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Full Length Research Paper

Women Leaders within Higher Education in the United States: Supports, Barriers, and Experiences of Being a Senior Leader

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Fundamental change is underway in higher education requiring more leaders and a different type of leadership at all levels. However, statistics indicate the women are under represented at the senior-most levels. Our research focused on 35 women at the senior-most levels of institutions of higher education and explored their journey into senior leadership roles and their experience of being a leader in higher education today. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, coded, and analyzed. Included is a statistical comparison of the experiences of white women and women of color. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the experiences of women in senior leadership positions in higher education. The women leaders in this study provide more detailed descriptions of the positive aspects of being in a leadership role than have been previously reported. The positive aspects of being in a leadership role are important to document in order to provide balanced perspective on the experiences of being a senior leader and a woman in higher education.

Keywords: women, senior leadership, race

Introduction

Fundamental change is underway in the United States higher education sector: (1) Student enrollment is growing while student demographics are more diverse; (2) the population of faculty is growing and increasingly diverse; (3) the need for and cost of earning a degree is increasing and new business models for meeting that demand are emerging; (4) the types of institutions offering an advanced degree are changing (for example, more for-profit and online institutions); and (5) technologies are changing what is taught as well as how teaching and learning are accomplished (Fusch & Mrig, 2011; Lennon, 2013; Snyder & Dillow, 2012; Touchton, Musil, & Campbell, 2008). New forms of leadership and new leaders are called upon to navigate through these turbulent times. In this context of change and turbulence, our research focuses on women who have successfully reached senior leadership positions in order to understand the pathways to the top and how to better support women leaders on that journey.

Since 1979, women have been more than 50% of the enrolled students in higher education (Snyder & Dillow, 2012). In the early 1970's, 11% of doctoral degrees were awarded to women, since 2005 women have earned more than 50% of doctoral degrees (Snyder & Dillow, 2012; Wolfinger, 2008). Most of this recent growth was among white women, and while there has been growth in the number of women of color earning degrees, that growth has been slower than that of white women (Cook & Kim, 2012).

While the general outlook is promising in terms of the number of women earning advanced degrees, few women reach the senior-most leadership levels. The percentage of college and university presidents who are women rose only slightly from 23% in 2006 to 26% in 2012 (Lennon, 2013). Women faculty members continue to earn less, on average, than their male counterparts. Women at doctoral institutions earn only 78% of what male faculty earns (AAUP, 2011). The gap is narrower at two-year institutions where women earn 96% of what men earn (AAUP, 2011). Despite the salary gaps, the percentage of women in faculty roles is nearing 50% (Lennon, 2013). The statistics clearly indicate that while there has been progress, there is much work to be done in creating equitable systems of development and opportunity. While the low numbers of women overall in senior roles at institutions of higher education is concerning, the number of women of color in these roles is

proportionally even lower, and more concerning (Toutkoushian, 2007).

The lack of diversity at the senior-most levels of higher education institutions limits the success of individuals, institutions, and the sector as a whole (Hart, 2006). Many compelling arguments about the benefits of higher numbers of women in senior leadership roles have been presented (Dezso & Ross, 2011; Joy, Carter, Wagner, & Narayanan, 2007). It is clear that advancing women in leadership roles is not something to be done solely to benefit women; it is in the best interest of institutions as well as society overall.

As the baby boomer generation vacates leadership positions, there is a need for talented replacements. Failing to recognize and cultivate talented women leaders for these positions reduces the pool from which replacements can be made. Increasing the number of women leaders in higher education would also increase the number of and variety of role models for a wide range of professions (Patton, 2009). Most professionals begin their career at an institution of higher education. Time spent earning one's degree not only prepares one for his or her profession, it shapes one's perception of a profession in terms of what is "normal" and what is possible within that profession. If, during the course of their educational experience, the senior-most leadership levels reflect a limited array of social identity groups, a consequence can be a perception of limited options in that field. The received message is one that signals "I don't fit" or "No one like me makes it to the top." The cultural importance of higher education is reflected in a recent report, "As microcosms of society, postsecondary institutions reflect, resist, and contribute to shaping norms of the larger culture in which they are situated" (ASHE, 2011, p.3). The focus of the research described here was on understanding the experiences of senior women leaders within the context of higher education in order to identify experiences important in reaching top leadership levels as well as the challenges and benefits of the role.

Review of Literature

Leadership approaches are expanding to include more plural and inclusive forms of leadership (Denis, Langley & Sergi, 2012). According to Marion and Uhl-Bien (2001) complex leadership is called for in complex organizations, and one might add in complex times. Some scholars have posited that women, in general, may be better able to lead complex organizations (Ritt, 2004). However, there are two downsides of these types of arguments. One is that focusing on individual characteristics reinforces a heroic leadership model and distracts from the growing understanding that leadership is a process and is often most effective when there is a diverse mix of skills and perspectives represented and able to work well together. Another downside is that focusing on individual characteristics and determining which gender has more or less of the desired characteristics can reinforce unhelpful stereotypes. Perhaps a more important focus for inquiry is understanding how to increase effective leadership and the variety of leaders required. Some argue that there are fewer women at the top because fewer women desire to be there or have what it takes to succeed at higher levels of leadership. Undoubtedly there are individual cases where that is true. Equally true, however, is the counterpoint: that there are women who desire to be senior leaders and have the skills to do so, but face multiple challenges on their journey to the top.

Previous research has shown that informal exclusion, devaluation, and marginalization can function to exclude women from the academic enterprise (Maranto & Griffin, 2011; Nguyen, 2012). Boards of Trustees are often male dominated and replacements are selected from their professional networks (Ehrenberg & Main, 2008). The networks tapped for these positions often do not always adequately represent a range of identity groups. Previous research also suggests that adding one or two women may not be enough to reap the benefits of difference, and argue that a more substantial amount of representation is needed (Konrad, Kramer, & Ekrut, 2008).

In addition to structures and processes that reinforce traditional, outdated leadership models and expectations, our collective conceptions about leaders and leadership tend to continue to give preference to men (Eagly & Karau, 2002). According to Evans, (2011, p. 62) "Men are still viewed as 'default leaders' and women as 'atypical leaders,' with the perception that they violate accepted norms of leadership, no matter what the leadership behavior." Not being seen and not seeing oneself as a leader threatens the future of women leaders (Christman, 2012). These forces coupled with a lack of senior role models for women create an unseen barrier for aspiring women leaders. "The higher a woman goes on the academic ladder, the fewer female colleagues she finds, the problem of finding mentors and supervisors becomes more acute the higher she advances" (Glover, 2010). There also remains a double bind, in which women who are assertive are seen as too tough and not likable or not feminine, while women who are compassionate are seen as too soft and not a leader; this creates a no-win situation for some women (Oakley, 2000). Women must not be too much within or too far outside of social constructions of femininity; the consequence of doing so can be detrimental to the perceived competence of the woman's leadership (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Oakley, 2000).

In addition to the intangible challenges related to identity and stereotypes, women tend to be assigned heavier course, service, and advising loads relative to their male counterparts (Aguirre, 2000) reducing their availability and energy for higher profile work, including meaningful leadership roles. Early formal leadership experiences provide the opportunity to see oneself as a leader, to build leadership skills, and for others to more clearly see his or her leadership potential. Not engaging in leadership early in one's career can create an experience gap that is cumulative, becoming most pronounced at the highest levels (Jackson & Leon, 2010; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009).

Increasing responsibilities in the workplace have not been coupled with decreased obligations for women on the home front. Women still bear the burden of care and household responsibilities (Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Wells, 2011). In a study of two generations of graduate students Friedman (2013) found that the number of graduates, both men and women, who plan to have children has dropped by nearly half in the past two decades. Faced with the challenges of being a dual-career couple, respondents indicated that they are opting out of parenthood rather than compromise career goals. Similarly, Hewlett (2002) found that women faculty have the highest rate of childlessness of any profession (43%). While women choose to not have children for a wide variety of reasons, there should not be a choice between being successful in a profession and being a parent especially when men rarely face this choice. In fact, the majority of men in senior positions are married and have children; 89% of men in senior positions are currently married while only 63% of women presidents are married. Ninety-three percent of men have children under the age of 18 while only 71% of women presidents have children (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). In addition to being personally fulfilling, being a parent may also enhance one's career. Research by Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, and King (2002) found that engaging in multiple life roles (such as parenting) in addition to leading was related to positive outcomes such as higher self-esteem and higher ratings of managerial skill and performance.

Flexible work options can help individuals better manage multiple roles, but research in other fields indicates that flexible work options can be difficult to navigate, in part because these options have been shown to have both positive and negative career consequences (Leslie, Manchester, Park, & Mehng, 2012). While flexible work provides more options for where and when individuals work, it does not always address workload issues; an issue particularly pronounced in academia because of the promotion and tenure system which is routinely timed. If a faculty member does not achieve tenure within the allotted time he or she could be out of a job during the early stages of one's career. Exacerbating the need for new ways of thinking about and organizing work is the increasing work demands on leaders and administrators in general. In light of these increasing demands, one study indicated that women administrators are more likely than men administrators to identify an overwhelming workload as a major dilemma (Kochan, Spencer, & Matthews, 2000). Understanding the pathways to and the pressures faced by senior-leaders contributes to understanding what needs to be done to open doors and create support for these leaders. Empirical evidence about women in higher education surfaces information that is both challenging and helpful. Diversifying higher education leadership is critical and the stalled pace suggests that more work is needed to understand and address the underlying factors that are contributing to the slowed progress.

Research Questions

Given the preponderance of research suggesting women are not moving adequately into diverse leadership roles and positions within higher education, we sought to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What barriers or sources of discouragement do senior women leaders identify as obstacles faced on their journey to leadership roles?

Research Question 2: What sources of encouragement and support do senior women leaders identify as important to their success?

Research Question 3: What are the negative aspects of being in a senior leadership role?

Research Question 4: What are the positive aspects of being in a senior leadership role?

Description of Sample and Method

Our research focused on women at the senior-most levels of higher education institutions in the United States of America and explored their journeys into senior leadership roles and their experiences of being a leader. Using a semi-structured interview protocol we interviewed 37 senior-level women. The women provided demographic information via an online survey or as part of the interview process. Interviewees were identified by tapping into the professional networks of the chancellor at a large public university and the executive director of a leadership development institute especially for women in higher education. A snowball sampling technique, wherein interviewees were asked to recommend other women to be interviewed, was used to identify additional women to be interviewed. All women were assured that the information they shared would be kept confidential and they provided permission to have the interview recorded. Interviews were conducted face-to-face whenever possible, but the majority of interviews were conducted over the phone. Two of the interviews were not analyzed because the interview quality was not sufficient for analysis; the remaining 35 interviews were included in our analysis.

Description of the Interviews and Coding

All of the interviewees had a doctorate as their highest earned degree. The mean age of the 35 interviewees was 57.49 years (SD = 7.90). The majority (20) of interviewees were Caucasian, with the remaining interviewees identifying as African American (9), Latina (1), Native American (2), Latina and Native American (1) or Other (2). Twenty-three of the participants were married, three were partnered, four were single or never married, and the remaining women were widowed (1), divorced (1), or living as married (1). Seventeen of the participants had at least one child, with an average of 2.2 (SD=1.24) children for those with children. In terms of organizational level, 15 were Presidents/Chancellors (2 being emeriti), 10 were Vice Presidents/Vice Chancellors, 5 were

Provosts, with the remaining 5 holding another senior leadership role, such as Dean, Chief Diversity Officer or Treasurer. Seventeen of the participants had been in their current position for 1-5 years, 10 had been in their current role for 6-10 years, 4 had been in the role for less than a year, and 4 had been in their role for longer than 11 years. Fourteen participants were employed by Public Universities, with the remaining women representing a variety of institution types including Private Liberal Arts Colleges, Community Colleges, Private Universities, Tribal, Technical, Public, and Private Colleges, an Art Institute, or a Board of Regents. Sixteen participants were employed at institutions with student enrollment between 1,000 and 9,000, 7 at institutions with enrollment between 10,000 and 19,000, and 5 where enrollment was between 20,000 and 31,000 students. The remaining participants worked at institutions where enrollment exceeded 50,000 students or was less than 1,000 students. One interviewee did not report the size of her institution.

The interviews were professionally transcribed. The research team then used a constructivist grounded theory approach to analyze the interviews (Charmaz, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Two researchers independently created summaries of each interview that were combined by a researcher into a single summary. This process helped to ensure that summaries were as comprehensive as possible. Four members of the research team each read all of the summaries and proposed and discussed interview themes; 15 themes emerged. Based on those themes, the researchers developed an initial codebook. At least three independent coders coded each full interview transcript. Researchers independently reviewed interviews to identify passages of text related to the 15 identified themes. Inter-rater agreement among raters was calculated (see Table 1).

After the initial coding was completed, we identified themes to pursue based on the level of inter-rater agreement and our desire to reflect a balanced perspective (e.g. positive and negative themes). We further refined the descriptions of these areas and reexamined the interviews to confirm that all relevant passages were identified. The following themes were selected: Barriers to Leadership, Supports for Leadership, Negative Aspects of Being in a Leadership Role, and Positive Aspects of Being in Leadership Role. The first set of themes examined the supports for and barriers to leadership roles. This set of themes included stories interviewees shared about experiences that provided them with support on their leadership journey as well as stories of the barriers or roadblocks they faced along the way. The second set of themes focused on the negative and the positive aspects of being in a senior leadership role.

Table 1:

Interrater Agreements for Initial Coding

Theme	**Level of Agreement**
Agency Self-Efficacy	0.81
Authenticity	0.66
Confronting Political Landscapes, Institutional Systems, and Gendered Expectations	0.99
Formal Development Experiences	0.80
Gendered Leadership Style	0.95
Negative Aspects of being in a Leadership Role	0.93
Positive Aspects of being in a Leadership Role	0.99
Career Stalling or Limiting	0.60
General Discouragement, Naysaying, and Lack of Support	0.77
General Encouragement, Support, and/or Acceptance	0.94
Role Models	0.65
Task Information, Knowledge Development, Career Growth, and Task Completion	0.76
A Family Member Outside the Organization	0.86
Someone Inside the Organization at the Time of the Event Described	0.93
Someone (or Some Group) Outside the Organization at the Time of the Event Described	0.71

Interview passages associated with these themes were independently reviewed by at least two researchers and subthemes were identified and discussed. A detailed codebook was created for each theme. The four codebooks included a description of the subthemes associated with each major theme, as well as at least one example to illustrate each subtheme. Two independent raters coded interview passages into the subthemes. The codes were captured and analyzed using the qualitative analysis software package Nvivo 10. We calculated the level of agreement between raters using Cohen's Kappa (K) (see Table 2). The value of Cohen's Kappa ranged from 0.18 to 0.86. A commonly used scale to determine the acceptability of Kappa values (Landis & Koch, 1977) considers Kappa values between .21 and .40 as indicating fair agreement, between .41 and .60 as indicating moderate agreement, between .61 and .80 indicating substantial agreement, and between .81 and .99 as indicating near perfect agreement. Interview

passages on which coders did not agree were discussed until an agreement was reached, though in some instances passages were omitted from the coding process. A detailed description of the subthemes is provided in the subsequent paragraphs.

Table 2.

Cohen's Kappa for Subthemes

Subthemes	Kappa
BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP	
Not Having a Leadership Identity	0.47
Lack of Opportunity and Support	0.46
Discouragement and Sabotage	0.66
Different Expectations for Men and Women	0.65
SUPPORTS FOR LEADERSHIP	
Formal Leadership Development	0.39
Early Leadership Experiences	0.86
Encouragement and Support	0.80
Having a Role Model	0.40
NEGATIVE ASPECTS	
Scrutiny and Criticism	0.65
Time Demands of the Job	0.79
Pressure of Ultimate Accountability	0.41
Broad Scope of the Job	0.37
Isolation	0.66
Not Fitting In-Not Being Heard	0.84
POSITIVE ASPECTS	
Having an Influence	0.21
Making an Impact	0.38
Broad Scope of the Job	0.80
Power, Authority and Autonomy	0.18
Being a Role Model	0.67

Description of codes for barriers senior women face

The barrier subthemes included the following: *Not Having a Leadership Identity*, *Lack of Opportunity or Support*, *Discouragement and Sabotage*, and *Different Expectations for Men and Women*. The subtheme *Not Having a Leadership Identity* was used to code stories of women limiting themselves because they did not see the possibility of being in a leadership role or did not see the possibility of being a leader while remaining authentic. Passages coded as *Lack of Opportunity and Support* were about women not being offered or asked to apply for leadership roles or opportunities. Stories were also about men being well-networked in a manner that afforded them access to leadership opportunities via connections while a woman who was just as qualified was overlooked. Descriptions of *Discouragement and Sabotage* included subtle as well as direct discouraging comments and acts of sabotage. Whereas the previous barrier (*Lack of Opportunity and Support*) included passive instances, discouragement and sabotage was a theme that illustrated active examples from people in these women's lives. Passages coded as *Different Expectations for Men and Women* reflected expectations and standards that were at times held by the women themselves (internal expectations) and in other cases were general social norms (external expectations) that women would not be able to perform well in a leadership role. Some stories reflected the experience that women have to perform at higher levels than their male counterparts in order to be recognized as competent.

Description of codes for sources of support senior women identify

The subthemes associated with supports for a leadership role included *Formal Development Experiences, Early Leadership Experiences, Encouragement and Support*, and *Having a Role Model.* Passages coded under the subtheme *Formal Development Experiences* referenced a formal leadership development experience (e.g. a leadership development program or a formal mentoring program) that helped define success, increase skills, and improve confidence. Passages coded as *Early Leadership Experiences* were stories of experiences that happened while growing up or before entering into a formal leadership role that taught the interviewee something valuable about their leadership or leadership more generally. The subtheme of *Encouragement and Support* includes any mention of support or encouragement the interviewee received from others at any point during the interviewee's career. The *Having a Role Model* subtheme was used to code passages wherein the interviewee mentioned having a person or event in her life that she learned from by observing or interacting with that person.

Description of codes for negative aspects of being in a senior leadership role.

The subthemes associated with the negative aspects of being in a leadership role included *Broad Scope of the Job, Isolation, Not Fitting in-Not Being Heard, Pressure of Ultimate Accountability*, *Scrutiny and Criticism*, and *Time Demands of the Job*. The subtheme *Broad Scope of the Job* represents the stress and pressure of having multiple, and sometimes competing, roles within the institution as well as balancing diverse stakeholder relationships. The passages coded at the subtheme of *Isolation* included references to a reduction or lack of contact with social and/or professional networks. This is

partly because there are few women in these roles, but also because of the nature of the role. Women who were originally in faculty positions noted that colleagues tended to view the decision to go into administration as going to the "dark side," and they were no longer trusted by their previous peer group. Passages of *Not Fitting in-Not Being Heard* included missing out on opportunities because women are not part of the "good old boys" network. Stories reflected feelings of not fitting in and missing out on decisions or conversations because the interviewee was not included or invited to participate. Interviewees also expressed the sentiment that often a woman can say something, but until a man says it, it is not recognized as a good idea. The subtheme *Pressure of Ultimate Accountability* included references to pressures that come with making difficult decisions and being accountable for everything within an institution. Passages in the subtheme *Scrutiny and Criticism* included women feeling perpetually watched, questioned, and criticized by others. The women often stated they felt like people were watching them with the assumption that they would inevitably fail. Some interviewees shared stories about regularly having their credentials questioned. *Time Demands of the Job* was the last subtheme within negative aspects of being in a leadership role. Passages included managing the long hours of the job and the stress of multiple roles (such as parent and leader). Many women noted that female presidents tend to play more roles than a male president would. For example, some leaders mentioned pressure to personally attend social functions of institutions, whereas for married male presidents with a female spouse it was acceptable for the wife to play that role. This feeling of always being "on," the cumulative impact of extra roles, familial pressures, and a lack of personal time encapsulates the most common time demands and work life alignment challenges in higher education.

Description of codes for positive aspects of being in a senior leadership role.

The positive aspects of being in a leadership role included the following subthemes: *Having an Influence, Making an Impact, Broad Scope of the Job, Power, Authority, and Autonomy*, and *Being a Role Model*. Passages coded as *Having an Influence* were about the interviewees involvement in and engagement with the decision making processes. These leaders talked about the advantage of having a voice at the table and being able to represent viewpoints, constituencies, or populations in situations where those perspectives are not always present or considered. Stories associated with the subtheme *Making an Impact* indicated that creating positive change was rewarding. The stories included changing someone's path for the better by opening doors and helping them, encouraging faculty members and students, influencing higher education policy, and starting or changing institutional initiatives. Passages coded as *Broad Scope of the Job* relayed the role-based opportunities and connections which allowed them to have a more comprehensive perspective. The subtheme *Power, Authority, and Autonomy* was used to code passages that described the benefits of having sufficient power to make and execute decisions. The subtheme *Being a Role Model* was used to code passages that expressed the reward women felt from knowing that their presence in a leadership role was a source of encouragement for others.

Description of the Results

In the barrier category, *Discouragement and Sabotage* along with *Different Expectations for Men and Women* were mentioned by 60% of the women in our sample. While 51% of the total sample mentioned the *Lack of Opportunities and Support* they received, nearly 75% of women of color experienced this barrier compared to only 35% of white women, a statistically significant difference. Forty-six percent of the entire sample shared stories that were coded as being related to *Not Having a Leadership Identity*.

In the support category, 40% of our sample mentioned the importance of receiving support and encouragement from mentors and their networks, accounting for over 75% of the total references coded in this category. Over a quarter of women leaders interviewed discussed the positive impact of *Formal Leadership Development*. While 20% of white women experienced the benefits of *Having a Role Model* only 7% of women of color said the same thing. On the other hand, 13% of women of color recognized how *Early Leadership Experiences* shaped them while only 5% of white women discussed the impact of early leadership experiences. While neither of these differences was statistically significant, it is worth exploring this in future research.

Pressures associated with the intense *Time Demands of the Job* were mentioned by 46% percent of the women interviewed and accounted for 18% of the total references coded as negative aspects of being in a leadership role. Forty percent of women interviewed mentioned being singled out for criticism or being the target of intense scrutiny and, though mentioned by fewer participants, references coded in this sub-category accounted for over a quarter (28%) of the total in this category. More women of color in our sample (67%) shared experiences of *Scrutiny and Criticism* than did white women (20%); a statistically significant difference. More than 30% of the women in the sample discussed challenges related to the *Broad Scope of the Job*, *Isolation*, or managing the *Pressure of Ultimate Accountability.* The challenge of *Not Fitting in or Not Being Heard* was discussed by nine women interviewed, a quarter of total participants, but only represented 9% of total references in the negative aspects of being in a leadership role category.

Eighty percent of interviewees identified *Making an Impact* through their leadership role as a positive aspect of their position. While only 10% of white women mentioned *Having an Influence* as a positive aspect of being in a leadership role, nearly 50% of women of color indicated *Having an Influence* as a positive aspect of the role; the difference between the responses of white women and women of color is statistically significant. *Having an Influence* was the second most positive

aspect of being in a leadership role after *Making an Impact*. Thirty–five percent of white women see the *Broad Scope of the Job* as being a positive aspect while only 10% of women of color view it this way. *Being a Role Model* to others was mentioned equally by both white women and women of color.

Table 3.

Number of Interviews Coded as Each Subtheme

	White Women *(N=20)*		Women of Color *(N=15)*		Total Sample *(N=35)*	
Subthemes	n	%	n	%	n	%
BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP						
Not Having a Leadership Identity	9	45%	7	46%	16	46%
Lack of Opportunity and Support	7	35%	11	73%	18	51%
Discouragement and Sabotage	11	55%	10	66%	21	60%
Different Expectations for Men and Women	13	65%	8	53%	21	60%
SUPPORTS FOR LEADERSHIP						
Formal Leadership Development	5	25%	5	33%	10	29%
Early Leadership Experiences	1	5%	2	13%	3	9%
Encouragement and Support	7	35%	7	46%	14	40%
Having a Role Model	4	20%	1	6%	5	14%
NEGATIVE ASPECTS						
Scrutiny and Criticism	4	20%	10	67%	14	40%
Time Demands of the Job	10	50%	6	40%	16	46%
Pressure of Ultimate Accountability	8	40%	3	20%	11	31%
Broad Scope of the Job	6	30%	5	33%	11	31%
Isolation	6	30%	5	33%	11	31%
Not Fitting In-Not Being Heard	3	15%	6	40%	9	26%
POSITIVE ASPECTS						
Having an Influence	2	10%	7	46%	9	26%
Making an Impact	15	75%	13	86%	28	80%
Broad Scope of the Job	7	35%	3	20%	10	29%
Power, Authority and Autonomy	9	45%	6	40%	15	43%
Being a Role Model	5	25%	5	33%	10	29%

SPSS was used to conduct Pearson's chi-square test of independence in order to examine the relationship between the subthemes within each thematic area and the racial categorization of the women in this sample. Race was categorized as a dichotomous variable (e.g. white women and women of color). This is not to suggest that either white women or women of color are homogenous groupings, but rather to determine, at a very rudimentary level, if women of color and white women have different experiences and perspectives of their leadership journey. These analyses extend previous research about race and the intersectionality of race and gender (Turner, Antonio, Garcia, Laden, Nora, & Presley, 2002).

The three subthemes for which a statistically significant difference between white women and women of color were found included *Scrutiny& Criticism* ($\chi^2(1, N = 35) = 7.78$, $p = .005$), *Lack of Opportunity & Support* ($\chi^2(1, N = 35) = 5.04$, $p = .025$), and *Having an Influence* ($\chi^2(1, N = 35) = 6.03$, $p = .014$). In all cases, women of color expressed higher frequencies as compared to white women (see Table 4 for full results).

Table 4:

Chi-squared results

	White Women *(N=20)*		Women of Color *(N=15)*		χ^2	*p-value*
Subthemes	n	%	n	%		
BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP						
Not Having a Leadership Identity	9	45%	7	46%	0.010	*0.922*
Lack of Opportunity and Support	7	35%	11	73%	5.040	*0.025**
Discouragement and Sabotage	11	55%	10	66%	0.486	*0.486*
Different Expectations for Men and Women	13	65%	8	53%	0.486	*0.486*
SUPPORTS FOR LEADERSHIP						
Formal Leadership Development	5	25%	5	33%	0.292	*0.589*
Early Leadership Experiences	1	5%	2	13%	0.760	*0.383*
Encouragement and Support	7	35%	7	46%	0.486	*0.486*
Having a Role Model	4	20%	1	6%	1.244	*0.265*
NEGATIVE ASPECTS						
Scrutiny and Criticism	4	20%	10	67%	7.778	*0.005***
Time Demands of the Job	10	50%	6	40%	0.345	*0.557*
Pressure of Ultimate Accountability	8	40%	3	20%	1.591	*0.207*
Broad Scope of the Job	6	30%	5	33%	0.044	*0.833*
Isolation	6	30%	5	33%	0.044	*0.833*
Not Fitting In-Not Being Heard	3	15%	6	40%	2.804	*0.094*
POSITIVE ASPECTS						
Having an Influence	2	10%	7	46%	6.033	*0.014**
Making an Impact	15	75%	13	86%	0.729	*0.393*
Broad Scope of the Job	7	35%	3	20%	0.945	*0.331*
Power, Authority and Autonomy	9	45%	6	40%	0.088	*0.767*
Being a Role Model	5	25%	5	33%	0.292	*0.589*

Note: *p<0.05. **P<0.01.

Discussion and Implications

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the experiences of women in senior leadership positions in higher education. The women leaders in this study provide more detailed descriptions of the positive aspects of being in a leadership role than have been previously reported. This is an important contribution because stories about the negative experiences of women leaders tend to outnumber and garner more attention than the positive ones, which can serve to dissuade women from pursuing leadership roles. Advocates of women's leadership need to prepare women for challenges, but

also make clear the benefits and rewards of formal leadership positions.

Another important contribution of this work is the exploration and documentation of the experiences of women of color as contrasted with the experiences of white women in similar leadership positions. That women of color are not offered leadership opportunities and are more likely to experience scrutiny and criticism than their white counterparts is an important finding. It suggests that particular focus and attention is needed in that area. Also important is the finding that for many of the women of color in this study, the counter-veiling experience—having influence and a role in shaping policy—is a powerful motivator. While the women interviewed in this research were, as a group, gratified by "making a difference," the specific benefit women of color reported seeking and claiming for themselves is being a voice for those who are routinely excluded from strategic conversations and decisions. Taken as a whole, these findings provide support for continued vigilance with regard to stereotypical expectations, discrimination, and other forms of inequity women continue to face. Our findings suggest new approaches for leadership development which specifically address the challenges and the positive aspects of leadership.

The change required is multifaceted. Cultural norms are shifting, but "think leader, think male" remains true. Women wrestle with internal and external expectations that are neither helpful nor realistic. Empirical research is a mechanism whereby damaging myths and beliefs that are folklore from ages past can be brought to light and critically examined.

There must be greater urgency in public conversations about the current, sometimes more subtle, forms of discrimination and bias that persist. It is important for women's leadership advocates and sponsors to continue to engage in systematic inquiry that informs individual as well as collective action.

Discouragements can be faced and overcome by drawing on positive experiences. Extending opportunities and providing positive reinforcement can have a real and cumulative impact for women in higher education. If we are strategic in and vocal about our efforts and the results thereof, perhaps this can form the basis for institutional practices and larger social change to create new paths for women as well as men to exercise leadership aligned with their professional and personal roles.

Our findings suggest that it is important for leadership development initiatives to include stories from women who are comfortable with having and using authority. Having role models that demonstrate a range of different ways of being in and successfully navigating a leadership role would help make the role more attainable and attractive and could serve to weaken assumptions and stereotypes. Also helpful would be for leaders to share more about the intellectual excitement in the broad scope of senior leadership roles. While the work of senior leaders is different from the research, teaching, and writing that characterizes faculty roles, there are intellectual challenges and rewards.

As with any research project, there are tradeoffs that impact the research process and outcomes. The sample size for this project, while larger than many qualitative studies, is a small subset of the entire population of senior-level women leaders. Therefore, the stories gathered may not reflect the full range of senior-level women leaders' experiences. For this study only women were interviewed therefore, we cannot make direct comparisons between the experiences of male leaders with the experiences of female leaders. We purposefully sought to represent women of color in our sample. The outcome of that, one could argue, is that women of color are over represented relative to the population. However, the paucity of research on senior level leaders who are women of color in higher education was a gap we wanted to help fill. All of the interviews occurred at one point in time with women advanced in their careers. A longitudinal approach could have provided deeper information about the career trajectory of senior women leaders. Some of the stories shared by interviewees reflect experiences from decades earlier which creates two challenges; 1) errors associated with recall and 2) their experiences may not reflect the experience of women currently in the earlier stages of their careers. Tradeoffs are an inherent part of the research process and any single study can, at best, seek to contribute empirical evidence that contributes to a deeper understanding of complex phenomena.

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