



# Advancing Women in Leadership

JOURNAL

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VOLUME 43, 2024  
ISSN 1093-7099

EDITORS: BEVERLY J. IRBY, NAHED ABDELRAHMAN, BRAD BIZZELL, AND JULIA BALLENGER  
ASSISTANT EDITOR: JORDAN DONOP & KRISTINA HALL

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*Full Length Research Paper*

## The Effects of Burnout in Female Higher Education Administrators

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Accepted November 8, 2023

**This research explored the phenomenon of femaleness and how it impacts the experiences of women in higher education administration, specifically in colleges of agriculture, and how these experiences contributed to burnout, compassion fatigue, and job satisfaction. Despite representing more than half of the college-educated workforce, women are not represented equally within leadership positions in higher education. In academia, women faculty numbers have improved over the past several decades, representing 52.9% of assistant professor positions (Women in Academia: Quick Take, 2020). Higher education was initially intended only for men (Bystydzienski & Bird, 2006) and therefore valued men in higher-level positions (Bird, 2011; Trower, 2012). This has led to the creation of a culture where women and minorities are underrepresented and face multiple barriers (Bird, 2011). Having an inequitable distribution of power not only in organizations but within society suggests that women will need to traverse a different, more challenging path than their male counterparts to arrive at the same tier of status.**

**Keywords:** burnout, compassion fatigue, higher education, women administrators, women leaders in agriculture, stress, gender roles, coping with stress

At their inception, higher education institutions were intended to only serve, educate, and employ men (Bystydzienski & Bird, 2006) and value only men in higher-level positions (Bird, 2011; Trower, 2012). This led to a culture where women and minorities are underrepresented and face multiple inequities (Bird, 2011). Acker (2006) defined inequality as: “loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations” (p. 443). For those who are underrepresented, the process of navigating an organization within a culture of inequality can be challenging (Acker, 2006), and the result can often mean disparities in pay and treatment. The perpetuation of inequalities in the United States (U.S.), via societal norms and expectations, causes additional issues, specifically for women. Inequality within an organization can dictate who holds and has access to power (Carli & Eagly, 2001). Disparities have been found in salary, expectations, treatment, promotion, and level of responsibility for women within male-dominated fields.

Throughout time, norms related to the respective roles of the different sexes have varied, initially lacking any scientific basis, based instead on social myths (De Beauvoir, 1949). The different sexes within nature do not have distinguishable functions, as humans do, but rather their functions are dimorphic. When the two sexes are viewed as a whole, they represent two diverse aspects of the species’ life vital to its

survival. De Beauvoir (1949) explained why sexual opposition increases when the individuality of an organism asserts itself. The male finds more ways to use the forces of which he is the master; the female feels her subjugation more and more (De Beauvoir, 1949, p. 38). There is a conflict between the women’s interests and the expectations femaleness puts upon her. (De Beauvoir, 1949). As Merleau Ponty stated, “man is not a natural species; he is a historical idea” (De Beauvoir, 1949, p. 45), which in turn leads to the historical notions of what being a female is and what femaleness entails. “Only within a human perspective can the female and male be compared in the human species. But the definition of man is that he is a being who is not given, who makes himself what he is” (De Beauvoir, 1949, p.45).

This research explored the impact being female/femaleness has had on the experiences of high-level women administrators in male-dominated land-grant institutions of higher education. These women face unique and challenging realities in their lives due solely to defying the confines femaleness has dictated for them. As women fight for more equity in their worlds, it exposes them to a multitude of other challenges, barriers, and obstacles.

### Theoretical Framework

This research was framed by the multidimensional theory of burnout (Maslach, 1998) and Ashby's Law of Requisite

Variety (De Raadt, 1987). Together, the framework demonstrated how biological systems attempt to cope with exposure to stress. When an individual is equipped to handle disruption or stressful situations, they will produce a requisite response to combat the stress. If the individual is ill-equipped and unable to produce a response, the result will be chaos for the system in the form of burnout.

Maslach (1998) described burnout as an individual stress experience embedded in the context of social relationships, including a person's conception of both themselves and others. Influencing individual responses to stress is an individual's social relationships, how they view themselves, and their view of others. Maslach's Multidimensional Theory of Burnout (MDB) examines three main components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment.

Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety is a law of organizations (Lewis & Stewart, 2003) positing that for a system to sustain viability, it needs to achieve and maintain many different states (Palumbo & Manna, 2018). Each organism possesses controls that aid in controlling variety and sustaining the system's internal equilibrium and homeostasis.

There is a correlation between the aspects of MDB and specific techniques used for coping with stressors. These coping techniques, both problem-focused and emotion-focused, are related to the theoretical framework through Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety, illustrating the direct link between workplace stressors and the requisite coping response. In burnout situations, when the individual has reached the dimension of a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, they are unable to cope. Without a response to act as a buffer between the disruption (or stressor), the individual's homeostasis will be disrupted, resulting in chaos (Cohen, 2013).

## Literature Review

Gender, leadership, burnout, compassion fatigue, and job satisfaction all intersect for women in high-level administrative positions at land-grant institutions. This review of the literature provides a brief overview into that intersection.

### Gender

Ridgeway & Correll (2004) indicated gender is not primarily an identity taught in childhood but instead an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two very different categories: men and women; and organizing social relations of inequality based on that difference (p. 510). It is "a social construct that outlines the roles, behaviors, activities, and features that a particular society believes are appropriate for men and women" (Hasanovic, 2015, para. 1). The gendered expectations and norms of any society may vary from group to group, may change over time and may differ based on the setting.

Like other systems of inequality and difference, gender involves distributions of resources and cultural beliefs, patterns of behavior, and organizational practices, selves, and identities (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, pp. 510-511). Gender has been linked directly to one's self-perception and identity. For this

research, the gender binary definition of a classification system consisting of two genders, man and woman, will be used (Dictionary, 2020). Participants in this research all self-identified as women.

Vinney (2019) described gender role socialization as the process in which we learn our culture's gender-related rules, norms, and expectations. This process begins very early in life, with children understanding gender categories (Vinney, 2019). Family can influence many different essential aspects of a child's life. During childhood and adolescence, one's gender roles are conveyed through the socialization process. Significant others shape these roles, mainly parents, teachers, and peers (Gabay-Egozi, Shavit, & Yaish, 2014, p. 2). As socialization for children occurs, boys are predominantly encouraged to be independent and friendly, while girls are encouraged to be dependent and modest. Experiences in school, with peers, and media will expose and reinforce gender norms. Adolescents will look to their same-sex friends for clues about "appropriate" behavior. Due to this influence, girls are more likely to favor humanities and social sciences, and boys are more likely to prefer STEM fields (Gabay-Egozi et al., 2014, p. 3). While making choices related to education, girls and boys follow a common perception of the "appropriate" choice and behavior for their gender. Gender socialization is a lifelong process, and our childhood beliefs can affect us throughout our lives (Vinney, 2019). The impact of this socialization can vary but may still affect behaviors in school, the workplace, or relationships (Vinney, 2019).

The term, "gendered organization," emphasizes that gender is part of the very structure and culture of organizations and acknowledges that individuals experience organization through gendered advantages and disadvantages (Pullen, et al., 2017, p.107). Joan Acker first theorized in 1990 that organizations are not just gender-neutral sites but that the organizations themselves are gendered, reflecting and reproducing a male advantage (Stainback, et al., 2016, p.110). Further, these researchers purported all aspects of an organization, including the rules, procedures, and hierarchies, while seemingly free of gender, actually reflect longstanding distinctions between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and power and domination in ways that aid in the reproduction and maintenance of gender inequality (p. 110).

Gender norms and gender socialization have led most of our environments to being highly gendered with an emphasis on traditionally male or female stereotypes becoming a part of our daily lives (Sobles-Canales, et al., 2020). The enactment of these stereotypes has implications for a woman's career path and the promotion and perpetuation of workplace gender bias. This suggests gender influences higher-level positions and leadership positions within an organization. Academia seems to be no different, with a scant number of women in higher roles within the institution.

### Gender Stereotypes/Bias

The act of being successful is not what is problematic for women, but instead being successful in an area that

demonstrates a violation of a gender stereotype. Gender stereotyping may be descriptive or prescriptive in nature (Heilman, 2012). The descriptive gender stereotype designates what women are like, while prescriptive establishes what women should be like. Societal norms, again, influence these specific biases. Stereotyping women based on gender creates negative expectations about performance in the workplace (Heilman, 2012). “Male gender-typed positions, which include top management and executive positions, are believed to necessitate characteristics that coincide with stereotypic conceptions of men, but not with stereotypic conceptions of women” (Heilman, 2012, p. 116).

Behaviors associated with the opposite gender, when exhibited by a woman, may be viewed as unfavorable and may prohibit ascent in an organization (Heilman, 2012). There is a societal assumption that women are not equipped to handle typically male tasks and positions. These assumptions can influence women’s upward career trajectory. Women who aspire to be successful in upper-level leadership positions “have to be able to compete aggressively for positions, to act independently and decisively, and to take charge when the situation requires it” (Heilman, 2012, p. 123). These behaviors often lead to disapproval or negative consequences. Within their individual organizations, women can be penalized for demonstrating competence in traditionally male positions (Heilman, 2012).

### **Women in Leadership**

Women comprise 50.8% of the United States population, including 47% of the U.S. labor force and 52.5% of the workforce who are college-educated (Warner, et al., 2018). Despite representing more than half of the college-educated workforce, women are still not represented well within leadership positions. For example, within higher education in the United States women are woefully underrepresented in senior administration (Mosley & Hargrove, 2015); only “31% of full professors and 27% of college presidents” (Warner et al., 2018, p. 1) are women. Individuals need only view the many references and newspaper articles that announce “she is the first woman” or “the only woman” to hold a specific position (Mosley & Hargrove, 2015) to have these statistics reinforced. When considering the statistics, it is clear an obstacle (or obstacles) is in the way of women gaining access to these higher education positions. While women continue to work to break down barriers and obtain positions they have not occupied previously, they can experience a form of gender-based discrimination. This bias, whether conscious or unconscious, may manifest in ways both subtle and overt (“What is Gender Bias?” n.d.) such as discrepancies in pay, job opportunities, and treatment.

Essentialist thinking about gender has taught women to fit into workplace gender norms and rely on the stereotypes constructed to define leadership that perpetuate the lack of women leaders (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2019). Consequently, women leaders end up being demoralized and subjected to constant pressure to lead in ways others think appropriate. Chamorro-Premuzic (2019) said if we continue the association of leadership with masculine features, we can continue to expect women will be more harshly and negatively judged despite their performance. As leaders,

women’s styles are typically characterized by cooperation, interdependence, emotional tone, personalistic perception, intuition, and acceptance (Billing & Alvesson, 2000). A better understanding of, and responsiveness to, how women leaders negotiate the personal, professional, and organizational landscapes both informally and formally for career advancement is necessary to improve the number of women in higher education leadership roles.

### **Women in Higher Education**

While women do hold some positions of leadership in the field of education, inequity persists. There is a “dismaying lack of success of women in making significant progress toward equality in the economic domain of American higher education. The gap between the salaries of women and men professors has not narrowed—it has widened” (Frances, 2018, p. 696). McMahon and associates (2018) found, in their review of the literature, that on average, women are not progressing as far as their male counterparts within the academic pipeline. Literature suggests when women do advance; they encounter vast differences in grant acquisitions, salary, and recognition (Frances, 2018).

Over the past 20 years, there has been little to no growth in this area of women serving on college and university boards of trustees (Frances, 2018). “At the highest level in 2016, among doctorate-granting institutions in the public sector, 23 percent of the presidents were women, and in the private sector, 20 percent were women” (Frances, 2018, p. 703). The American Council of Education (ACE) has conducted periodic reviews of studies from the American College President and found the path to high-level positions in academia, such as the presidency, may be very different for men and women (Frances, 2018, p. 703). Women traditionally work their way through the ranks within an institution, tending to take a traditional path of serving as a department chair, dean, and finally chief academic officer, positions from which some men have been promoted directly into the presidency (Frances, 2018).

There are fewer women in leadership in postsecondary institutions who are positioned to take on critical roles, such as president, provost, dean, director, and department chair (Madsen, 2012). This contributes to a lack of prepared leaders. The underrepresentation of women within higher education environments has been referred to as the “absent women” discourse (Aiston & Yang, 2017). This issue not only has an impact on the institutions themselves but also has an impact on the research being conducted within the institutions. Contributing factors that hinder the advancement of women in leadership roles include work relationships, university environment, invisible rules, proactivity, and personal circumstances (Madsen, 2012). These factors lead to gender imbalance within institutions. Due to this gender imbalance, the presence of women leaders and mentors available for other women is lacking.

Academia is a challenging environment in which to work. Faculty members, within colleges and universities, encounter multiple stressors. As their responsibilities continue to grow and expectations rise, this may result in the

faculty member experiencing feelings of stress or being overwhelmed (Eagan & Garvey, 2015). The amount and different types of responsibility (teaching, grant writing, research pursuits, mentoring graduate students, etc.) is one explanation for these feelings. "Rank and gender of the resident instructional faculty proved to be significantly associated with task-based stress" (Smith, et al., 1995, p. 276). In addition to having more experiences of stress in the role of faculty, women report having more task-based stresses. In contrast, male faculty were significantly less likely to have this experience. "Controlling the effects of the other variables, the likelihood of task-based stress for men was about half (0.4758 times) that of women" (Smith et al., 1995, p. 277). Without proper provisions in place, it is possible that mismanaged workplace stressors could potentially cause other serious consequences for the employee, including, but not limited to, job dissatisfaction, burnout, or compassion fatigue, and ultimately affect the employee's health and career.

### **Burnout**

While there is no generally accepted definition of burnout, most do agree burnout syndrome is comprised of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishments (Kulkarni, 2006). Common symptoms include but are not limited to, constant negative state of mind related to work, strain, exhaustion, distress, tension, chronic fatigue, depression, professional melancholia, feelings of not being effective, decreased motivation, persona crisis, and poor mental health (Kulkarni, 2006). Kulkarni (2006) stated, "Approximately 30-50% of the workforce is exposed to psychological overload at work resulting in occupational stress or burnout while 75% of US workers admit that their jobs are stressful and pressure of work is steadily increasing" (p. 3). Workplace pressure and stress is realized and felt by individuals. Demands for new skills, new responsibilities, and pressure for a higher quality of work, time constraints, and hectic schedules all act as stressors in the workplace (Kulkarni, 2006). These workplace stressors are in addition to any individual's life concerns. "The increasing difficulty in integrating working life with family life globally has caused imbalance in financial capital, social capital, and health capital" (Kulkarni, 2006, p. 3).

Not only do stress and burnout affect an individual's well-being and mental health, but they have a direct impact on organizations. In the U.S., occupational stress has been estimated to cost employers over \$200 billion annually (Kulkarni, 2006). Individuals who may be experiencing burnout may exhibit a decrease in their workplace productivity, quality of work, and exhibit low morale. Organizationally, employee burnout may be manifested in an increase in staff turnover and absenteeism rates, increased worker compensation claims, and frequency of on-the-job injury rates resulting in increased demand for occupational health. There is a need for organizations to be aware of the results of occupational stressors leading to burnout. This awareness will allow the organization to act as a resource for their staff in the prevention and treatment of this condition.

Burnout may appear differently for individuals who work in academia. "The downside of having a brain that is constantly on call is that our energy is sapped continuously. The resulting

burnout can happen at any stage of a career" (Gannon, 2008, p. 1157). As one's career advances, the responsibility and workload given to the individual can potentially increase. This leads to what has been referred to by Gannon (2008) as the "stale phase." Once an individual moves from tired, to stale, to burnt-out, it is difficult to recover. The time needed to complete tasks generally increases while the constant underperformance drains enthusiasm. It may become increasingly more difficult for academics to continue their work after reaching a period of burnout. In another psychological approach, burnout has been viewed as an existential crisis (Dzau, et al., 2018). This crisis manifests when the value of the individual's work and sense of self-worth is being questioned. Teachers experiencing this level of burnout come to ask why they are working in a thankless and underpaid job. They may challenge what difference their efforts are making. These feelings of depleted self-worth and a lack of appreciation in their career may cause teachers to leave their positions (Dworkin, 2014).

Burnout for women is attributed to many different stressors and challenges unique to their experiences related to their gender. As women climb the organizational ladder and take on more leadership responsibilities, they encounter more barriers in their path including "the sporadic focus on career advancement, time-consuming childcare, responsibility for family life, and a woman's tendency toward understatement" (Schueller-Weidekamm & Kautzky-Willer, 2012, p. 244). Further, these researchers share that outside factors, including family and personal life, affect the careers of women leaders. Harassment at work and lack of a women's network were additional factors that hindered prolonged career development. A lack of women mentors and role models paired with low self-confidence may pose challenges for women within leadership (Schueller-Weidekamm & Kautzky-Willer, 2012).

Care giving responsibilities are mentioned frequently within research as an obstacle encountered in a woman's career ascent. For women, the time expenditure for family life, including responsibility for children's education, childcare (Watts, 2009), and organizing family life and structure, has been identified. "Women report significant challenges when balancing their work and family lives, due to the lack of sufficient time, their husbands' non-involvement in house chores, cultural norms, and gender biases that still exist in the workplace until this day" (Karkouljian & Srour, 2016, p. 4919). There is more stress due to the burden of family and career imposed on women leaders with families, and "these stress factors might lead to a burnout syndrome that occurs in > 30% of people who work in the healthcare system" (Schueller-Weidekamm & Kautzky-Willer, 2012, p. 248).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the phenomenon of being female/femaleness and its impact on the experiences of high-level administrators in colleges of agriculture at land-grant universities. This phenomenon has implications for half of the population. The term "female" is understood as a pejorative term that confines women to her

sex (De Beauvoir, 1949). Historically, the roles of the different sexes have varied. Men have more opportunities, while women feel subjugation in the conflicted between their own interests and external expectations (De Beauvoir, 1949). The phenomenon of being female/femaleness was crucial to consider when examining participant experiences to tease out the resulting impact the phenomenon may have had. The participants' cumulative experiences resulted in feelings indicative of burnout and compassion fatigue, with implications for overall job satisfaction. The following questions were used to frame the study:

1. How does the phenomenon of being female/femaleness impact the lived experiences of high-level female administrators at land grant colleges of agriculture?
2. What are the experiences that result from being female/femaleness, as they relate to career burnout, compassion fatigue, and job satisfaction?
3. What are the consequences of stress, stress coping mechanisms, and implications of long-term stress exposure for those who are female?

### **Methods**

To understand the phenomenon of being female/femaleness, a qualitative approach was selected because the main objective of was to understand the experiences of a particular individual or group and the meaning those individuals attach to those experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Particularly when investigating an individual's leadership journey, it is important to "understand the meaning people have constructed" concerning their environment and experiences that they have encountered in the world as it relates to their position (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15).

### **Research Design**

The descriptive method of phenomenology Giorgi used is a version of Husserlian's approach, however, it places the focus on the "importance of going to the description of others; assuming the attitude of the phenomenological reduction (bracketing); and the search for an invariant psychological meaning ..." (Vagle, 2014, pp. 52-53). This approach was useful in this context as it was "corrective both to the 'natural attitude' of everyday life and to other scholarly approaches that gloss over the meanings of such experiential data, or even the data itself." (Salter & McGuire, 2014). The responses provided were a description of the participants' own personal experience rather than a reflection of the experience.

### **Sampling & Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used to determine the sample for the study. This type of sampling is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96). The population for this study was higher-level female administrators, specifically in colleges of agriculture, at 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions. Twenty-two participants responded to the invitation to participate and completed the interview session. The participants were from a variety of regions across the U.S. and ranged in age

from 40-70 years old. Further details of the participants has been left out to ensure that identities stay confidential.

### **Data Collection & Instrumentation**

Descriptive, semi-structured phenomenological interviews were conducted with each participant. This type of interview was selected to collect data to obtain information that has a complete description of the participant's experience (Merriam, 2009; Giorgi, 2009). The phenomenological interview required the participants to describe their experiences; additional details were obtained through the flow of interview discussions, body language and other tacit information.

### **Data Analysis**

When analyzing the data, the focus was placed on the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences and the tacit information conveyed during the interview. It was imperative the words of the participant be represented without edit. The processes of horizontalization, reduction, and the whole-part-whole method were used to retain the focus on understanding the participants' experiences via their descriptions of those experiences (Hoffding & Martiny, 2016).

In horizontalizations data are examined, and each statement is given an equal value at the initial data analysis stage (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Each statement represents a segment of meaning. The segments are then categorized into themes (Chun, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). With horizontalization, an individual has a combination of conscious experiences and phenomena. Qualities are recognized and described during the process of explicating the phenomenon, with every perception having equal value, nonrepetitive experiences are linked thematically, and full description is derived. (Merriam, 2009, p. 27, Moustakas, 1994, p. 96)

Smith et al. (2009) described phenomenological reduction as a process intended to lead the inquirer away from the distraction and misdirection of their own assumptions and preconceptions, and back towards the essence of their experience of a given phenomenon. I used reduction to guide me back to the lived experience of the phenomenon to get back to its essence (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reduction was achieved through the epoche, acknowledging, and putting aside my own experiences, opinions, and biases regarding women in leadership (Kee, 2019). Giorgi stressed the importance of detaching from personal experience, understanding, and knowledge to analyze the data from a new perspective (Vagle, 2014).

As the final analysis process, a whole-part-whole analysis was undertaken, revisiting the data three separate times, each time with a different view (Giorgi, 2009); An initial reading to become (re)familiar with the data, taking notes, a secondary reading where large sections or excerpts of data that contain meaning were marked, defining meanings and identifying themes and categories based on the readings/re-readings. It was important to continually ensure that the

meanings that originated from the data and participants rather than the interpretation of the researcher, and subsequent readings to re-articulate personal thoughts about each section, label themes, and identify new trends (Vagle, 2014, pp. 110-111).

### Credibility

Qualitative research occurs in a natural setting for the participants, making the phenomenon observable and can be interpreted “in terms of meaning people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). Researchers need to ensure they are proving the trustworthiness of their study (Ingerson, 2013). Credibility was established through member checking and peer debriefs. Transferability was established through thick, rich descriptions. Dependability was achieved by conducting a code-recode procedure, taking field notes, journaling, and audit trail. These tools mapped out every step of the process, including how decisions were made and how conclusions were reached. Confirmability was established with the use of an audit trail, the use of spreadsheets and folders organizing the research documentation.

### Results

It is important to note that in this results section, participant numbers were used to denote attribution to the participant(s) who shared the experiences contained herein. Where direct quotes were used, the pseudonyms provided to the participants at the outset of the research were used to attribute the words to their source, while still ensuring confidentiality of the participants.

#### **Research Question 1: How does the phenomenon of femaleness impact the lived experiences of high-level female administrators at land grant colleges of agriculture?**

This question focused on understanding the impact of femaleness participants have experienced as high-level female administrators. Three major themes emerged that demonstrated the lived experiences of these administrators: career path, mentors, and motivations.

We first examined where participants started and what inspired them to pursue a career in academia. A few participants had a linear path to academia, always intending to pursue faculty positions as their ultimate career (P2, P9, P11). Still others started their journey not with a desire to work within academia, but outside it, instead starting careers in industry and K-12 education (P1, P6, P7, P18, P21, P22). Some of these women found inspiration to pursue roles in higher education based on backgrounds in cooperative extension and 4-H (P15, P17, P19). They described being raised in families with mothers who were educators—many witnessed women in these roles over generations. By seeing women hold these roles in these organizations, it reinforced that these were positions women could have, and therefore, inspired the participants to follow similar paths. Mary shared:

Well, as far as preparation, I grew up in a rural area. Growing up in a rural area, you get involved with a lot of different types of you know, organizations such as 4-H and things like that that teach leadership and agriculture. And so going through each program, and

my mom was an educator, watched her, modeled her, and always wanted to be like my mom.

Parents, teachers, and peers shape gender roles. Growing up, these individuals witnessed others working in particular positions deemed acceptable for their gender; that there were appropriate roles for girls to pursue. This finding is compatible with Marcus et al.’s (2015) research that, in practice, gender norms “limit girls’ development opportunities and undermine their well-being” (p. 5). As such, some of the participants elected to stay within the defined confines and pursue a similar path. Additionally, these participants considered their expectations as a female when exploring their career options. Susan shared:

I thought it was a good mom's job because I wanted to be able to have time with my children, follow the school schedule if I was a teacher. So I started out in education to become a teacher ...

Hansanovic (2015) stated society deems what is appropriate within roles, behaviors, activities, and features based on gender. The responsibilities outlined by the phenomenon here included the expectations that these women fulfill traditional female roles. By selecting careers that allowed for some to be available for childcare and household priorities, they were able to pursue employment while still navigating within the confines that femaleness had outlined.

This study revealed mentors and role models played critical roles for these participants, providing guidance, and assisting these women along their career journeys. Due to the male-dominated STEM environments, mostly male mentors were available (P1, P5, P11, P12, P20, P21, and P22); however, some participants did have experience with a female mentor or role model (P3, P6, P11, P14, P16, P21). While mentors and role models were beneficial to their career trajectories, participants felt that female mentors had more of an impact than males. These female mentors were found to be able to provide guidance, act as a sounding board, and model what navigating femaleness in a male-dominated environment may look like. Caroline shared, “my role model was a faculty member in the [discipline] at the [University]. And seeing her as a woman working in, as a [position], encouraged me that it was possible.” This finding is congruent with Rupert et al.’s (2015) research which suggested institutions should partner newer staff with a more experienced colleague as a mentor, providing examples of someone of the same gender navigating successfully around the phenomenon of femaleness, inspiring other women to do the same.

The third theme that emerged related to the phenomenon impacting participants’ experiences was motivation; what inspires, drives, and motivates these individuals within their careers. Participants were inspired to be able to work with students (P6, P8, P9, P10, P12, P13, P16, P19). Michelle explained she remains,

where I'm at because of the students. I love the students, and I love the research I'm doing. If I

didn't have the love of the students and the research, I probably wouldn't stay in academia.

Being able to remove potential barriers and guide these students on the way to success was exciting and motivational for participants. This type of nurturing service is congruent with Bartel's (2018) research that found that women comply with gender-role stereotypes by taking on more service-oriented work than their male colleagues. By acting in the role of problem-solver or caretaker, and putting others' needs before their own, these women were complying with the gender-role stereotypes.

A man would not have to consider being available after school and during the summer to be with children. For women, this is still viewed as their primary role. Women are taught to seek fulfillment by assisting others in more of a service-oriented or caretaker role. This is a prime example of the constraints the phenomenon imposes on women via taking care of others, their homes, and families; thus influencing the levels of fulfillment and satisfaction women may find based on the parameters of the phenomenon. While women have advanced in many fields in an attempt to gain equal footing, findings here indicate women consciously and unconsciously are still confined by their femaleness within society.

### **Research Question 2: What are the experiences that result from femaleness, as they relate to career burnout, compassion fatigue, and job satisfaction?**

Research question two focused on the experiences related to career burnout, compassion fatigue, and job satisfaction as a result of femaleness. Five significant themes emerged during this portion of the study, including stereotyping, challenging environments, women as a marginalized group, gender expectations, and misogyny.

Heilman (2012) posited stereotyping women creates negative expectations about performance within the workplace, and the findings of this study were congruent. Gender stereotypes create assumptions that women are not equipped to handle typically male tasks or positions, leading women to have to "compete aggressively for positions" (Heilman, 2012, p.123). Stereotyping was a pervasive experience shared by participants that had a direct impact of femaleness. From uncomfortable situations to blatant inappropriate statements, participants shared their experiences of stereotyping that they have experienced only because of their gender (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P12, P14, P15, P16, P17, 18, P19, P21). Caroline explained, "I have multiple experiences. We would not have enough time today to talk about these experiences." She explained "At the end of an interview, I was told, 'you know, we think you're a really promising young [role]. I'm really impressed with your communication and your [specific type of] skills, but honestly, we have no idea what we'd do if you got pregnant.' " Still others were advised not to pursue a promotion due to the fact it was viewed as a "male" role. Mary's peers affirmed this thinking by stating, "Oh, no way, you know they're not gonna let you have that. They don't want women."

Similarly, this study found while there were many experiences of blatant stereotyping, many participants encountered microaggressions throughout their careers that caused feelings of

discomfort, stress, and dissatisfaction in their work (P3, P5, P10, P11, P19, P21). These passive-aggressive behaviors may be small but frequently occurred, having a cumulative effect on the participants.

Women found themselves as the gender minority in exceptionally challenging work environments (P3, P4, P5, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P18, P19, P21). Stainback et al.'s (2016) study purported all aspects of an organization, while seemingly free of gender, actually reflect longstanding distinctions between men and women, masculinity and femininity, and power and domination in ways that aid in the reproduction and maintenance of gender inequality (p. 110). The current study supports those findings, as the phenomenon of femaleness impacted the treatment of participants in the workplace, including an unwelcoming climate, and lack of inclusivity and satisfaction, adding additional obstacles for the participants already attempting to navigate male-dominated workplaces, directly resulting in increased exposure to stress.

Participants felt an inequity within their work environments that resulted in being excluded, underappreciated, uncomfortable, and mistreated (P3, P6, P7, P11, P12, P14, P15, P19, P21, P22). Most participants were singled out for being a woman and made to feel as if they did not belong in the male-dominated environment. As an example, Ava shared during her career, "research was sort of relegated as a male role, so unfortunately teaching and service was a female role." Goldeberg and Crowe's (2010) study reported male dominance in agriculture being well recognized, and our findings are congruent. Caroline identified this saying at her institution:

women here are pigeonholed to a certain extent into traditional roles, they can work in HR, they work with teaching, work with youth and children, but it's much harder to have a voice in the harder science things ... we have [barriers] in having a voice and being heard in agriculture.

The findings of this study also paralleled some results of Jacobs' (1995) research, including the lack of women faculty in higher education is evidence that they have to endure a chilly climate. Entry into these male-dominated fields is more challenging due to traditional expectations placed on women as a result of the phenomenon. Even after gaining access to these fields, these participants were still met with inappropriate behavior and treatment. These experiences have a cumulative effect and increased stress levels, feelings of dissatisfaction, and symptoms related to compassion fatigue and burnout. Hiring more women would ultimately diversify not only the faculty/department/college but the discipline which has far larger implications in terms of opportunities, role modeling, and mentoring.

Holmes' (2011) research referred to the "Gendered Division of Labor" describing roles deemed "male" and "female," with only those genders traditionally filling those roles. In this study, participants were prohibited from entering certain positions or opportunities because the role was viewed as a "male role" (P3, P6, P7, P11, P12, P14, P15, P19, P21,



P22). Susan explained, “[at my institution] the females did family consumer sciences and males did the agriculture area.” Chloe added,

It's [the discipline] mostly male-dominated at the upper echelon. And the women that make it up, again they tend to be the women who didn't marry for whatever reason, don't have kids. And they are tough women in a different sort of way. So, they kind of fit that male expectation or the male role?

The current research study's findings supported Aron's (2019) findings stating the idea of misogyny was understood to be structural and recognized organizations of society are deeply rooted in the oppression of women. In this study, adverse treatment within organizations not only contributed to a challenging and unwelcome environment but also increased the overall level of stress to which the participants were exposed. Participants discussed either having first-hand experience, observing the behavior, knowing someone, or hearing about women around them experiencing misogyny (P2, P5, P16, P20). Evelyn shared she is often treated negatively, saying, “there is no inclusion, and I was not part of the buddy talk.”

In this study, men were not found to be the only perpetrators of misogynistic behavior. This is congruent with Clark and Lindfield's (2018) study which found misogynistic influence was so deeply ingrained into society women did not realize they were imposing those views on themselves or other women. As these women deviated outside of their prescribed femaleness, they were met with disdain and negativity by other members of their gender (P5, P7, P8, P10, P12, P16). Maria shared:

I have personally speculated that I think in general the women make it worse than the men. I've wondered if it's because the women are so aggressive because they've always been really high performing. They kind of fought their way to the top and continued that. [You get the women together, and they're just ready to cut each other's throats rather than help each other out... the women are always trying to prove that you're better than the other person, trying to constantly say, Oh, those other women are not as good as I am.

This behavior creates undue stress and barriers between members of the same marginalized group, preventing opportunities for comradery and support. This increased exposure to stress, frustration, and dissatisfaction are all symptoms of burnout Kulkarni's (2006).

### **Research Question 3: What are the consequences of stress, stress coping mechanisms, and implications of long-term stress exposure for those who are female?**

When exploring the impacts and consequences stress had on these women, it was essential to be conscious of the phenomenon of femaleness and the daily implications it has for this group. Four major themes emerged related to the consequences of stress, coping mechanisms, and long-term stress exposure. These themes include stressors, impacts of stress, coping, and level of satisfaction.

The types of stressors participants were exposed to range from work-related issues, personal issues, or a combination of the whole. This research found one cause of stress for participants was not feeling valued (P3, P6, P11, P14). Chloe shared, “If I were to come up with a common thread, it was just lack of respect for what I did or could do, my potential, just total lack of understanding or respect of my potential.” This finding is congruent with Bystydzienski & Bird, (2006) that higher education was initially intended for only men and therefore valued men in high-level positions (Bird, 2011; Trower, 2012). Another source of stress that impacted symptoms related to burnout, compassion fatigue, or dissatisfaction was the participants' abilities being doubted. The superior's perception of one's abilities was a significant factor related to stress. For example, Ava discussed such an experience with her supervisor, sharing:

[He] called me into his office one day and said, “well, you know, we don't have any confidence in your abilities to manage your budget, and that's the perception we get among all the [specific role]. This is a crisis I don't think you're going to survive.”

Participants also noted discrepancies in pay between themselves and male counterparts, which resulted in feelings of being undervalued and their abilities being doubted which is in line with Baker et al. (2015). These situations, and others like them, resulted in health issues (P1, P5, P6, P8, P10, P11, P12, P15, P19), difficulty sleeping (P2, P3, P5, P8, P11, P14, P15), a lack of work-life balance (P11, P18, P20, P22), a loss of morale, feelings of hopelessness, and self-doubt all of which are symptoms of compassion fatigue. It is further congruent with Elliot, et al.'s (2015) work that identified that females have an increase in stress from working in a male-dominated field results in sleep disorders. Poor institutional cultures and resulting stressors impact women in these high-level positions including exposure to and level of stress which has long-lasting health-related consequences.

Kulkarni's (2006) study identified many workplace stressors including demands for new skills, new responsibilities, and pressure for a higher quality of work, time constraints, and hectic schedules. Similarly, Schaufeli's (1996) research identified job demands as the root cause of burnout. The current research study's findings supported both Kulkarni's (2006) and Schaufeli's (1996) findings. It can be concluded that these stressors paired with the impact that femaleness has had on this group's daily experiences result in them being at risk for higher levels of stress and the development of feelings of dissatisfaction and burnout.

When employees are under intense stress, it not only has an effect on them but the organization as a whole. Employee burnout increases staff turnover, absenteeism rates, increased worker compensation claims, and an increase in on-the-job injuries (Kulkarni, 2006). The participants in this study had symptoms of burnout, resulting in feelings of disengagement that impacted the participant's work and the organization.

As people move into the stage of depersonalization, interpersonal relationships will suffer (Borgogni, et al., 2012), and this research is congruent with those findings. More than half of the participants admitted feelings of disengagement at some point in their careers (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P14, P15, P17, P18, P19, P21, P22). Participants shared stories about difficult situations involving superiors, colleagues, and decisions that resulted in feelings of disengagement, helplessness, anger, depression, and frustration, all symptoms of burnout. As their symptoms of burnout manifested, their relationships at work and sometimes at home were negatively impacted.

Coping mechanisms were vital to ensure balance. Each individual developed coping mechanisms to combat the different types and amounts of stress they experienced. Not all coping mechanisms participants shared were healthy or effective long-term, such as the use of food, drugs, or alcohol, are directly related to burnout. These are not recommended mechanisms. Four participants admitted to drinking to reduce stress (P1, P11, P14, P16). While others did not drink to relieve stress, they did say that their drinking has increased, and occasionally they drank in excess.

Most participants discussed using exercise and physical activity as a method to combat stress and promote their well-being (P8, P9, P10, P11, P14, P16, P20, P21, P22). Staying active has helped participants feel balanced, healthy, and get through their day. An additional coping mechanism participants referenced was religion or prayer (P5, P7, P9, P10, P14, P17). The incorporation of their faith into their daily routine provided feelings of calm and peace. Many participants discussed professional support networks (P4, P7, P8, P9, P13, P14, P15, P16, P19, P20, P21). These women shared utilizing professional associations for support, and networking opportunities resulted in them gaining valuable colleagues. Many participants referenced their families as their primary support structures (P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P12, P13, P17, P18, P22). These women referenced their families as fundamental support structures that provided many different types of support for them. Other participants turned to friends for support and guidance, emotional support, and socialization (P5, P6, P8, P11, P13, P18).

Ginoux and Isoard-Gauthier (2019) and Meier and Beredord (2006) both had similar findings which indicated the institutional and individual implementation of physical activity as a coping mechanism had an overall positive impact which is in line with the results found here. Krasner et al.'s (2009) study found that intuitional intervention aided staff with positive coping mechanisms. While the current research found participants implementing a host of coping mechanisms, both those recommended and those not recommended, findings did not include an institutional invention.

The findings related to stress, coping mechanisms, and implications of long-term stress exposure indicate that as the level of stress increases, the risk for symptoms related to burnout and compassion fatigue will also increase. Long-term exposure to stress without proper tools to prevent and manage it will result in a likelihood in the development of conditions such as burnout,

compassion fatigue, and overall dissatisfaction. As appropriate coping mechanisms are implemented into one's daily routines, the results of stress should begin to be better managed and eventually decrease. If inappropriate or not recommended coping mechanisms are used to combat stress, we can conclude it will have an overall negative impact on the individual. The result would be an increase in the level of stress but also the risk for conditions such as burnout and compassion fatigue.

### Recommendations

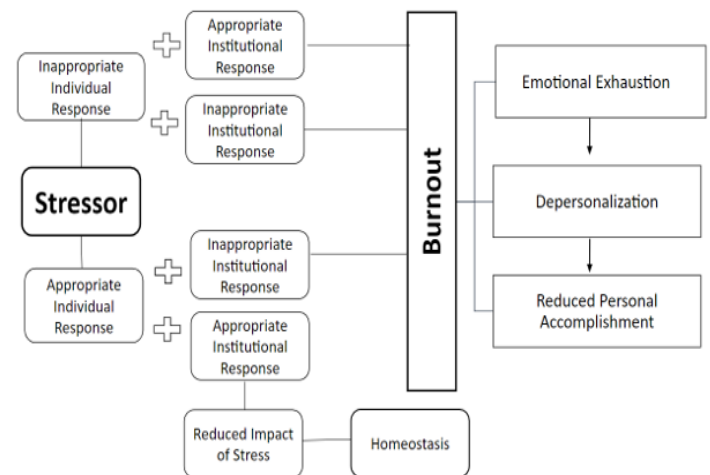
This study provided insight into the impact the phenomenon of femaleness has on the lived experiences of female administrators within land-grant institutions. Based on the research findings, the following are suggestions for future practices and further research.

### Suggestions for Practice

It is imperative when managing and combating stress, the burden not be shouldered individually, but shared institutionally. Rupert et al., (2015) found that while individuals have personal stressors, many of the stressors faced are actually related to organizational or contextual factors. The individual can work to manage their personal stress but the "unavoidable occupational hazards" of workplace stressors need to be addressed and managed by the institution (Rupert et al, 2015, p.168). The proposed model demonstrates the importance of an individual and an institution together, responding appropriately to stressors to prevent burnout (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.**

*Proposed Model for Individual and Institutional responses for burnout Prevention*



As the model demonstrates, the responsibility cannot rest only on one party to reach homeostasis, but rather the individual and institution share a part in the successful management of stress. While job demands play a central role in most burnout models, these models have increasingly emphasized the importance of resources for preventing or reducing levels of burnout (Rupert, et al., 2015). The job demand-resources model (Demerouti, et al., 2001)

recognizes multiple other resources, such as opportunities for professional development, supervision, and feedback, play a role in reducing burnout, either by directly influencing motivation or engagement in work or by buffering the impact of job demands (Rupert et al., 2015, p.169).

As part of the institutional intervention, the well-being of female employees needs to become a top priority. By providing educational and health resources to these employees, it assists in managing, combating, and treating stress and related conditions that are unique to this group. Institutions should begin by performing an assessment of their current state to identify existing resources, programs, and sources of expertise within the organization (Krusie, 2018).

Programs and educational resources and promoting high-quality behavioral health resources for staff is essential. This allows staff not only education on topics such as stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue but will provide resources for diagnosis and treatment. It is necessary to make the behavioral health resources anonymous to encourage female staff and faculty to feel comfortable seeking help.

Educational leaders need to be educated to recognize stress and burnout, enhance communication skills, and become advocates for their staff and faculty (Krusie 2018). Within the system, the organization needs to specifically outline the traits and competencies expected of its leaders. This will ensure leadership's principles are aligned with the system (Krusie, 2018). There should be expectations for leaders to be available for coaching and mentoring to support not only the staff but also aid in continuous improvement of the organization. An essential part of supporting the staff will be leaders listening and encouraging feedback. Autonomy and control are cited as critical factors in understanding the prevention of burnout. By providing faculty and staff with a sense of self-direction and independence in their work can increase engagement as well as personal ownership.

Structured formal networks and support systems need to be available and encouraged for new female faculty members entering STEM disciplines. Formal, scheduled support mechanisms, such as a support group dedicated to discussing personal feelings about work and problem-solving, provide staff a supportive outlet to discuss their feelings and triggers of stress (Meimer & Bresford, 2006). Additionally, this offers an opportunity for interdisciplinary support as staff to come together to discuss common issues (Rupert, et al., 2015). This support structure will assist in the navigation of the high-stress work environment and provide education on balancing work-life responsibilities and stress related to burnout. Rupert, et al. (2015) suggested that workplace support is a significant resource. The support an individual receives in the workplace plays an important role as it assists with building a sense of personal accomplishment (Rupert et al., 2015).

As women gain entry into the male-dominated STEM disciplines, a mentor will be imperative. Institutional implementation of a mentor program is recommended as it assigns an experienced colleague in the workplace to assist the new employee. By pairing a colleague who is experienced in similar experiences related to femaleness, it will assist in the

navigation of challenging and stressful situations (Meimer & Beresford, 2006), the phenomenon of femaleness, and burnout. Schueller-Weidekamm and Kautzky-Willer (2012) indicated fellowship activities positively influence colleague relationships. Meimer and Beresford (2006) recommended the utilization of peers who understand the work and can be sounding boards. Rupert, et al. (2015) noted support at work is important, specifically for building a sense of personal accomplishment.

Female mentors should also be made available to female students. These mentors should be visible within the organization to demonstrate to aspiring females the possibility of holding a higher-level administrative position. The creation of a formal program that pairs women in STEM fields with a female mentor will provide opportunities for comradery, guidance, and support from another female within the area. Additionally, mentoring programs, coaching, networking, and the support of other persons help to strengthen female soft skills and achieve a work-life balance (Schueller-Weidekamm & Kautzky-Willer, 2012, p. 249).

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