a really good one, umm, but we had many conversations about it [and] it's like, why would we pick up what we have here, we're so, you know, our roots are deep and broad in this community, our family lives here, it was too hard for us to move, so the position was great, [the institution] was great, the people were great, they really wanted me [but] we didn't want to go.

This scenario is one I have seen repeated over and over during my time in higher education. Women seem to constantly make career choices around what is best for family instead of what is best for their own career. Why do societal roles in higher education in particular mirror those of past centuries where women are caregivers and men are providers (Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers, 2017, p. 11)?

The examples above from the two interviewees, as well as my own experiences, have been proven out in research on individuals in higher education who hold the role of president or chancellor, "...10 percent of women presidents reported stepping back from their careers to provide caregiving, as compared to 3 percent of male presidents; 21 percent of women, but only 9.5 percent of men, reported adapting their career plans to accommodate a partner or spouse. These data confirm what we already know: 'In the university world as well as other professions, marriage and children appear to boost the careers of men and slow or stop those of women'" (Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers, 2017, p.

11). If women at the highest level of leadership are criticized for taking time from their career for family, how do women in mid-level management positions combat these types of societal norms and biases and progress in their careers without society labeling them as unworthy caregivers?

Yet another participant in my study shared that while she wasn't unhappy with her choice of career, she has been in the same type of job for well over 20 years and may have "missed out" on some opportunities outside of work and home

I was a single parent, so one of the lifestyle choices I had to make in working was sort of work and being a mom and not having a whole lot of time for other kinds of social life. At this job, when my daughter was younger and in middle school and high school, I didn't travel quite as much. It didn't seem like it was necessary or demanded of me. But when I did travel, I would go maybe for a week at a time, and I had to make sure I had support for my daughter at home. I don't think I missed out on anything in particular, but I think especially in the early years I probably didn't do as much socially outside of the home and outside of work as I might have if I didn't have those other responsibilities.

SF shared that she didn't originally intend to work in higher education. The ability she gained to care for her family while she was employed led to her current career in higher education.

I entered higher education when I was 24... My aspirations, I think, at the time, were to be somewhere maybe in higher ed. but not really sure of what population I wanted to serve. And that was when my older daughter was starting kindergarten and someone came and recruited me to work at an independent school. And it just so happened that the kindergarten room was right next to my office. And we weren't really planning for her to go there. It was about the same price as day care because I got a discount, and I'm a working mom. So then, that's when I switched from higher education into more of a K-12 environment. And it was an opportunity to lead my own team.

Then when I moved into another role at a different company, that was also kind of like serendipity because I was recruited to a health care facility at the time my Dad had been suffering from a debilitating disease for at least 10 years, maybe 15? And within the first year that I was there, he had intensive therapy there. So that became ever more present. I got recruited to come here through a conference. It was a ‘What’s my purpose in life?’ conversation.

So, the reason I took [this job] was I felt some higher calling. You know my dad had passed away, so I wasn’t a caregiver for him. My mom is still there, but she’s really fairly healthy. I had a daughter in college who was getting more settled, and I had a younger daughter who really didn’t have a great experience her freshman year. Who’s a really smart kid but just. I don’t know how much that contributed to it or not. She was very up for this move. If she wouldn’t have been, we wouldn’t have moved.

Once again, the role of caregiver drove career choice. First the ability to be close to a child, then a parent needing medical care, then another child not doing well in a school situation all led to different job choices.

Is it due to the fact that women are seen as primary caregivers in a family situation that they tend to think of everyone else who makes up their “family” over themselves? At what point does a woman stop to think, what could this job change/career choice/career path look like just for me? While SF described “looking for a purpose in life” and a “higher calling” in relation to her career, she also ends this section of our time together being quite clear she would not have made the move to her current position if her daughter wasn’t supportive. Does that mean even if the new role gave SF what she needed for personal fulfillment, her child’s needs always come first? That’s how it comes across during the interview not only for this woman, but for the majority of study participants. As a mother I concur that children’s needs tend to take



precedence over career. However, I am also of the mind that my children would thrive in most environments when they are provided love and support from myself and their father.

While I made conscious decisions to move in order to further my career, I also strove to ensure my children would be in good schools, daycare, etc. I do take my children needs as well as my aging parents needs into consideration when contemplating a career change and have been fortunate that my husband and children have always been supportive of my career choices. Not all women have this familiar support.

### **Institutional Community**

Turning to another prevalent theme from the interviews, the sense of the institution as a community was a recurring topic. One woman shared that she never intended to work in higher education, but because she loved the work, the campus community, and the flexibility the position afforded, she stayed for over 25 years. The women I spoke with truly love the work they do and the campus community where they are employed. One woman said, “I wanted to give back to [the campus]. I don’t know if it was that I wanted to work in higher education. I wanted to work at [this campus] and give back to [this campus]. I really love my job.” Another stated, “Yeah, I really do like it [my job] and I love this work. I like all of it, it’s interesting, it’s fun, I like working with the people I’m working with, these basic scientists are some of the nicest people I’ve met on campus so far.”

The women interviewed were all passionate about the work they did and many, just as passionate about the institution for which they worked. For those outside of higher education, it can be hard to describe the close-knit community on a campus. It is

vastly different from other places of work. Not to be misunderstood, silos exist on every campus generally by division and/or department. However, most individuals wear the school colors, know who the mascot is, and come together in times of celebration and tragedy. There is a general respect and instant bonding when people meet someone and find out they both work at the same institution. It's more than the typical gripes over parking or human resource policies found in corporate or government work. There is an instant bond and feeling of family, even if two people have just met. This leads to a level of trust and familiarity I have yet to find in other industries.

### **Impact of Family**

An understanding and appreciation of "family" was another theme which came to the forefront of discussions throughout the interviews. Women felt they could have a career and a family when working in higher education because of the understanding and tolerance of how families operate. This doesn't mean the tolerance was taken for granted or that professionally having to deal with family issues was always considered appropriate or that there were institutional policies in place which supported parental needs. SC shared:

Fortunately, I've worked with a lot of women, so if I had to bring [my daughter] to the office, if she was quiet, nobody really minded. But I didn't make a habit of it. And I actually bought a home where my daughter could walk home from school. This was the thing that saved me, except for when she'd get sick and I'd have to pick her up. My daughter would walk home from school, and we had an alarm, and she knew how to take care of herself. It was a reasonable age - it was middle school. She would walk home and be there, and that way I didn't have to go back and forth. One thing, if you are responsible, solely responsible for [a] child, the number of sick days that we get is one per month. But that's not just for me; that was for my child too. So, if my child was sick, I had to take sick leave.

And you start with zero. You start with zero days of vacation and zero sick days, and you have to build them.

It's apparent from the above statement that while individuals who worked in the same office as this woman were understanding of the need to bring a sick child to work, from the standpoint of a working professional there weren't adequate institutional policies in place to support flexibility for a single parent. An interesting contrast in a space where the women I interviewed felt they were part of a larger campus community and family. Individuals took care of one another but that didn't mean all of the institutional policies reflected that sense of understanding and caring.

### **Unwritten Rules**

I was interested in the perceived unwritten rules of the campus on which the women I interviewed worked. When I asked a question about the value of the benefits of working in higher education the women kept mentioning, I heard a lot about not only benefits, but also the unwritten rules which needed to be followed in order to take advantage of some of the benefits of working in higher education. I wondered if the benefits of working on a university campus outweighed the unwritten rules? What were the benefits that kept the women I interviewed at one institution and/or working in the industry? What were the most significant factors for why women stayed in the same position and/or the same department or campus for years? For some women the culture and community of the institution far outweighed both the unwritten rules as well as any shortfalls in benefits. RU shared:

I think there's an unwritten rule even among women working with women [that] you have to put in more time. I think you have to prioritize work above family time and need to make a point of doing that. I think that's part of that leftover structure of men being able to really devote themselves 100 percent to their job, and women trying to balance that. I think we talk about work/life balance, but we don't really live it. I think [this institution], in general, talks about it. I think they do a good job in the HR side of talking about it. There was an email that came out from our Dean on faculty and work/life balance which was great! And then I went to the website to see where was the meat to that, and I didn't see any. We talk the talk, but we don't walk the walk when it comes to that.

Interviewer: And do you think some of that is what women bring on themselves?

I think so. I think there's a certain amount of responsibility that women have, but it is a bit of a catch-22, because if you're a woman that's taking a lot of time away to deal with sick kids and your family I don't know that you'll necessarily be the one that's promoted into a position over somebody else. Even if it's a woman doing the hiring. It's unfair. I think we judge each other unfairly....

Another woman was frustrated with what she perceived as a double standard. She felt women were held to a higher standard than men at the institution.

I think the thing that's frustrating is, as a woman. Well, if I were a man, I wonder if that would be societally acceptable. You know, just to sort of coast. I think that even for a woman you're kind of expected to do [everything] all the time. But I just learned that wasn't important. And it's just not, it's not appreciated. And if you do everything waiting for something external to appreciate you, that isn't the reason to go into work every day. You need to do it for you, and so the decision, at least the decision has been for me, 'I want to build that program.' 'I want to take it to the next level.' I would have moved to [a higher-level position] and I would have knocked it out of the park. And I would have, but I don't want to [change jobs]. I don't.

However, another woman didn't see any difference in treatment based on gender stating:

I've never felt marginalized or that I haven't had opportunities at [this institution], whether it was before when I was here, or after. Frankly, or at any of the places I've worked because I'm a female. Maybe there have been factors, but I haven't noticed it. Apart from my reporting relationships in this office, there are a lot of males I work with, and I haven't felt from them like that's a problem either. But I do feel like I am constantly asking myself, 'Is this all I can do?'

SC shared her perceptions of the difference in the way men and women are treated when it comes to taking time from work for family:

One of the people I manage doesn't have any children. One of them has three. And she has, I feel like, a lot of flexibility. She doesn't have any qualms about taking that. For me, I feel like I am able, if I need to be out, because [my child] is sick, I feel like I'm able to [be out of the office]. If during the school year, I feel like if she's got something at school I need to go to, I prioritize that and I go. I think a lot of people do that, but I think it's sort of [an] unspoken [rule]. The demographics in our office now are TOTALLY different from before, when I left in 2011. There were not a ton of people having babies. There were not a lot of young people. So, the demographics have changed which is a good thing, but the message coming from our leadership is not [positive] because they all have adult children. I can tell you when I had my review I commented to my manager that I was struggling to keep up with the volume of email and I feel like I could be a slave to my email every night. And she sort of said to me, 'That's a choice that you have to make. If you're going to open yourself up to being available every night?' And that wasn't really what I was hoping to hear. I mean to me that sort of says 'Institutionally, we feel like it's okay to expect people to be available at all times. If you choose not to do that yourself, that's on you.'

Yet another woman shared:

In my previous position the unwritten rules for women were that no women challenged the role of the leader. The women that were in [mid-level] positions in that office, were pretty much not going to advance. So, the leader was meant to be the one and only [leader].

RU, one of the younger interviewees, shared:

My colleagues and I have definitely discussed a little bit of things that we have thought had a little bit of double standard. Even in our office. We had male colleagues who, if they left to go see a kid's game, it was, 'Oh, that's so nice of them.' If it was a woman who did the same thing, it was more like a penalty as opposed to an exception. I've definitely seen that happen. There seems to be a little bit more flexibility that was given to some of our male colleagues as far as if they left a little early [for a family event or issue]. Whereas if a woman left a little early [for a family event or issue] then her priorities may have been somewhere else and not necessarily at work.

It became obvious whether they were recognized by the women I interviewed or not, unwritten rules for women existed at their institution.

### **Institutional Norms**

NG stated what seems obvious to many in higher education but is often overlooked by individuals who have never experienced the culture as an employee.

People in higher education tend to stay in the same role and department for years at a time, which limits the availability of openings in higher-level jobs for others regardless of gender:

I guess the obstacles would be that nobody goes anywhere, like if nobody leaves [their job then there is] nowhere else to go. You know we have a challenging situation now, at the ending of [a major initiative] and not knowing what the staffing is going to be after that. There will be questions about [which staff members will stay and who will be let go]. When [people] come here [to work], they tend to stay in the position that they were hired into. You know, at senior-levels we've got many associate deans that are female. And in communications. You know, I hate to. I don't really see it. Unfortunately, no. I don't know if that is good or bad. I mean, in this office all the leaders are women and I don't necessarily think that it's that healthy either. Because there needs to be a balance. At the higher university levels all the leaders are men.

Another interviewee shared her frustration with the institution in terms of the flexibility to work remotely when needed:

I don't even know if this is really support, but like our office has NO flexibility in terms of working remotely, working from home. I think there are some people who just do it and people assume they're over at the hospital - and in some cases they might be, but [this institution] remains a place that does not allow for a lot of flexibility. Or at least our office is that way.

### **Gender Bias**

MG talked about discrimination against women by women:

My executive director is a woman, and surprisingly, it is my observation after 11 years that you will get further as a man in her office than as a woman. I think you should always pick the best person. Of course, I always see everybody struggling to have diverse staff and that sort of thing, but 'unwritten rules?' Women have to certainly manage more. I think my experience is the expectation is 'You will work as much and as hard as any man on this staff. We may actually pay you less and recognize you less, and you will, on top of all of that, have to handle everything that goes on at home without letting it interfere with your professionalism.' So, there's a high demand on your professionalism as a woman, and no equal reciprocation. I know some men here who have two jobs to make it work for their family. I'm not saying that. But, yeah.

However, Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers (2017) disputed the notion of discrimination of women by women leaders the interviewee above discussed:

Hence, the myth of "queen bee syndrome." The antithesis of those women like Madeline Albright who understand that "There's a special place in hell for women who don't help each other," the queen bee pushes the ladder away just as other women are getting to the top. The notion that powerful women are the biggest enemy of other women seeking advancement has been debunked by a number of studies demonstrating that women in leadership roles engage in lower levels of discriminatory and harassing behavior, offer more personal support to female employees, and oversee offices with smaller pay gaps between men and women than those run by male bosses. These findings bolster Sheryl Sandberg's

assertion that ‘Women aren’t any meaner to women than men are to one another. Women are just expected to be nicer’(p. 10).

What then is the norm in higher education? Is there bias against women by other women based on solely gender? I have worked with women who discuss how female leaders in the office, whether they are supervisors or in upper-level leadership roles, are “out to get” women in lower level leadership positions because those women are perceived as a threat. Female leaders in higher education are viewed as having worked hard and given up things that matter to them personally, such as time with family or social outings, in order to advance in their careers. Due to the fact that individuals in the academy tend to stay at one institution or in a department/position for many years (Oshagbemi, 2000), it is alleged that they are threatened by other individuals who could take their job, even when this perception may be false.

### **Career Aspirations/Motivation**

I asked the interviewees if they consciously made the choice to stay in their current work role, especially when several shared they had the chance to move to a higher-level role either at their current institution or another institution. MG shared:

I actually picked a way to sunset my career without any aspirations of how I wanted to live my life. I don’t necessarily think I’m going to double my income. I’m not looking to spend more time in the office. And I know that [the work I do] is not met with gratitude and it’s not met with encouragement. So, it isn’t choosing the path of least resistance; it’s really choosing the path of what’s best for me.

I can still get pretty much the same pay [if I stay in my current job]. Maybe I would earn just a little bit more [if I moved to a higher-level position], but what I would give up is far greater. I would constantly be in the spotlight and I would have to justify myself over and over again, and I’m tired of it. I’m tired of proving



myself, and I've done it. I have no regrets. I know what I can do. I know what I did corporately, before I came to [this institution] I know what I did privately, [when I was] self-employed. And I know what I actually accomplished here, which was more and quicker than I expected. And I'm doing a lot of things for me.

I had some serious health issues, so that was the other reason [I stayed in this job]. I had already made that decision about my job, beforehand, but afterward I was really glad. It would have killed me [to take a higher-level position]. I just want to be with my husband. I just want to walk and cook and do my job and whatever. But I don't need that other stuff [the extra responsibilities a higher-level position would bring] anymore.

RE shared that she stayed in higher education and at her level because she felt she was making a difference in the lives of others:

I was going to be 50 and you're having these 'What's my purpose in life?' conversations. So, the reason I took [my current job] was I felt some higher calling. And I know that sounds stupid, but I felt some higher calling. Also, people my age tend to have aging parents if they still have them. And so that whole piece of it is a big motivator [to take or stay in a job].

MG shared that she stayed at the institution due to her age despite misgivings she had about the leader of her division. An opportunity at the institution opened when she was in a situation where she was unhappy with her job but wanted to stay in higher education at the same institution.

I thought he [the top leader in the division] was completely unethical, I didn't like working for him. You know, he was a nice guy [but] he was completely unethical and I just looked at that and I said, you know, why, how can we work with this guy, a leader of this big office, where, you know he's just putting the worst possible face on [our department]? I don't know how other people felt about that I know that there were some other people in this office who sort of felt the same way. But I really, really just didn't trust him and umm...I would've stayed, you know, I wasn't going to leave [the institution] but I was in a conversation with [another administrator] and [a new position in that persons department] came up,

that he was looking for somebody and I said, you know I mightn't be interested and he jumped on that, and that's how it happened. Honestly, I find you just get beaten down so often that you just say, OK, you know, I'm 56, I could just continue doing what I'm doing. On the other hand, I think about where we started this conversation. Ok, I was brought in, brought back to do [a job I loved] and yet I have this whole other area that at this point is blossoming and it's really interesting and I really enjoying it and I would like, at some point to, for somebody to sort of recognize that in a formal way. So, I stayed at [the institution] but took a new role.

MG also shared her reason for taking a mid-level position and staying in it was simple, "I wasn't really looking for a high stress position because I was a single mother and I had the house and the kid and I wasn't really looking to have to take my work home."

KP shared that she hasn't moved to a level beyond that of mid-level management due to personal choices:

I have justified myself at work for years and years, and I know that this is a question you're getting to, but when I chose [to take current job], well I chose a few things, I mean I made some stipulations. I agreed to have my [job] level lowered, my title wouldn't be raised, 'cause they don't see it as a real job. (laughter) I don't think they do; they think, 'Oh, she's going to have fun.' But it's not true. But I maintained that I would have to keep my salary and that it would increase, and things like that. I really didn't care [what the job title was].

### **Advice from Mid-Level Managers**

Having worked on a college or university campus for 20+ years while serving as the primary wage earner and care giver for my family, I have a deep understanding of the loyalty to family, passion for an institution, struggles and joys the women interviewed faced. I asked each woman if she had any advice for those following in her footsteps.

The replies were vastly different and yet, carried some similar themes. MG shared:

First I would say ‘You need to sit down with yourself on a regular basis and really think about what you want. What you want when you get there. What do you expect?’ And then you need to make sure [it] is what you’re going to get when you get there. And if that is the case, then you always, always, always just need to keep moving forward. Don’t take it personally. You do, kind of I guess, have to build a tough skin. I don’t know how to explain that. You shouldn’t compromise yourself. I think that’s a mistake. As soon as you compromise the kind of person that you are, you’re giving up a lot of what might actually be your strength. So, you need to find a way to utilize your feminine strengths for the purpose of your own personal goals. This is really important: they have to be *your* goals. Not somebody else’s expectations. Not ‘My Dad told me I have to do this,’ or whatever, society, or whatever. It has to be what you want. And make sure you get the positive reinforcement that everybody needs to get up every day. That you have a source for that that’s not really dependent upon other people. It’s nice to have somebody at home or anything that reminds you of that, but if you don’t, you need to make sure you give it to yourself.

KP advised:

As I told somebody one day.... I’ve heard people say, ‘I can’t believe so and so has been in that position so long.’ And they see people staying in one position as, ‘They’re lazy. They don’t want to look for something different.’ I view it as, I’ve stayed in this position because I genuinely love what I do, and I know that wherever you go you’re going to have people that you disagree with, you’re going to have people that you don’t like, and it’s how you handle it. I’m confident in what I know and what I do, and I feel like that has propelled me and has kept me where I am and I’m like ‘If I’m not unhappy, why am I leaving?’ I just said this saying to someone the other day and it’s ‘The devil you know is much better than the devil you don’t know’.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter IV included statements from the women interviewed for this study. We have walked in the shoes of professionals in mid-level management positions in higher education to answer the questions: “Why do women make a personal choice not to pursue senior-level leadership positions?”, “Do some women make a deliberate choice not to move into higher level positions?” and “What is it about institutional culture in higher education that makes it so hard for women who desire a higher level role to move into senior-level leadership positions?” in order to understand the larger question: “How do lived experiences of women in mid-level management positions shape their careers in higher education”? The current chapter, is an interpretation and discussion of what the 10 study participants chose to share in terms of their individual lived experiences. “How do lived experiences of women in mid-level management positions shape their careers in higher education”? Then I will focus on answering:

1. “Why do women make a personal choice not to pursue senior-level leadership positions?”;
2. “Do some women make a deliberate choice not to move into higher level positions?” and;

3. “What is it about institutional culture in higher education that makes it so hard for women who desire a higher-level role to move into senior-level leadership positions?”

## **Discussion**

### **Changing Institutional Culture in Higher Education**

Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers (2017) pointed out, “...we will not make real progress until we embark on structural changes that align the academy with the lived experience of a diversified faculty, as opposed to reward systems that privilege masculine behavior and reify the separation of the public and private spheres in which women continue to do the majority of unpaid domestic work” (pp. 11-12). This statement is true for all who work in higher education, not just faculty. Institutional policies must change if men and women are to be equally treated, rewarded, and promoted. Given the value the women interviewed place on family and community, cultural and institutional change will be slow to occur if institutional bias towards women isn’t recognized and eradicated. Women must take on responsibility to advocate for the needed change. MG stated:

I think it’s important that we advocate for ourselves and for each other. I think that’s really important. And by that, I mean professionally and personally. I think we need to model the behavior we want to see. And support, not only support up, and we can do that as best as we can, but I think the biggest impact we have, actually, are in the people we supervise. Because we can control that. We can control how we’re supporting them, and the behavior we’re modeling.

MG clearly understands the value having a supportive supervisor has for individuals.

It's clear having someone who supports career aspirations, be they to move into a higher-level position or to remain in a position and at a level where they are happy and satisfied with their career, is the ideal. For instance, when I was a manager there was a woman who worked for me who was more than content in her mid-level management role. She had an associate's degree and wasn't interested in obtaining a four-year degree. She had a salary she considered fair and reasonable and she *loved* her job. When we would meet for our year-end reviews I would always offer support if she was interested in moving into another position or department in our division. She would always say, I'm happy right here, doing what I'm doing. Why would I want to do anything else?

Simply put, not all women are interested in moving into positions at higher levels which could include more responsibilities, supervisory duties, etc. are interested in doing so. SF, one of the interviewees with the longest tenure in higher education even stated:

When I first began working in university development programs as a fundraiser, I thought that I might like to move up the ranks and become a director of a department or director of fundraising or something. And while I was at the [one university], besides raising money, I was the director of the alumni program. And I would say up until, oh maybe the early 90's, I still sort of thought that I would enjoy that, but I decided at some point that I really loved just doing fundraising and not having any other sort of management responsibilities for other people. And that I would be very happy just doing the actual development work and the relational work and the fundraising work that I do.

In order to ensure individuals, have a chance to either remain in positions they love or move into higher level positions employees in higher education need to challenge institutional policies, unwritten rules and the biases which exists for culture changes to occur.

One important reason to change the culture of higher education to one that is friendlier to women in senior-level positions is the fact that top level management positions are beginning to open at higher education institutions across the United States.

The ‘graying of the presidency’ could be a symptom of America’s aging population...[A]t the same time, they say, it suggests a potential ‘surge’ of presidents’ retiring — leaving a vacancy ‘for which a larger generation of higher education leaders must be identified and prepared.’ [About half of the presidents surveyed said they planned to leave their current post within five years] (Quintana, 2018).

Women who are interested in leading campuses of higher education need to have the experience required in order to take advantage of these anticipated job openings through movement from mid-level management positions into senior-level positions, so they are ready when the top-level jobs are vacant.

Additionally, Hannum, Myhly, Shockley-Zalabak and White (2014) remind those who work in higher education,

...our nation’s students need role models with deep knowledge of their cultures, histories and communities **at all levels of the academy** who reflect their genders, races and ethnicities. What better time to recruit top-tier, competent, confident women and minorities from the ranks of our nation’s faculty, department chairs, deans and other positions to take the helm at the highest levels of our institutions? Dramatic change is needed and the time is now (p. 5).

Cultural change is needed more than ever on campuses of higher education in terms of gender, racial and cultural equity of campus leaders. How can women at institutions of higher education have career goals of working on campus when they don’t see individuals who look like them in the roles they aspire to hold? The topic of

discussion at conferences, in board meetings, faculty/staff senate meetings, and at water coolers around the nation continues to be “How?” While many realize the necessity and importance of cultural change, it remains a real struggle as to how institutions, through policy change, bring to light unwritten rules, the lack of support for professional and personal development, and other inequities that exist. This is a question which must be answered in order to support women who are ready and willing to take leadership positions and ensure a culture shift in the leadership of higher education occurs.

Culture change is difficult in any environment, but especially in higher education where change of any type is eschewed. As Jeffrey Buller (2014) points out,

All organizations resist change. After all, that’s their job. The whole purpose of any organization is to act in ways that are regular, consistent, and predictable. And regularity, consistency, and predictability are natural enemies of change. Yet despite how often change is resisted in the world at large, colleges and universities seem particularly resistant to even modest change (p. 2)

How then, do women, few of whom hold positions of power on campuses of higher education, push for change? Ford (2016) reminds us,

Transforming institutional cultures is difficult, but, as learning-centered organizations, universities should take the lead in reflecting on practices that reify timeworn gender norms. Simultaneously, women must pursue individual level strategies to position themselves well within existing structures even as they participate in the change process. In particular, women can pursue three strategies – social efficacy, social modeling, and mentoring – to acquire the requisite leadership skills and experience that will enable them to claim positions of influence in departments and universities where they can act as transformational change agents (p. 501).



Change won't be easy, nor will it happen overnight but is possible. In order for it to occur for women in higher education, there need to be more women in positions of power who can act as role models and social change agents. The only way for that to happen is to have a pipeline of female candidates ready and willing to take on senior-level roles in higher education. The question then becomes, does such a pipeline of qualified, willing candidates exist and are these women willing to make the personal sacrifices which are many times needed in order to advance to senior-level leadership positions? If not, how do those of us who hold positions of power in higher education help to fill that pipeline? That is a huge question best handled through future additional research.

### **Personal Choices and their Effect on the Path to Senior Leadership Roles**

The women in this study all made personal choices in regard to their career path. Some chose not to pursue positions at levels higher than the ones they occupied at the time of our discussion. These women were happy in their roles and wanted nothing more than to do the work they enjoyed. Others were early in their careers and hadn't given thought to the possibility that there could be a possibility they wouldn't be able to move quickly and efficiently up the career ladder to senior-level positions in higher education. The youngest interviewee in this study stated:

I think what it would take me to get to another level is just more experience. Having the opportunity to have that experience. I would really like for my next stop, my next advancement, to involve a managerial role. I don't necessarily have an opportunity to practice direct management. Like having staff to manage. Not having the exposure to that experience would be a dock on me if that's something that I'd like to move into, which I definitely do, and I think I would be good at, but I won't really have the chance to demonstrate it in my current role.

The woman above realized the skills she needed to move to a higher-level position but was unsure how to gain that experience when she was in the catch 22 of needing to move up in her career but not having the opportunity to do so.

Several women would have liked to hold higher-level positions in higher education but made the choice to remain where they were based on family needs. While they were content with their choices, there was regret that the chance to move into positions of more responsibility or act as a supervisor may never happen for them. Still others were bitter they weren't able to obtain the positions aimed for when starting their careers. They realized some of the choices they made were either around family, the ability to work in a less stressful environment, or the choice to remain at one institution or in a certain community dictated their career path; they weren't happy with the perceived powerlessness to move into higher-level positions. Some of the inability was due to the lack of institutions of higher education in the communities in which they lived. Other times the lack of opportunity to move into other jobs was the result of individuals who remained in their positions for long periods of time. Anyone who has worked in higher education knows individuals who have worked on a campus for 10, 20 or even 30 years. One of my assistants worked on our campus in only a couple different departments for over 40 years! Three of the women in this study worked on their campuses for 20, 24 and 27 years. One woman worked in higher education for 39 years.

We all make choices when it comes to the work we do. Sometimes, these choices are based on the need for a certain income, the area of the world in which we want to

live, the choice to have family, or the need to be the primary care taker for family members or friends. Other times they are based on the lifestyle we prefer. Whatever the choices individuals make, they shouldn't be dictated by a culture of higher education that doesn't fully support women.

### **Lived Experiences Effects on Career Progression**

Tiao (2006) believes women who wish to hold senior-level leadership positions in higher education must consistently over-achieve, maintain good relationships with others, expand themselves constantly, and utilize strong mentor relationships. The results of her study revealed that in order to succeed as top-level executives, women must be "...experts at forging multiple, strategic layers of support through connections, collaboration, networking, sponsorship, and advocacy"(p. 212). Tiao's study reveals that while progress has been made in terms of the ability to access and hold senior-level leadership positions in higher education, equality based on gender is still nonexistent.

The window over the ceiling may open for a while, but then it closes again. Moreover, females who are 'different' in the predominantly male leadership groups continue to experience difficulty making the team. In other words, a women-friendly environment and climate in leadership is never secure. Accompanying the 'outsiders' are often alienation, skepticism, resistance, silence, devaluation, and fewer opportunities or options (p. 220).

In her study Yeh (2018) confirmed Tiao's (2006) theories, "All the seven participants reported that they had to work harder than everyone because of being female. To counter the systemic sexism, the participants were hopeful that if their University was more committed to inclusion and not just diversity, this might begin to solve the issue" (p. 253). She also found that the women in her study offered lack of leadership role

models, support from leaders, and discrimination they faced based on gender made it very difficult to move into leadership positions themselves (pp. 253-254). Experiences of women in my own study found that several chose not to fight the culture and systems in higher education in order to progress to leadership positions. While recognizing there could be a choice to move from mid-level management positions into senior-level positions, the attention and time it would take away from personal lives was overwhelming and not worth the sacrifice. These women were happy to remain in positions where the work they did gave them a sense of accomplishment, the feeling that they mattered to others and were making a difference in the world. RE shared :

You know there's some inner thing that says, 'You're needed there.' There's a purpose. There's a higher purpose for your being there. So that's how I launched into health care. And that has followed me since then because - you know I still like student stuff-- my daughter's in college, so that makes sense. But it doesn't hold my passion like it used to, like health care does. So, the reason I took [my current job] was I felt some higher calling. And I know that sounds stupid, but I felt some higher calling for it.

The woman above didn't sound "stupid" in the least. It was this woman's personal decision. What is implied is that no one should be required to move up the ladder if it doesn't feel right.

The participants in my study felt similar to those in Yeh's (2018) who expressed, "For them it was about living according to their personal values, finding meaning and purpose in what they do and in the relationships they have with the people they serve as well as serving in a goal that is bigger than self" (pp. 255-256).

Women's sense of accomplishment and success come from their lived experiences. Several of the participants in this study showed no regret in the path their career took them while others were bitter about having to choose personal commitments, family in this study, over professional aspirations. Choices made and reflected upon were bemoaned or celebrated depending on the individual interviewee. A common theme for all of the women I spoke to was the ability to share their personal lived experience with others in the hopes of helping women in similar situations have a better understanding of outcomes related to choices made. Having the ability to give advice through an interview was the main reason several women agreed to participate in the study. They shared various pieces of wisdom throughout the interview, which have been shared at various points in this paper. A few comments from the women I spoke with that stand out as something they specifically wanted to ensure was communicated to other women were around education and mentorship.

KP wanted women in mid-level management positions who wish to move to higher level leadership positions to know:

This is something, and it's funny because of what you're studying, but this is something I wish I had [someone] to say to me...put more emphasis on education. Because although I feel like, and I came from an environment [in my previous career outside of higher education], that every six months I was promoted, degree or not. It was solely based on the work. However, when I moved and came south, and I still feel like because of some of the comments that are made, that the emphasis is on education, and then your performance, second. So, I definitely would, if I had to talk to someone now, I would say 'Make your emphasis education and that will take you, you know, where you want to go'.

JH shared she wanted women considering leadership positions to seek out mentors:

I think mentors would help people have realistic expectations and goals. Because I think the unrealistic expectation could really [hurt their careers]. It's certainly discouraging to people when it [advancing their career] doesn't happen, but I think it can also be detrimental to them in their career. Because when it doesn't happen. The reaction. Then people will get labeled. I mean for me that would be the most important thing, to have a mentor kind of guide you, you know. 'And this is what you have to do.' And kind of, 'You know - you gotta pay your dues,' so to speak.

KP also felt very strongly that women should consider happiness in their career choice:

As I told somebody one day.... I've heard people say, 'I can't believe so and so has been in that position.' And they see people staying in one position as, 'They're lazy. They don't want to look for something different.' I view it as, I've stayed in this position because I genuinely love what I do, and I know that wherever you go you're going to have people that you disagree with, you're going to have people that you don't like, and it's how you handle it. I'm confident in what I know and what I do, and I feel like that has propelled me and has kept me where I am and I'm like 'If I'm not unhappy, why am I leaving?' I just said this saying to someone the other day and it's 'The devil you know is much better than the devil you don't know.'

There is no one path for moving through careers in higher education that works for all women. Personal values, judgments and situations can dictate choices made which affect career path. For some women, the unwritten rules, cultural norms, organizational inflexibility, and lack of mentors in leadership positions were insurmountable and they either regretted not taking the chance and moving into a senior-level leadership position

when it was available or took the opposite view and chose to assist others who wanted to do so. As JH shared with me:

I would say it's really important to find support among other women at a similar level. For me, that's critical - to get advice, to have a sounding board, to have confidential support, a support network. I think that that is so important. That also helps to create some balance. Sometimes you just need somebody at a similar level to encourage you to do some things that you know are the right things to do, but you need somebody to say it's okay. "You can go attend your child's Flag Day at elementary school.' You know what I mean? That support network to me is key.

I [also] think it's important that we advocate for ourselves and for each other. I think that's really important. And by that, I mean professionally and personally. I think we need to model the behavior we want to see. And support, not only support up, and we can do that as best as we can, but I think the biggest impact we have, actually, are in the people we supervise. Because we can control that. We can control how we're supporting them, and the behavior we're modeling. I had to bring [my child] to work. It was terrible. I had been really, really sick and we had a big event coming up and then [my child] got really sick. And I was fine, but I had to come into the office for a meeting, and she had a fever. It was just a really bad situation. But there was no going around it. I felt really - I didn't feel good as a Mom because I was bringing her into the office when she was sick, I didn't feel good at all modeling that behavior for my team members. And I made a point, actually, of saying something later, because I didn't want them to think, 'Oh, this is the new normal.' Or that 'JH's advocating that we all put ourselves into the ground trying to get things done'. It was such a unique moment and it was an extreme moment when I had to get something done, and there was nobody else that could do it, and I helped my staff understand that that is not what I expect of them and that was a very unique circumstance that I don't ever want to have to repeat myself.

I just think it's important to be really conscious of the way we're acting and what we're doing, because I think others follow that. We have a new flexibility policy. You may or may not be aware of it. But we've now put in writing working from home as an option in certain cases, being able to be compensated in time if you're working late, like an event. I mean it's not all equal, but the fact that we have something like that in writing is pretty huge for this organization. And there are times I've used it. I encourage my staff to use that with me, because I do try to encourage them. The pendulum has to swing the other way from time to time. And I think that's the way you keep good employees. I think that's the way you build loyalty.

### **Limitations**

Although there are important findings in this study, they do not come without limitations. The research in this paper focuses on a small sample of women at a four-year, Carnegie Classified Research I institution who hold mid-level management positions. While the findings are relevant to the study of women leaders, a generalization regarding all women who work in similar positions at this type of institution as well as women in higher education administration in general should not be drawn. Although this study provided essential insights in to the experiences of women in mid-level management positions and individual career paths, additional studies of women in mid-level and senior-level positions in higher education should be conducted in order to add to our understanding of women's experiences, career choices and progression.

### **Implications for Future Study**

The women I spoke with shared very personal stories with me about their lives, career choices, aspirations, motivations, regrets and more. I wanted to understand, beyond just what the research shows, why more women are not in senior-level leadership positions in higher education. Were more women choosing to remain in mid-level positions or were their options limited due to organizational structure, the lack of mentors and/or support from executives, the fact that people stay in roles for inordinately long times and at the same campus? My research suggests that bias against women in higher education still exists. To gain a true understanding of why there are not as many women as men who hold senior-level positions in higher education, we need to continue to go



beyond what they numbers tell us and listen to the experiences and stories of the women themselves.

Despite limitations, there are certain implications for the findings of this study. The primary implication is the realization that change at any level is difficult. The challenge to enact a change in organizational culture is one people in every organization face. This study supports the argument that there is plenty of work to be completed to determine how to ensure change in higher education actually occurs and on a regular basis. Initiating change in higher education can be a formidable task, but without change gender equity in senior-level leadership roles will never exist.

Also apparent in my study was the lack of racial and ethnic diversity at mid-level management levels. When reading through the participant biographies some may question why the majority of the study participants were white. The answer is, those are the women who held the vast majority of positions at this level at the institution. There was also a real fear when women of color were asked to participate in this study. These women would tell me they very much did not want a record of their thoughts and comments as they felt it could be used against them and ultimately even lead to dismissal from their current job and/or result in the lack of promotion to a higher-level position. The one African American participant had no such qualms when asked to participate. However, she was one of the participants with the longest length of time on the campus and in her position. We need to explore possible connections between race and gender as they relate to the career progress of women in higher education. Finding minority women serving in roles of senior-level leadership positions at Research I institutions of

higher education is almost impossible. A study of minority women in the pipeline for senior-level positions and any impacts gender, race and ethnicity may have on their career development could be very interesting.

### **Recommendations**

Higher education institutions should continuously work to identify how their culture affects the career path of the women who aspire to become senior-level leaders. Institutions can begin by focusing on several key areas found to have impacted the career paths of women in this study as outlined below.

#### **Career Aspiration/Motivation**

Offering resources to help women identify pathways to senior-level leadership positions is critical. Many women in this study had no plan to hold management positions when entering the higher education workforce. Several made career decisions based on family situations or fell into jobs based solely on being in the right place at the right time. A position came open which fit their personal needs at the time for childcare, family well-being, or interests. These women took the job and remained at the institution or in the position for many years with little or no planning for career advancement. What could have happened had resources to assist with the balance of work, family and personal well-being along with a planned progression for an upward career path been easily accessible? Making positions of leadership positions ones that are viewed as a manageable and appealing career goal for all individuals regardless of gender should be the norm. The conversations with women in this study shows institutions need to

improve the ways in which they offer support and experiences for women in mid-level management positions who are interested in becoming senior-level leaders.

### **Institutional Organizational Structure**

Changing the organizational structure which has existed in higher education since the concept of post-secondary education emerged is a monumental challenge. Women who work in higher education and wish to progress in their careers to senior-level leadership positions need to reflect and realize that change will not occur if they themselves don't continue to push for it. Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017) found that "...early leadership experience, encouragement, and support are factors that reduce barriers for women" (p. 10) to progress to leadership positions in higher education. Realizing what contributes to these barriers from an organizational structure perspective and working to eradicate them is an important first step for leaders in higher education.

### **Cultural Bias in Higher Education**

"The underrepresentation of women in senior administrative positions in academe, particularly at research-intensive institutions, is problematic, in that it results in the waste of administrative talent at a time when higher education faces serious challenges that will be met only with strong, effective leadership. The challenges call for new ways of viewing the core mission, how higher education will be funded, how instruction will be delivered, and how findings from research will be disseminated and applied. Women possess great potential to be transformative leaders in the academy at a time when their talents are much needed" (Dunn et al., 2014, p. 9). How can cultural norms and traditions be changed in order to assist women who desire to be leaders to

move into positions of leadership in higher education? While there are many leadership development programs available to women across the United States (Madsen et al., 2012), these programs alone are not enough. By themselves, women may not be able to change centuries old engrained cultural norms and policies. If women are to become the transformative leaders Madsen, Longman and Daniels (2012) believe they can be then change needs to begin from the inside the academy in regards to how women are professionally and personally trained to be leaders with gender neutral opportunities open to anyone who wishes to advance her or his career.

Women who wish to move into positions of leadership in higher education must decide how to change the cultural biases regarding what makes an individual a “good choice” to progress to a role where she is viewed as a leader. Smith et al. (2018) describe how culture in the United States has shaped the ways in which we view leadership traits based on gender, “While men were more often assigned attributes such as analytical, competent, athletic and dependable, women were more often assigned compassionate, enthusiastic, energetic and organized. Consistent with our results, societal attitudes suggest that women leaders are described as more compassionate (the most assigned attribute overall) and organized than men leaders. In contrast, women were more often evaluated as inept, frivolous, gossip, excitable, scattered, temperamental, panicky, and indecisive, while men were more often evaluated as arrogant and irresponsible” (p. 4). While the view of what makes an individual a leader goes well beyond the confines of college and university campuses, leaders at these types of institutions can begin to eradicate bias through the review and revision of

organizational structure, personal and professional development programs, and awareness of implicit bias which exists at their campus.

### **Work Life Balance and Support**

Research on work–life balance reveals gender disparities, lack of policy usage, and a lack of cultural change with little understanding of the ways to bring about a campus culture that understands, promotes, and has established norms that support work–life balance (Lester, 2015, p. 139).

More research should be completed on how formal and informal systems support work life balance for everyone in higher education, but particularly for women. This is important as women tend to wither gravitate towards and/or remain in positions that fit how they can balance work and personal life. As Clerkin (2017) points out, the most common reason women gave for staying with their current employer was that their job fits well with other areas of their life, they enjoy the work that they do, and they believe their job gives them the opportunity to make a difference either in individual lives, their own community, or in the world at large. Women were more likely to stay with their employer for these reasons over what might be considered more concrete, traditional reasons such as pay or benefits. Moreover, when women wrote in their personal answers to the question, “What are the most important things that organizations could do to make you want to work for them? (p. 12)” many talked about having personally meaningful work that connects to their values, purpose, and work-life balance.

Studies show (Gerdes, 2006; Hardy, 2018; Lepkowski, 2009; McDade et al., 2009; Nidiffer & Bashaw, 2001; Sork, 1996) the majority of the time in any situation where care for other individuals is needed, but especially in familial settings, almost by

default, women are the main caregivers. How do women who aspire to senior-level leadership positions remain as the main caregiver when professional demands take over the majority of their time? Several of the participants in this study pointed to the fact that they were caring for children or parents and that care would not enable them to move into senior-level positions, or they moved into a lower paying job with less responsibilities in order to have the time to act as main caregiver. Some of the women were single mothers, others had spouses with full-time careers. When one person in a relationship or family was asked to fit his/her professional life around the needs of a family, the woman took on the role of main caregiver. The women in this study made the choice to be the caregiver and several recognized they had the power to choose and were fine with that choice. The question becomes, why did they have to make the choice in the first place? What unwritten rules, cultural and societal norms, and/or organizational rules led them to believe there had to be a choice between work and family? From personal experience, I know the feeling of having a new-born child at home and feeling torn between being there for that child or answering the text from my chancellor asking for an immediate response at ten at night. I never hesitated to answer the text, knowing without being told that was the expectation from this individual, even if there was no written policy, and it had never been verbally stated. In order to be promoted I had to show I was always at the ready. The chancellor was not a bad person, but many of his senior leaders were male or women with grown children or no children. There were many times he would plan a meeting at six in the morning or seven at night with no thought to the personal lives of his staff. Some of these meetings

I made the choice to attend, others I had to bow out of for family obligations. While there was tacit understanding, the underlying assumption was I was really just a mother. How many women have had similar experiences and why do they still happen? From Clerkin's (2017) study which focused on how to retain women workers, she found,

...to a control group of men, women also rated paid time off and working from home as higher priorities. Flexibility might be particularly critical when it comes to retaining talented women who also want to raise families - women with children rated having a flexible schedule and being able to work from home as more important compared to women who didn't have children. Flexibility was also a common theme when it came to women's personal stories about the most important things organizations can do to retain them (p. 2).

It will take more than formal rules to change the culture in higher education to one of support for individuals seeking a work life balance. Flexibility is key to enabling women not only to stay at an institution but also allow them upward mobility for their careers, if they choose to go after leadership positions. Women faculty seeking tenure and the inability to achieve work life balance has been written about for years. Take these types of studies and expand them to female staff at all levels of the institution. From janitors, to housekeepers, to coaches, to those in Student Affairs, Athletics, Advancement, etc.

Dunn (2014) gives a perfect example of a woman giving up her leadership role in higher education due to the inability to balance personal and professional demands.

With respect to addressing the challenge of work-life balance, less success was found in their roles as leaders. The narratives revealed the personal life often took a backseat to the professional and, in many instances, the personal lives suffered as a result. On occasion, circumstances pushed the personal to the forefront, and the work lives suffered. The decision to step down from the provost's position

was made because of the difficulty of combining work and family life at a time when called into an intensive caretaker role. While she felt this was the right decision, she laments leaving a position she loved. Reflecting upon this time she said, 'I consider this (the inability to achieve work-life balance) a great failure on my part, as I loved the work, and if I had been able to more effectively achieve balance, then I would likely have remained in the position for many years to come' (p. 17).

While it is obvious many individuals must make a choice between professional and personal demands, it seems women are asked to do so more often and are expected to opt for the personal life over their professional life. How can administration in higher education become structured so that there is a chance to strike the necessary balance between work and life? Women who desire leadership roles want them to be meaningful if they are going to take away some of the precious time and energy they focus on personal life and family. As Clerkin (2017) found in her study, "...women are more likely to get "glass cliff" positions - leadership opportunities that are high stakes, precarious, and have a high likelihood of failure. Thus, it might not be surprising that many women said that the most important thing organizations can do is to offer gender-equal opportunities for success" (p. 3) Dunn et al (2014) got it right when they stated, "The results [of their study and many others] suggest that gender may be a more important patterning variable in careers than organizational context." (p. 17).

### **How Individuals can Affect Change in Higher Education**

Looking back at Figure 1 in this study, the three themes which came to the forefront as being the most important to the interviewees were those of personal traits, beliefs and values; family and community. How can individual women support change in higher education's culture and systemic bias which align with these three themes? How



does change happen? Individuals, both women and men, can make a choice to act in small ways and lead the way to change at their institution. One way is by volunteering to serve on committees such as those where decisions regarding workplace policies are being made. Other ways are to question policies already in place for fairness and equity; be the person who steps forward and helps develop equitable policies and procedures; serve on hiring committees and insist on a candidate pool which is diverse; serve as a mentor; there are countless ways to have a voice in support of change.

One example of a policy implementation that can directly impact the themes of family and community is a flexible work time policy. When I began working at the institution where my study was conducted a flex time policy didn't exist. When I left 10 years later, that policy was in place. I voiced my opinion that all faculty and staff should have the ability, as long as their work was completed in a timely manner and/or they were meeting the goals set forth by their supervisor, to have flexible work hours in order to have additional options for childcare; assist with care for a friend or family member; or take a relative to a recurring appointment. The idea of having flexible hours for work was unheard of on the campus and was met with resistance. However, enough individuals, primarily women, joined their voices to request the change and it happened. It wasn't simple or easy but it happened. What other policies and practices could be established or modified by one person asking a question and others supporting the change?

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to share personal stories and career trajectories for women in mid-level management positions at one higher education institution to make meaning of why they have not moved into higher-level positions. I interviewed ten different women regarding their career paths and how they thought and felt about their career journey; current job; personal decisions made during the journey; unwritten rules; if family influenced career and any advice, joys, regrets or nuggets of wisdom they wished to share with women on a similar journey. I wanted to better understand the career path these women followed; any motivation or road blocks which allowed them to remain at a mid-level management level; career growth and unwritten rules around expectations for women as employees in higher education; and how their personal experiences related to their ability to advance to senior-level leadership positions.

Results of this project will be shared with the office of the Vice President for Institutional Equity at the institution where the interviewees work. My hope is that the comments women administrators shared will assist with an understanding of the way in which they make meaning of the politics, policies, unwritten rules, and biases which exist for them as employees at the institution. Through this sharing of personal and intimate knowledge from women in mid-management, the institutional staff in charge of achieving equity on campus, as well as other faculty and staff, will have a chance to learn from deeply personal stories how colleagues perceive their work environment and the challenges and struggles they experience. For administrators, a glimpse into the way in which women perceive their individual situation on the campus could lead to further

change in policies but more importantly, the beginnings of a change in the culture of the institution in regards to gender equity.

It became clear as I interviewed, transcribed, coded and reread transcripts that the women in this study made personal decisions in regard to career path based on family, community and the ability to serve in a position where they felt they would make a difference for their campus community. These women were more concerned with their ability to take care of their family and/or do good things for the world than they were about personal gains [position level, title, salary]. While this is a noble concept, what impacts will women who make the choice not to progress to senior levels of leadership in higher education have on the next generation of their female colleagues? In theory, the ability to hold leadership positions in higher education should be equitable for all individuals regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, etc. It is apparent through the research conducted for this study and the women's personal stories; this does not hold true in 2020. Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017) suggest, "If we hope to make meaningful strides in promoting women's leadership in higher education, we must be prepared for a shift that reflects a valuing of authentic leadership... (p. 12)". I argue not only do we need a reassessment of authentic leadership, but a change in institutional and societal biases, norms and culture.

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**APPENDIX A**

**WOMEN MID-MANAGER SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Institution and Department:

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Interviewee (Title and Name):

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Interviewer:

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Topics to Try and Cover:

\_\_\_\_\_ A: Interviewee Information

\_\_\_\_\_ B: Personal career experience in higher education

\_\_\_\_\_ C: Institutional Organization/Structure influence on career path

\_\_\_\_\_ D: Myths/Stereotypes around gender equity in higher education

\_\_\_\_\_ E: Interviewee Background

Other Topics Discussed:

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Documents Obtained:

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Post Interview Comments:

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## APPENDIX B

### CROSSWALK OF DATA

#### Question Asked

There have been lots of studies about women in leadership positions that talk about ‘unwritten rules’ for women to be successful in leadership positions. In other words, there may be different standards of “good” leadership for men and for women. Are you comfortable sharing an example of an unwritten rule women in higher education may face?

<b>Initials</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Code 1</b>	<b>Code 2</b>	<b>Code 3</b>
SC	My executive director is a woman, and surprisingly, it is my observation after 11 years that you will get further as a man in her office than as a woman. And that. I think you should always pick the best person. Of course, I always see everybody struggling to have diverse staff and that sort of thing, but ‘unwritten rules?’ Women have to certainly manage more. I think my experience is the expectation is ‘You will work as much and as hard as any man on this staff. We may actually pay you less and recognize you less, and you will, on top of all of that, have to handle everything that goes on at home without letting it interfere with your professionalism, so there’s a high demand on your professionalism as a woman, and no equal reciprocation. I know some men here who have two jobs to make it work for their family. I’m not saying that. But, yeah.	Benefits	Pay	Unwritten Rules
RE	No, not really. Fortunately, either it’s my own naïveté, I guess, or. I’ve never felt marginalized or that I haven’t had opportunities at [institution], whether it was before when I was here, or after. Frankly, or any of the places I’ve worked because I’m a female. Maybe there have been factors, but I haven’t noticed it. Apart from my reporting relationships in this office, there are a lot of male physicians I work with, and I haven’t felt from them like that’s a problem either. But I do feel like I am constantly asking myself, ‘Is this?’	Career Choice	Unwritten Rules	
NG	Yes. In my previous position at the ... association. The unwritten rules for women that no women challenged the role of the leader. Not challenge but the women that were in	Family	Supervisor	Unwritten Rules

	positions in that office, were pretty much not going to advance. And don't worry I won't use the Alumni association. I know it from. so I will put it in anything. So the leader was meant to be the one and only and that the women were not. That they were tender. No threats to the leader. And were there any other women to share with things such as if you had a sick child, you had someone to talk about it or did you have any those types of rules or was there support there. Either for child or for parental care. Some women would share. Not now because now my children are gone. But when I was there before I think it was my supervisor.			
RU	Unwritten rules of how to be successful? Hmm. Now that you're asking these questions, I thought of some more things. I actually got feedback one time about. So, I would say that I'm a very polite person, that I am a very kind, polite person. I think I am. But I actually got feedback one time about how to ask for things, like getting deadlines to your colleagues, things like that. Just to reframe the way you ask for things, like 'I would appreciate it if you did this,' as though, 'I need it by this.' But that criticism was certainly not demonstrated by our. Well, the head of our office was a male at the time - and he certainly didn't do the same. However, I was given that criticism and I don't think I ever had any sort of tone that was rude, but I was advised to reframe my requests in the form of a suggestion as opposed to an outright request. Or a deadline. Or a demand. To rephrase it in the form of a request or suggestion as opposed to a demand. And when I received that feedback I was very shocked, because I never thought that anything I said was impolite or demanding. But apparently, it was perceived by some people that way. What was the original question again, the unwritten rules?	Gender Bias	Unwritten Rules	Work Responsibilities
JH	I think there's an unwritten rule even among women working with women that if you. I think you have to put in more time. I think you have to prioritize work above family time and need to make a point of doing that. I think that's part of that leftover structure of men being able to really devote themselves 100 percent to their job, and women trying to balance that. I think we talk about work/life balance, but we we don't really live it. I think Duke, in general, talks about it. I think they do a good job in the HR side of talking about it. There was an email that came out from Dean _____ on faculty	Benefits	Career Choice	Unwritten Rules

	and work/life balance which was great! And then I went to the website to see where was the meat to that, and I didn't see any. We talk the talk, but we don't walk the walk when it comes to that. Interviewer: And do you think some of that is what women bring on themselves? MM: I think so. I think there's a certain amount of responsibility that women have, but it is a bit of a catch-22, because if you're a woman that's taking a lot of time away to deal with sick kids and your family I don't know that you'll necessarily be the one that's promoted into a position over somebody else. even if it's a woman doing the hiring. It's unfair. I think we judge each other unfairly in that, but I've seen that.			
KL	I am not aware of any unwritten rules.	Unwritten Rules		
MG	Unwritten rules? None that I can think of...	Unwritten Rules		
SF	You know, you try not to cry. In public or even in one-on-ones. That's a very good question - unwritten rules. You know I have worked for and been around women who thought that they were being supportive and would announce that they wanted people to succeed and move up, but in fact were pretty threatened by that idea and reality. And, I have witnessed that. Actually early in my career at the United Way. She was one of the first women to ever run a big United Way and I don't know how the hell she did it, but it must have been tough for her. She did make it tougher for the women than the men in that organization, I will say. It was very interesting to see. Interviewer: How did she make it tougher? Can you think of an example? RI: She would, for instance in a meeting, if you offered a suggestion or an idea she would, oftentimes, not necessarily make fun of it, but play it down. Where if the males basically said the same thing, she thought it was a great idea. Sometimes it was very subtle, other times it was like 'I just said that yesterday and she told me it was a terrible idea.' And I just always felt like she was just, and I guess I gave her the benefit of the doubt. I thought that to get to where she was, she must have gotten so tough that she just couldn't relate to other women or try to get a sense of our wanting to be able to look up to somebody that was a positive role model. To me, she was a negative role model. RI: In the way she did, not belittle, that's not exactly the right word, but she would just not	Gender Bias	Male Executives	Unwritten Rules

	<p>get enthusiastic about something that came from a woman the same way she would if it came from a man. And then, after that, I think I've had all male bosses and supervisors until here. It's been ____ and ____ was always great. And then with this _____ at the top, it's the first time. I really don't have much. I run into ____ in the hall, but I don't have interaction with her professionally, actually in the office.</p>			
EG	<p>Hummm. I think everything is written down here. I can't think of unwritten rules.</p>	Unwritten rules		
KP	<p>Not being a woman. More so because of the position. It's you can't. I mean I've experienced you can't be, you know, you can't be direct because of the position you're in. Because people take it for being rude or something like that. There are a lot of 'you can't's' and it, again, it probably would be the same for a male. So, I'd have to say, 'No. It is not any unwritten rules.'</p>	Unwritten Rules		

## **APPENDIX C**

### **RECRUITMENT EMAIL/PHONE SCRIPT**

Dear [insert name],

My name is Jenny Jones and I am a student from the Higher Education department at UNC Greensboro. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about the personal experiences of women in mid-level management positions, with particular interest in understanding why some women are not advancing to senior-level leadership positions in higher education.

I hope to begin to hear and reflect on the experiences of women mid-level managers at institutions of higher education in order to understand their perceptions of the jobs they currently hold and learn if they have a desire to move into senior-level leadership positions. My study does not aim to provide training programs or tips for women wishing to advance in their career. Rather, I am trying to learn more about how women in our position think about personal and professional growth as it relates to career, and hopefully share our combined perceptions in order to provide a campus environment and culture, which is supportive of the women who wish to move into senior-level leadership in higher education.

You have been identified as someone who holds a mid-level management position at Duke University [or in the Duke University Health System]. I obtained information regarding your level from the Duke University Office of Institutional Research via their yearly report and your contact information from the Duke University directory.



If you decide to participate in this study, I will ask that you meet with me for one (1) hour in a location of your choice either on campus or in the city of Durham. To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversation. Only my dissertation chair will be privy to the tapes after they are transcribed. The interview is an opportunity for me to learn more about who you are, what you do and why you do what to you do, and why you choose to do what you do. Everything you share with me will be confidential.

I will also share with you those parts of my paper in which I use the information you choose to provide in order to ensure that I have correctly understood what we discuss.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me [jejonesg@uncg.edu](mailto:jejonesg@uncg.edu).

Thank you for your consideration to take part in this research.

Sincerely,

## **APPENDIX D**

### **WOMEN MID-LEVEL MANAGERS INTERVIEWS**

#### **Introductory Logistical Remarks**

To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. For your information, only my dissertation chair will be privy to the tapes after they are transcribed.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I will ask you questions, but please feel free to share with me as much as you would like to answer each question. I will do my best to keep the interview to the time we have allotted.

Please know that we do not have to cover a set number of questions during this time, I just want to hear your story. This interview is an opportunity for me to learn more about who you are, what you do and why you do what to do and why you choose to do what you do. Remember everything you tell me is confidential. Please feel free to speak your mind.

I will also share with you those parts of my paper in which I use information you provide today in order to ensure that I have correctly understood what we have discussed. Are you still willing to participate in this study?

#### **Personal Introduction**

I asked to speak with you today because you have been identified as someone who holds a mid-level management position on campus. My research project, as a whole, focuses on the personal experiences of women in mid-level management positions, with particular interest in understanding why some women do not advance to senior-level leadership

positions in higher education. I hope to begin to hear and reflect on the experiences of women mid-level managers on campus in order to understand their perceptions of the jobs they currently hold and learn if they have a desire to move into senior-level leadership positions. My study does not aim to provide training programs or tips for women wishing to advance in their career. Rather, I am trying to learn more about how women in our position think about personal and professional growth as it relates to career and hopefully share our combined perceptions in order to provide a campus environment and culture, which is supportive of the women who wish to move into senior-level leadership in higher education.

### **Interview Questions**

First, I would like to ask you some short overview questions...

#### **A. Interviewee Information**

1. What is your current title?
2. Have you worked in departments other than your current one?

#### **Probes:**

Would you share the other departments on campus where you have worked?

Is there an area or department on campus where you have not worked but would like to work?

#### **B: Personal career experience in higher education**

What were your career expectations and/or aspirations when you entered into higher education?

In what ways, if any, have they changed?

**Probes:**

As a female who holds a mid-level management position will you list for me any lifestyle choices you feel you have had to make to reach your current position?

**C. Institutional Organization/Structure influence on career path**

Would you list for me obstacles and/or areas of opportunity that exist for women who are in mid-manager positions but have a goal of moving into upper-level management?

There are no right or wrong answers to this question. You can just tell me what came to mind immediately when I asked you this question.

**Probes:**

Can you describe more in-depth one obstacle and one opportunity that you've experienced to me?

Are there types of support you wish you had received during your career? If so, tell me about these supports. If not, explain why you've felt so supported.

**D. Myths/Stereotypes around gender equity in higher education**

There have been lots of studies about women in leadership positions that talk about 'unwritten rules' for women to be successful in leadership positions. In other words, there may be different standards of "good" leadership for men and for women. Are you comfortable sharing an example of an unwritten rule women in higher education may face?

**Probe:**

Given the world in which we now live, what do you view as the remaining challenges and/or obstacles women with a goal of obtaining a leadership position in higher education currently face?

Is there any advice you would give a woman who has a career goal of becoming a leader in either academics or administration in higher education?

**E. Interviewee Background**

How long have you been ...

\_\_\_\_\_ in your present position?

\_\_\_\_\_ at this institution?

Interesting background information on interviewee:

What is your highest degree? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your field of study? \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

### ADULT CONSENT FORM

#### UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Women Mid-Managers in Higher Education: A Study of Inequity in Higher Education

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Jennifer E. Jones-Goodwin, principal investigator; Colleen Fairbanks, Professor and Chair Dept. of Teacher Education and Higher Education and Deborah Taub, Associate Professor, Teacher Education and Higher Education

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

#### **What is the study about?**

This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: How do lived experiences of women in mid-level management positions shape their careers in higher education? What is it about institutional culture in higher education that makes it so hard for women to move into senior-level leadership positions?

#### **Why are you asking me?**

I asked to speak with you today because you have been identified as someone who holds a mid-level management position on campus. My research project as a whole will focus on the personal experiences of women in mid-level management positions, with particular interest in understanding why some women are not advancing to senior-level leadership positions in higher education. I hope to begin to hear and reflect on the experiences of women mid-level managers on campus in order to understand their perceptions of the jobs they currently hold and learn if they have a desire to move into senior-level leadership positions. My study does not aim to provide training programs or tips for women wishing to advance in their career. Rather, I am trying to learn more about how women in our position think about personal and professional growth as it relates to career, and hopefully share our combined perceptions in order to provide a campus environment and culture, which is supportive of the women who wish to move into senior-level leadership in higher education.

My sample for this study consists of ten women who are current employees of Duke University, which is coded by the Carnegie Classification as "research 1". I selected participants from the Duke's Human Resources categories-based job classification and/or salary bands that denote "mid-level managers". You fall into the classification of mid-manager. Also, due to the nature of the study and the fact that there will be a certain level of trust needed between myself and the interviewee, I have done my best to choose participants whom I have met or with whom I worked during my tenure with Duke Medicine.

#### **What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?**

I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I will ask you questions, but please feel free to share with me as much as you would like to answer each question. I will do my best to

keep the interview to the time we have allotted. Please know that we do not have to cover a set number of questions during this time, I just want to hear your story. This interview is an opportunity for me to learn more about who you are, what you do and why you do what to do and why you choose to do what you do. Remember everything you tell me is confidential. Please feel free to speak your mind. I will also share with you those parts of my paper in which I use information you provide today in order to ensure that I have correctly understood what we have discussed. Are you still willing to participate in this study?

**Is there any audio/video recording?**

To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. For your information, only my dissertation chair will be privy to the tapes after they are transcribed. Everything you share with me will be confidential. Only myself and my dissertation chair will have access to the audio tapes and any notes from the interviews. Notes from interviews will not contain interviewee names, location of the interview or other identifiable information. Interviewees will be coded as #1 - #10 on paper and transcripts in order to maintain confidentiality. Any names you use will be taken out of the transcript and will not be used in the final paper. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although I will try to limit access to the tape as described in the section below titled, "How will you keep my information confidential".

**What are the risks to me?**

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

You do not have to respond to any of the questions you do not wish to answer.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact me, Jenny Jones. I can be reached at 704-687-1967 or [jenny.jones@uncc.edu](mailto:jenny.jones@uncc.edu). You may also contact Dr. Colleen Fairbanks at 336.334.3746 or [cmfairba@uncg.edu](mailto:cmfairba@uncg.edu) or Dr. Deborah Taub at 336.334.4668 or [djtaub@uncg.edu](mailto:djtaub@uncg.edu).

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

**Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?**

Before change that will eventually lead to gender equity in staff working in higher education occurs, personal descriptions of women's experiences as mid-level managers and perceptions - in their own words - are needed to gain insight and explain the complications inherent in progressing to senior-level leadership positions as perceived by those who face them. Collecting, listening to and studying the personal stories of women mid-level managers in higher education will allow for the collection of this type of information.

**Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?**

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

**How will you keep my information confidential?**

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

1. Audio recordings will be stored on a locked desktop computer that requires a username and password to access any information. The researcher is the sole administrator for the desktop.
2. The audio files will be erased from the minirecorder after they are transferred to the desktop.
3. The minirecorder will be kept with the researcher immediately before, during and after the

interview.

4. The mini recorder will be kept in a "cash bag" with a zipper and key lock when not in use for interviews or transfer of files.
5. Audio files will be transferred as soon as possible to the desktop files.
6. Paper files will be stored in a locked strong box in a locked office cabinet in an office which is locked when staff are not in the building.
7. The building is always staffed with university personnel when open. Visitors and guests are only allowed in offices when the individual assigned that office is present.

**What if I want to leave the study?**

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data, which has been collected, be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

**What about new information/changes in the study?**

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you have read the form, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by \_\_\_\_\_.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX F

### IRB APPROVAL NOTICE

IRB Notice

Subject: IRB Notice  
From: IRB <ori@uncg.edu>  
Date: Tue, 15 Mar 2016 11:09:20 -0400 (EDT)  
To: jejonessg@uncg.edu  
CC: irbcorre@uncg.edu, cmfairba@uncg.edu, djtaub@uncg.edu

To: Jennifer Jones-Goodwin  
Teacher Ed/Higher Ed  
1950 S Wendover Rd

From: UNCG IRB

Date: 3/15/2016

RE: Notice of IRB Exemption (modification)

Exemption Category: 2.Survey, interview, public observation

Study #: 15-0221

Study Title: Women Mid-Managers in Higher Education: A Study of Inequity in Higher Education

This submission has been reviewed by the IRB and was determined to be exempt from further review according to the regulatory category cited above under 45 CFR 46.101(b).

**Study Description:**

Before change that will eventually lead to gender equity in staff working in higher education occurs, personal descriptions of women's experiences as mid-level managers and perceptions - in their own words - are needed to gain insight and explain the complications inherent in progressing to senior level leadership positions as perceived by those who face them.

Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: How do lived experiences of women in mid-management positions shape their careers in higher education? What is it about institutional culture in higher education that makes it so hard for women to move into senior level leadership positions?

My sample will consist of ten women who are current employees of an institution coded by the Carnegie Classification as "research 1". Participants will be pulled from the institutions' Human Resources categories based job classification and/or salary bands which denote "mid-managers". Due to the nature of the study and the fact there will be a certain level of trust needed between the interviewer and interviewee, I will do my best of choose participants whom I have met or with whom I worked during my tenure at the institution.

I worked at the institution from which the participants will be recruited for many years and have a network of colleagues on the campus. I hope my familiarity with the institution and the women will allow me to recruit participants from a co-hort of women who at the very least know who I am and my reputation as a trustworthy employee. I also hope to have access to both a comfortable and easily accessible location for the interviews as well as convenient time frames in which to conduct them based on my knowledge of the campus environment and culture.

I am also optimistic that the interviewees will have suggestions of other women mid-managers with interesting personal stories regarding their career paths whom they think could add valuable data to my research.

Interviewees will hold positions labeled by the institutions' Human Resources division as pay categories 14-19. Women who hold positions in these levels will be identified with the assistance of the Office for Institutional Equity yearly report. My intent is to compile a cross section of women who range in age from approximately 25 to 55, from a variety of educational, social and religious backgrounds, which hold positions as faculty or staff