



# ADVANCING WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

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*Full Length Research Paper*

## **Men's Perceptions of the Value of Female Leaders in Higher Education**

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**This qualitative research study, framed by social role theory, explored the perceptions of 20 men faculty and academic administrators at doctoral-granting highest research-intensive universities located in the Southwestern region of the U.S. The focus of the study was their perceptions of the value of women leaders, the differences between how men and women are valued in higher education, and the stereotypes and challenges that contribute to how women are valued as leaders. Findings from this study show that men faculty and administrators do not always value women as leaders; differences between academia and industry may exist surrounding how women are valued as leaders; institutional leadership may perpetuate the devaluation of women as leaders; and the value of women in higher education leadership remains a reflection of how women are valued in society. Differences between how men and women are valued were also explored, finding that men faculty and administrators may not see the differences in value based on gender; gender differences exist in regards to standards for evaluation and reward in higher education; and women are perceived to devalue themselves. Challenges that contribute to how women are valued were identified, including the continuation of homosociality that promotes men supporting other men, and the existence of stereotypes and biases that give men an advantage and undermine women in leadership roles.**

**Keywords: social value, women's leadership, gender**

Women are underrepresented in leadership roles across various industries, making up just 5.8% of chief executive officers at Standard & Poor (S&P) 500 companies (Catalyst, 2020); approximately 23.6% of Congress (25% of Senators; 23% of House members) (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2020); and 30% of college and university presidents (Gagliardi et al., 2017). To explore how women are valued in leadership positions in higher education, it is necessary to understand how women are valued in greater society. A potential reason for the limited number of women in leadership roles across society may be the way that women are socialized (Babcock & Laschever, 2007; Denmark, 1993; Klenke, 1996, 2018), as well as the value that society places on gender and its social role. Denmark (1993) suggested that women were not socialized for leadership roles, but instead for "domestic roles as wife and mother or lower-level traditional jobs in the workforce" (p. 345). Denmark also posited that education is a reflection of larger society, and in turn its values and beliefs, allowing it to reproduce differences based on gender. More recently, Parker (2015) noted that a significant shift has occurred, and women have gained momentum professionally, but still are primarily responsible and expected to take care of duties such as childcare and supporting their spouses as they advance in their careers,

further demonstrating society's expected role of them. As demonstrated in *Women in Management: Quick Take* (2020), there has been an increase in the representation of women leaders globally and within the U.S., but women and most specifically women of color, continue to be underrepresented in the highest levels of leadership.

Society and culture determine how individuals are socialized (Bian et al., 2017; Denmark, 1993; Trumpy & Elliott, 2019), and play a role in determining the status value of nominal characteristics such as gender or race (Ridgeway, 1991). Berger et al. (1980) identified that valuations and beliefs about individuals are organized around specific characteristics, known as "status characteristics" (p. 479); and include individual characteristics such as race, gender, physical attractiveness, and age. Status characteristics manifest themselves in the "status organizing process" in which they form the "basis of observable inequalities in face-to-face social interactions" (p. 479). Ridgeway (1991) explained that a characteristic has status value "when consensual cultural beliefs indicate that persons who have one state of the characteristics (e.g., whites or males) are more worthy in the society than those with another state of the characteristic (blacks or females)" (p. 368). Certain characteristics, such as gender, have long histories of status

value in society, as depicted by men being seen as more valuable than women (Berger et al., 1980; Ridgeway, 1991). In their review of literature on gender and leadership, Appelbaum et al. (2003) noted that women are socialized through play and behavior to reinforce a second-class nature that they then accept. Furthermore, the second-class nature affects the self-confidence of women when it comes to leadership opportunities (Kay & Shipman, 2018).

Berger et al. (1980) suggested that when working in groups or organizations, status is not created in a silo but rather influenced by the greater society and is at times inequitable. Eagly (1983) referred to “formal status inequality” as being “a product of a hierarchy of roles that is legitimized by social norms and embedded in the formal structure of groups and organizations” (p. 972). As status is being determined by characteristics such as gender due to societal influences, the ability to influence followers for women may be difficult, in turn, limiting how they are viewed as leaders. Carli (2001) noted, “to be effective, influence agents should be perceived as competent, and people typically perceive men to have higher levels of competence than women have, unless there is a clear evidence of female superiority” (p. 734). Wagner and Berger (1997) highlighted the interaction between socialization and status characteristics, saying “socialization determines the meaning of status differences, what these differences represent, and when they are appropriate to employ” (p. 6).

Performance expectations are determined by social factors through three individual processes: (a) status characteristics that are significant within society including race and gender, (b) social rewards, and (c) “patterns of behavioral interchange” (Correll & Ridgeway, 2003, p. 32) between individuals. As previously described, status characteristics are the categories by which individuals differ in which the greater society have conferred value, worthiness, or ability to one individual over the other, and can be either specific (i.e., dependent on a situation) or diffuse (i.e., general) (Berger et al., 1980; Correll et al., 2007; Correll & Ridgeway, 2003). Gender, for instance, is an example of a diffuse characteristic in which men are often valued higher in professional situations and women are valued higher in domestic responsibilities, such as childcare. Additionally, status characteristics are independent, meaning that individuals may have more than one lower-level status characteristic that affects their overall status value and how they are viewed by society as potential leaders (Ridgeway, 1991). The key to the continuation of status characteristics is that even those who hold lower status accept the lower value position as a “societal fact,” devaluing themselves and their contributions (Babcock & Laschever, 2007; Correll & Ridgeway, 2003, p. 32).

### **Status Characteristics and Leadership**

Klenke (1996) identified that historically, the lens that leadership is viewed is “many great men” (p. 2). Numerous studies also support the “think-manager, think-male” concept as a possible contributor to gender bias in leadership (e.g., Schein, 1973, 1975, 2001, p. 676; Sczesny, 2003). This concept, first

developed by Schein in the 1970s, highlights the relationship between gender and perceptions of characteristics associated with being a successful manager (Schein et al., 1996). Braun et al. (2017) furthered the concept of *think manager, think male* in their study that supported that, women encountered an opposite expectation of “think follower – think female” (p. 386). The authors suggested that this concept might perpetuate the challenge, pulling women towards the follower roles that align with society gender roles, and pulling men to leadership roles while pushing them from the follower roles.

Within higher education in particular, scholars have noted that women and men are valued differently within leadership roles. Dean et al. (2009) claimed that “Because academic leadership is male normed, simply being male gives men a boost” (p. 235). As identified by Klenke (2018), homosociality is practiced by men in higher education leadership positions who look for individuals who are similar to them to hire. In U.S. higher education, men make up the majority of the positions of power, including president (69.9% of the 1,546 participants in the American Council on Education’s (ACE) American College Presidents Study in 2016; Gagliardi et al., 2017), provost (56.4% across institutional types in 2013; Johnson, 2016), deanships leading to a presidency (72% in 2012; Kim & Cook, 2013), and full professors (68% of 182,204 were men in 2015; Johnson, 2016). As such, they are the ones often evaluating female faculty and leaders and may act as a barrier to the advancement of women due to how they value them in leadership positions.

Gender and status are linked based on societal expectations and values, something that is also seen within higher education. A depiction of the value placed on men over women can be seen in the lack of advancement of women into higher faculty ranks as well as into administrative positions (ACE, 2016; Gagliardi et al., 2017; Johnson, 2016). Further evidence is the continued gender pay gap in which men out earned women at every faculty rank from lecturer to full professor, and at every institution type except two-year privates in 2015-16 (Johnson, 2016). This is also true for higher education administrators. Women in administrator positions in 2016 made \$.80 per dollar as compared to men, an increase of only \$.03 more since 2001 (based on data from approximately 50,000 higher education administrators from more than 1,100 institutions; Bichsel & McChesney, 2017).

In their suggestions for future research on women faculty and leaders, Dominici et al. (2009) advised that researchers explore the “reasons for the inadequate recognition of women's leadership contributions, which undermines women's career trajectories as well as their stature and job satisfaction” (Conclusions section, para. 1). Researchers have explored the advancement of women in patriarchal higher education institutional structures (e.g., Jones & Palmer, 2011; Jones & Taylor, 2012, 2013; Jones et al., 2015a, 2015b), yet it has often been explored from the women’s perspective. The lack of the dominant gender’s voice in academic leadership -- men -- from the literature is an oversight that needs to be addressed as higher

education continues to be male-normed (Bornstein, 2009; Dean et al., 2009; Eddy & Cox, 2008). Until we understand how men perceive and value women as leaders, it remains challenging to address issues that women face in advancement in higher education, including but not limited to: challenges to tenure and promotion (e.g., Hart, 2016; Mason et al., 2006; Maranto & Griffin, 2011); allocation of work responsibilities (e.g., teaching, research, service) and the value put on each (Eddy & Ward, 2015; Link et al., 2008; Misra et al., 2012; O'Meara et al., 2017); and campus climates and cultures that are not supportive of women and their career progression as leaders (Jones et al., 2012, 2015b; Maranto & Griffin, 2011; Pal & Jones, 2019).

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of men, the dominant gender and power holders in higher education leadership and senior faculty ranks, of the value of women leaders within higher education. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do male faculty and administrators perceive women are valued as leaders within higher education?
2. What differences do male faculty and administrators perceive between how male and female leaders are valued within higher education?

### **Social Role Theory**

This study is framed by social role theory. Social role theory supports that within society there are shared gender stereotypes that develop from a division of labor based on gender (Eagly, 1987), as well as “behavioral differences between [men] and [women] are the result of cultural stereotypes about gender (how [men] and [women] are supposed to act) and the resulting social roles that are taught to young people” (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Eagly et al., 2000; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; “What is social role theory,” n.d. para. 3). According to Eagly (1987) and Ridgeway (2001b), since there is a division of labor based on gender, men and women have different skillsets and contribute to a social organization that supports this gender-differentiated behavior (Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly & Wood, 2012).

Social role theory's key principle is based on how society distributes men and women into social roles, which results in differences and similarities (Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly & Wood, 2012). Eagly and Wood (2016) stated that gender roles are supported and sustained by the way that men and women behave. There is a socially accepted expectation that women more than men will take on roles that “require predominantly communal behaviors, domestic behaviors, or subordinate behaviors for successful role performance,” and men more than women filling roles that “require predominantly agentic behaviors, resource acquisition behaviors or dominant behaviors for successful role performance” (Eagly et al., 2000, p. 127). People's perceptions about individuals are framed by whether or not they stay within the confines of the expected gender role or deviate from what is considered normal, with them being rewarded or punished respectively (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Within the higher education context, if men are

predominantly the leaders and are perceived by society as having the skills and competencies to be leaders, then the division of labor based on these stereotypes will continue without intentional disruption of gendered stereotypes. Women who challenge this socially accepted norm may face critical sanctions that are either overt (e.g., being removed from their role) or covert (e.g., being talked about negatively; Eagly & Wood, 2012).

### **Methods**

This qualitative survey research study was conducted through a naturalistic paradigm. The naturalistic paradigm was used to explore the multiple constructions of reality by the male faculty and administrator participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Salmons (2015) noted that online interviews (e.g., conducted through surveys, video conferencing) “may help some participants to be more forthcoming in response to questions. As a result, participants may be more willing to discuss sensitive or personal matters” (p. 40). The decision to use a qualitative survey was made to increase the openness of the participants by creating a nonthreatening environment to discuss what could be a sensitive topic. The data was collected through a 21-question researcher-developed qualitative survey, researcher journals, and institutional documents.

The qualitative survey consisted of demographic as well as a series of open-ended questions surrounding men's perceptions of how departments, colleges, and institutions value women leaders; the role of women within the department/college/institution leadership; challenges that women face in their career progression, and the role of society in the valuation of women as leaders. The survey instrument was validated through a pilot study with eight higher education professionals including administrators and faculty as well as graduate students and was also face validated by three researchers of higher education leadership and gender studies. Feedback from the pilot study and higher education leadership experts resulted in the need to revise several of the open-ended questions for needed clarification.

The participants in this study were 20 men faculty and administrators at three large, public, highest research-intensive universities located in the Southwestern region of the United States. Participants were identified through departmental and college websites based on their role (i.e., faculty member, administrator). The recruitment email was sent to 30 individuals (10 at each university) and included a request to forward the study information to others who they perceived would be interested in participating. Due to the use of this recruitment technique, it is not possible to identify the response rate to the survey. Although individuals from all academic disciplines were invited to participate in this study, some disciplines were better represented in the final participants than others (e.g., STEM, business, arts, humanities, and social sciences). At the time that contact information was collected in Summer 2018, men made up the majority of deans, other college administrators excluding department chairs, department chairs, and assistant, tenured associate, and tenured full professor ranks. The only group

where women dominated in number was the lowest rank of full-time faculty at the instructor level.

Potential participants were emailed an invitation to complete the online qualitative survey through Qualtrics. A follow-up reminder was sent to the potential participants two weeks later. Twenty men completed the qualitative survey. Data analysis occurred through the unitizing of data into the smallest meaningful pieces (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and coded using open and axial coding to establish themes and subthemes (Saldaña, 2016). The data were independently coded and analyzed by the two researchers who came together to discuss and agree upon the final resulting themes. Trustworthiness was addressed throughout the study through the use of rich, thick descriptions, peer debriefing, researchers’ reflexive journals, and audit trails of both the unanalyzed and analyzed data.

**Positionality of the Researchers**

Having experienced higher education from various roles and perspectives, we have had the opportunity to serve in leadership roles as well as to experience how leadership roles are filled within multiple higher education organizations. Our similar backgrounds and current experiences within a doctoral-granting highest research-intensive institution have led us to this study. Research intensive doctoral-granting institutions are considered *prestigious* in the college and university hierarchy and have fewer women at the top administrative levels than other types of institutions. As individuals who identify as women ourselves, we continue to search for why women continue to struggle to reach parity in the top levels of these organizations. Our prior work has been from the lens of women and their lived experiences. Wishing to further explore why women struggle to achieve parity in leadership, our focus has moved to the perspectives and experiences of the dominant power holders, men. This study was a challenge to both of us as we were unsure if we could remain unbiased in our interpretations and analysis of the data collected but relied on peer debriefings and our reflexive journals to help ensure the trustworthiness of the study’s findings.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study has several limitations. The first is that only men at three highest research-intensive universities located within the Southwest region of the United States were invited to participate in the study, limiting the transferability of the findings to other types of institutions or geographic regions. Another consideration is that an online qualitative survey was used to collect the data as we perceived the participants would be more honest as the data was anonymous. To get the rich data that was needed to address the research questions, the questions posed were open-ended and required a significant amount of time to complete. We knew that this could potentially affect the response rate to the study. Additionally, this study only explored men’s perceptions of the social value of one gender identity, women, and did not consider other gender identities, such as transgender, gender non-binary, or no gender identity. A final limitation is that we were seeking the thoughts of the counter-gender of their perceptions and experiences of women. It is understood that some individuals may be guarded with their responses in order to be *politically* correct. It is assumed this is why some of the examples provided in the findings were based on the experiences of the participants with other men and their actions toward female leaders.

**Findings**

The participants in this study included 10 tenured professors, five tenured associate professors, two tenure-track assistant professors, two non-tenure-track faculty, and one director. All participants were White (the predominant race of the study institutions) and represented a variety of disciplines including STEM (8); business (3); art, humanities, and social sciences (5); agriculture (2); education (1); and architecture (1). All but five had held an administrator role at some point during their careers or were currently in an administrator role (e.g., director, chair, dean). The profiles of the participants are presented in Table 1. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants.

**Table 1**  
*Participant Profiles*

Name	Age Range	Race/ Ethnicity	Rank	Discipline	Administrator Role
Bill	65+	White	Associate Professor	Business	Yes
John	65+	White	Professor	STEM	Yes
Ted	55-64	White	Professor	Agriculture	Yes
Chris	45-54	White	Associate Professor	Architecture	Yes
Mike	55-64	White	Professor	Business	Yes
Blake	55-65	White	Professor	STEM	Yes
Ryan	45-54	White	Associate Professor	STEM	No
Tim	55-65	White	Professor	Business	Yes

Kyle	65+	White	Professor	Arts, humanities, or social sciences	Yes
Sam	45-54	White	Associate Professor	STEM	Yes
James	35-44	White	Associate Professor	Arts, humanities, or social sciences	Yes
Alan	55-64	White	Professor	STEM	Yes
Adam	55-64	White	Professor	STEM	No
Kurt	35-44	White	Assistant Professor	Arts, humanities, or social sciences	Yes
Mark	45-54	White	Assistant Professor	Arts, humanities, or social sciences	No
Colin	55-65	White	Non-tenure track faculty	Agriculture	No
Tyler	25-34	White	Non-tenure track faculty	STEM	No
Dale	45-54	White	Professor	Education	Yes
Evan	45-54	White	Professor	Arts, humanities, or social sciences	Yes
Scott	65+	White	Director	STEM	Yes

### Value of Women as Leaders

The first research question explored men’s perceptions of how women are valued as leaders within higher education. Themes that emerged to answer this research question included: (a) male faculty and administrators do not always value women as leaders; (b) industry values female leaders more than academia; (c) institutional leadership may perpetuate the devaluation of women leaders; and (d) the value of women in higher education leadership remains a reflection of how women are valued in society.

#### *Male Faculty and Administrators Do Not Always Value Women as Leaders*

Participants highlighted how within institutions of higher education, there is still a bias toward men as leaders, something that manifests through language (how women are talked about) and action (how women are treated). Adam perceived that it was becoming harder for women to ascend to leadership, stating, “I used to think that the university made efforts to provide equal opportunities for women in leadership. But recently, the track record seems fairly weak.” Others, such as John shared that he had seen men faculty and administrators often question a woman’s right to authority. He recounted a recent conversation he had with some administrators:

One example that was clear to me was during interviews for the current dean of [academic college]. In my view, the most highly qualified candidate was a woman, but I heard from some administrators that she was, put bluntly, too “strong” for the position and wanted too much power. However, she was asking for no more than the current dean of [academic college] had obtained.

From John’s perspective, the woman administrator was evaluated poorly because she demonstrated traits that are often

accepted of men. In another instance, Mike shared an example of how colleagues of his referred to a new woman academic dean as “the girl dean,” questioning her ability to lead. As he reflected further on his male colleagues who placed the low value on women leaders, he noted:

They [men] hold endowed positions and are generally full professors...The fact is that they use their institutional power to dissuade women from advancing through the academic ranks. For example, in our college, once a woman was ranked first among candidates, this faction, all male and all senior, apparently lobbied the provost to declare our dean search a failure.

The men in Mike’s example seemed to perceive that a woman was not right to fill the dean role, perpetuating the value challenge that women face. Although the woman dean was hired, she entered into a culture where senior men faculty were challenging her ability to fulfill the role before her first day.

This was not the first time that action had been taken against a woman in a leadership position in this discipline, which may have contributed to the diminishing value of female leaders. Mike shared:

Two years ago, our administration allowed an incompetent interim dean to fire a competent and effective woman who was serving the college as associate dean. That was a travesty and called into question the sincerity of the president’s verbal support for women in leadership roles.

He discussed that he perceived the decision to remove the woman associate dean to be more than just removing one person, but a signal as to how the institutional administration valued women in leadership positions. Mike’s experiences were supported by Tim who shared his perception that “There is still a resistance among some men toward women in leadership roles. It is sometimes subtle and at other times overt.”

A practice that may contribute to the devaluation of women as leaders in the academy was discussed by Blake who claimed that women were sometimes appointed to leadership roles, even when they had not earned it based on their work, noting, "I'm sure there is still the perception that when a woman is appointed to a leadership role, it was done based on something other than merit." For Chris there was a recognition that women were valued when it was support roles, stating that he knew of examples of women in leadership roles but "they seem to follow the standard pattern of valuing effective women in roles that support leaders rather than being the leaders."

### ***Industry Values Female Leaders More than Academia***

Some of the participants noted that they perceived industry-valued women leaders more than academia. Tim, whose discipline was business, noted "That [valuing women as leaders] has changed in business and the professions over the past several decades. I expect that will change in government over the next few elections. We need to make the change in the academy." Tim went on to say that academics "needs to catch up" with industry, which accepts and values women leaders. John had experienced a similar situation in the sciences, sharing "In my field, it took industry to point the way by hiring and advancing women scientists, and by providing them with some of the benefits discussed [childcare, parental leave]."

Other participants perceived that women were valued in academia. Kyle shared an example:

Education is one area where women nationally are recognized as leaders...K-12 education has been seen for years as a largely female career, so it is not terribly surprising to see that more women are moving into higher education, and that some of them move on to successful careers as administrators at various levels. So I think higher education is probably a pretty good place for talented and ambitious women to move into leadership positions.

In his reflection, he did question the number of women presidents in higher education organizations, first speculating 25%, then looking it up to see that it was 30%, higher than he had expected. In his assessment, this was viewed as a positive of the value of women as leaders in the academy based on less than one-third of college presidents being women.

### ***Institutional Leadership May Perpetuate the Devaluation of Women***

A number of participants discussed the role of institutional leadership in the valuation of female leaders, some giving credit to current institutional leadership for valuing women, while the majority questioned their role in continuing the devaluation of female leaders. Sharing his perceptions of institutional administration Adam explained, "I have felt that the current upper administration seems less likely to listen to concerns brought by a female leader than by a man. The administration seems to have found ways to politely ignore some requests from female leaders."

Mike shared that in some cases, it might be a risk for male administrators to shift perceptions and place a higher value on female leaders:

I'm not sure our administrators are willing to take any personal risk to advance the cause. For example, [in the example shared above] regarding the president/provost's unwillingness to tell an interim dean that he does not have the authority to fire a female associate dean.

From his perspective, the potential consequences of straying from the norm led the institutional leaders to continue to support the status quo instead of challenging the negative value placed on female leaders.

Another area discussed was the idea that men administrators do not perceive women's opportunities for leadership to be a challenge. This was supported by Kurt who said, "I also think that part of the problem in representing women in leadership positions here in greater numbers is that too many of the stakeholders with power don't perceive the lack of representation as enough of a problem." He further elaborated:

I think that female leaders at my institution are perceived with great respect, and indeed, I think that the admiration they earn from their male administrative colleagues sometimes blinds those male leaders to problems of representation. That is, I think that some administrative leaders [see] the success of these representative women as indicators of gender equity across campus.

Many of the participants, however, noted that the lack of women in leadership positions was a challenge that needed to be addressed.

Dale held the perception that a commitment to value women as leaders by senior administrators was a "clear expression of intent from top leadership (president down)." He noted that the top-down commitment to increasing the number of women in leadership roles has led to changes within his institution, stating "I think the organization has been successful to a significant degree [in] placing women in leadership positions across the university." Still, "genuine diversity" in leadership was something that he perceived was not yet present at the institution.

### ***Value of Women in Higher Education Leadership Remains a Reflection of How Women are Valued in Society***

Participants perceived that how society values women as leaders continues to be a concern. Tim, for instance, stated, "Society has not valued women in leadership roles." This was reiterated by Adam who explained, "In the United States, society as a whole seems more eager to disparage women in leadership than to value them." Kurt acknowledged that progress had been made but women were still devalued, stating that "In society and our communities, while important shifts have been made, not nearly enough value and respect are given to the powerful way that women can guide and lead." Tyler also explained that there had

been a shift, but women were not valued highly in American society, and “as leaders, even less.”

Scott noted that some of the challenges that women face regarding being valued in society may prevent them from pursuing certain careers as early as junior high school. He explained, “Higher education is part of the larger society, and women with academic bents are not immune from what goes on outside academe. I fear that the pipeline is getting squeezed at early stages for women.” Despite perceiving that his institution “values good leadership and also inclusiveness” and, in turn, “women who exhibit good leadership potential (and actuality) are given opportunities to use their abilities,” he still acknowledged that challenges in how women are valued in society may affect them reaching higher education leadership positions by keeping them out of the roles that are access points to higher education leadership.

### **Differences Between How Men and Women are Valued**

The second research question explored the differences between how men and women are valued as leaders. Themes to answer this research question included: 1) men faculty and administrators may not see differences based on gender; 2) due to norms that support men in society and higher education, men and women are evaluated and rewarded based on different standards; and 3) women devalue themselves, adding to the challenges they face in obtaining leadership positions.

### ***Male Faculty and Administrators May Not See Differences Based on Gender***

Although participants supported that female leaders are devalued compared to males, they did not necessarily see the differences in how men and women are valued. Kurt, for example, perceived that, women were supported in leadership by being treated equally with men, stating “The highest leadership roles in our college are filled by women, and I value their leadership, and I have always felt like there is strong teamwork in our college, and especially in our department, regardless of gender or sex.”

Sam stressed the importance of valuing the individual and not considering gender, noting:

I would not state it [valuation of leadership] as a perception of women's leadership abilities but rather that of an individual's abilities. We had a male associate dean who stepped down and was replaced by a female. The female associate dean was greatly appreciated as she was much better at the position. I also know situations where a female in a leadership position was not well-liked because of the way she led. In both these cases, the feeling about the individual was fairly uniform among the [vast] majority of faculty members (and students), with no difference based on the gender of the faculty member or student.

Tim perceived “Those women who are in leadership roles are comparable to my perception of the men who are in leadership roles.” Alan also perceived that women were equally competent when recruited through a proper search and not appointed. He

continued his assessment of female leaders, cautioning that women may not be equally competent when they are appointed “just to fill some quota.” A similar point was made by Sam who perceived that women may in fact benefit from a bias favoring placing them in leadership roles.

### ***Men and Women are Evaluated and Rewarded Based on Different Standards***

Participants highlighted the different standards that men and women face regarding the valuation of their leadership potential. Differences included men being allowed to negotiate for more and rewarded with it, and being allowed to behave differently than women. John shared his thoughts that “Some faculty and administrators seem hesitant to accept that women scientists need as much start-up support as men.” If women are not valued the same when starting, affecting things like their start-up support, it has the potential to affect them throughout their careers, creating a disadvantage due to lower valuation of women as researchers from the start.

Participants perceived that men had the latitude to behave differently than women, being more aggressive or assertive, due to male-normed expectations of leadership held by society. James commented on the challenges that women face:

I think that sexism is rampant in our society. Assertive women face the burden of this bigotry by being perceived as unfair in their expectations or overly imperious, even when they are conducting themselves in the same manner as their male counterparts.

He continued by sharing an example that he sees when men colleagues become frustrated with assertive women leaders, using “sexist comments” to devalue them (e.g., “She thinks she’s the queen bee” or “she’s a bit of a mother hen”). Bill reflected on the meaning of the comments, “While the men offering these comments likely see them as innocuous, they speak to negative attitudes that cloud [perceptions of] women in leadership positions.”

Mark perceived that women may need to change their demeanor at times in order to be successful in leadership roles. For women, certain behaviors, mistakes, and challenges are associated with their gender instead of who they are as a leader. He explained:

Women are often put in positions that require them to “soften” their public persona by publicly responding to questions that are gender-norm specific or they are often called upon to use a rhetoric that genders their relations in the context of governance. Women are subject to greater scrutiny; mistakes in leadership or mere disagreements with positions or policies are often attributed to gender.

He furthered this with an example of a difference related to leadership he perceived based on gender where a woman past president was forced to resign when she acted contrary to the conservative expectations of the institution, resulting in “her role [becoming] contentious, publicly.”

Kyle has seen female administrators be devalued or overlooked for promotions when they appeared too aggressive or forward. He shared his perceptions that others assessed these women as “lacking leadership skills (i.e., not [ambitious] or able to tackle difficult personnel problems).” Kyle provided an example that he had seen of a woman administrator, someone he assessed as “exceptionally competent” that “may have suffered [from] the perception that she was too willing to tell people what she thinks.” Despite reaching successes outside of the institution, the incongruity between a woman leader and male-accepted leadership traits contributed to the stopping of advancement opportunities for her within the institution.

### ***Women Devalue Themselves, Adding to the Challenges They Face in Obtaining Leadership Positions***

A final challenge that the participants perceived was that women tend to devalue themselves as leaders, which contributes to the challenge of obtaining a leadership position and may contribute to the negative valuation of women in leadership roles in general. A number of participants noted that women often do not apply for leadership positions, making the problem less about how men value them and more about how they see themselves in the role of leader. Chris explained, “In years of serving on search committees for faculty as well as our current dean, the applicant pools have too few women within them.” He perceived that women may “self-edit” and not apply for roles when they cannot “see themselves succeeding or being supported at our institution.” Apart from questioning their ability to successfully fill a role causing them to not apply, Bill noted that “women are reluctant to self-promote.” To apply for a position though, he explained that self-promotion was necessary. This point was also shared by Scott who perceived that some women have a “confidence deficit,” something that he claimed men had as well, but “push ahead anyway.”

### **Discussion and Implications for Higher Education**

The findings of this study provide interesting insights into men’s perceptions of how women are valued as leaders within higher education organizations. The theory that frames this study, social role theory, continues to be supported by the findings. Though participants appeared to value women as leaders, they provided ample examples of subtle and blatant biases and microaggressions toward women leaders at their institutions that provide evidence that women may not be valued as leaders simply due to their gender as well as the stereotypes within society of what their societal roles should be (Eagly, 1987). The language and terminology used to describe the perceptions and experiences of the value of women as leaders in this study served to reinforce status characteristics and expectations (Berger et al., 1980; Correll & Ridgeway, 2003; Ridgeway, 2001a). References to “the girl dean” and the experience of a woman leader who hit the wall on advancement due to her willingness “to tell people what she thinks,” support the continued misogyny that many women experience in academe. For instance, adding the word “girl” in front of dean is explicitly used to remind others that she is different from the expected

male-norm (e.g., Schein’s [1973, 1975, 2001] concept of *think-manager, think-male*). The men who added the qualifier as they referred to her were devaluing her capabilities as a leader by stressing the gender difference, perpetuating the stereotypes that women must confront when they stray from the accepted gender-normed social roles. But there is more to this statement than just a reference to her based on her gender. They chose to take it a step further, demeaning her personally as a woman by referring to her as a *girl*.

To further expand on the discussion of the woman leader who was willing to “tell people what she thinks,” this is another example that supports the negative perceptions of women who are assertive, a trait that is perceived to be a sign of effective men leaders, and reinforces that how individuals are socialized to perceive women and men leaders may be determined and perpetuated by society and culture (Denmark 1993; Eagly et al., 2000; Klenke, 1996). The participants acknowledged that when women make it into faculty or administrative positions, they are often valued based on different standards (e.g., not being able to be assertive, being judged if they tried to negotiate for the same amount during the hiring process as a man), aligning with Correll et al.’s (2007) assertion that individuals with lower status characteristics (e.g., women, minorities) are held to stricter standards and evaluated harsher than those from the higher status characteristic group. In some cases, researchers have found that a double standard exists where men are awarded for behavior or characteristic that negatively affects women (e.g., parental status, aggressiveness) (Correll et al., 2007), something that was evident in this study as well. The challenge that exists is that researchers have found that these gender norms are reinforced in society starting in early childhood (e.g., Babcock & Laschever, 2007; Bian et al., 2017; Trumpy & Elliott, 2019) – supporting that these double-standards of leadership expectations for higher education leaders are just a continuation of what society has always accepted.

The patriarchal organizational structures in higher education organizations continue to support what Eagly (1983) defines as “formal status inequality,” caused by the “hierarchy of roles that is legitimized by social norms and embedded in the formal structure of groups and organizations” (p. 972). When the status is determined by a characteristic such as gender due to societal influences, the ability for women leaders to influence their followers may be difficult to advance, further limiting how they are valued as leaders. Those who can influence others are perceived as competent, and as supported by Carli (2001), society perceives men to be competent until proven otherwise, simply based on their gender. Women, on the other hand, must prove their competency to be perceived capable.

Berger et al. (1980) asserted that status is influenced by the greater society, which is also supported by social role theory. The way that participants in this study perceived and framed women’s value in higher education leadership was also influenced by components of how it is perceived in society (Denmark, 1993; Eagly et al., 2000; Ridgeway, 1991; Ridgeway

& Correll, 2004), as well as within the traditional patriarchal organizational structures of higher education organizations (Borstein, 2009; Eagly, 1983; Eddy & Cox, 2008; Jones et al., 2012, 2015b). Though many of the participants reflected on their experiences with *other* men that they knew in their responses (oftentimes highlighting negative examples that they witnessed instead of providing ones about themselves), the findings reinforced the concept that gender is a status characteristic, which confers value, worthiness, and ability to men in higher education leadership positions, often over women (Carli, 2001; Correll & Ridgway, 2003). In order to be valued as competent and capable leaders, women must overcome the challenges that they face to move beyond the confines and lower valuation that comes with their lesser status characteristic (Berger et al., 1980; Correll & Ridgeway, 2003; Ridgeway, 2001a).

Though we perceive that the intentions of the participants were not to devalue women but to support their progress within the academy as leaders, Kyle and Mark both made statements that further support that societal expectations are embedded in our perceptions of progress. Kyle discussed within education, women had made strides into leadership. This comment reinforces stereotypes that women may only be suitable or accepted as leaders in the education profession and this is where they may need to look for their leadership opportunities. This aligns with the assertion of Eagly et al. (2000) who highlighted how women fill “female-dominated occupations” (p. 127) because they align with gender-role expectations. The statement made by Mark was within the intention of helping women be leaders but can be interpreted to further support that society expects women to act and behave in specific ways, further perpetuating the stereotypes that society holds of women and reinforcing a continued gender hierarchy, which persists due to the continued assumption that men are more powerful, influential, and have higher status than women (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Participants highlighted that there is still a biased preference toward men as leaders, something that manifests through language (how women are talked about) and action (how women are treated). As seen from some of the stereotypes surrounding women leaders, and the argument that the multiple roles of women will prevent them from fulfilling their work responsibilities, women continue to be devalued in the professional setting by some men, the ones often in the positions of authority and power and valued more for their contribution in the domestic sphere (Babcock & Laschever, 2007; Denmark, 1993; Klenke, 1996, 2018). Klenke (2018) highlighted the concept of homosociality – when individuals look for those who are similar to them in experience, education, and leadership styles when making hiring decisions. Due to the societal impressions and values of women as leaders, men may, consciously or not, hire other men for leadership roles. Not only does this practice prevent women from being equitably represented in leadership, but also could perpetuate the perceived lack of their value as leaders in the professional sphere

in academe, especially at the higher ranks of faculty and administrators.

The findings of this study lead to implications for higher education organizations as well as future research recommendations. The perception by some of the participants that industry demonstrates greater value to women in leadership roles may indicate that society overall is moving in a direction where it assigns greater value to women in leadership roles, which may eventually become a priority in higher education organizations. This difference between industry and higher education organizations needs to be further researched to garner evidence as to why colleges and universities are slow to adopt promising practices from industry relative to gender equality and acceptance of women in leadership roles. Since higher education institutions often prepare educated individuals who later become industry leaders, it is especially important that women are valued in leadership and faculty roles as it sends a message that may reach well beyond the walls of the institution. As noted by Denmark (1993), what happens in education reflects the larger society and can serve to reproduce gender differences. If there is a lack of willingness (or desire) among institutional leadership to challenge the status characteristics and value typically attributed to women leaders, something that participants in this study did not perceive was happening, the gender differences may be perpetuated and continuously reproduced.

If status characteristics are self-fulfilling prophecies, and individuals with higher status characteristics continue to fulfill positions of authority and influence while those with lower status characteristics act as followers (Correll & Ridgeway, 2003), it may be challenging for women to disrupt the status quo and challenge what has traditionally been accepted themselves. Further research is needed to explore why women may continue to accept follower roles when they are the most educated population in higher education institutions today, to determine if this perceived acceptance continues because of societal values and stereotypes or simply due to inequitable opportunities for career advancement. Women will be unable to disrupt the status quo without the support and advocacy of men. They need men in positions of authority and influence to advocate for and with them to challenge the accepted valuation of female leaders and acknowledge that women leaders have much to contribute.

Although society is advancing, women and men are still socialized in ways that have aligned with traditional gender-role expectations (Babcock & Laschever, 2007; Bian et al., 2017; Denmark, 1993; Eagly, 1987; Trumpy & Elliott, 2019). This socialization may prevent men (and potentially women) from seeing the value of women as leaders and perpetuate the issue that female leaders will continue to be devalued within higher education organizations, demonstrated by inequity in gender parity in status, position, and pay at the highest levels of the organization. To challenge the impact of gender-based social value norms in society on higher education, institutional leaders should examine how women are valued on their campuses through a critical lens, looking beyond numbers and exploring

the views of those who hold power positions and the followers who also place a value on the leaders. Further, faculty and administrators of all genders must understand and acknowledge the role of gender in leadership within their institutions and be willing to challenge existing status values that give advantage to men and disadvantage others when no real difference exists in qualifications or leadership.

In order to better understand why women are not valued or recognized for their leadership contributions in higher education (Dominici et al., 2009), it is imperative to understand the perspectives of men, the dominant gender in the academy. Although the participants in this study noted that they personally valued women as leaders, they also highlighted challenges with how women are valued by men, as well as themselves, in leadership positions. These challenges and solutions to address them need to continue to be researched. The current study is one of the few that focus on men's perceptions of women as leaders. Additional research is needed that continues to explore this topic. Until status characteristics can be broken down and challenged though, women may continue to face challenges including being devalued and assessed as less capable for leadership positions. A challenge that exists in confronting this is that men may not see the differences in how men and women are valued but play a critical role in confronting and deconstructing the biases, stereotypes, and structures that exist, which favor the continued advancement of men into leadership roles (Bornstein, 2009; Eddy & Cox, 2008; Jones et al., 2012, 2015b).

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