

Positionality and Enacted Leadership:  
Women in Senior Level Administrative Positions at Liberal Arts Colleges

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## Abstract

Women are underrepresented in senior level leadership positions in higher education institutions and their experiences are underrepresented in leadership research. This qualitative study engaged women senior administrators at liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States to better understand how their intersecting identities mediate their enacted leadership. The following research questions guided the inquiry: (a) How do women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges perceive that their intersecting identities mediate their enacted leadership? (b) How do women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges perceive that their identities shape their interactions with other members of the campus community? How do their interactions confirm and contradict their perceptions? and (c) How do women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges perceive their own power among other members of the campus community? How do they see their power as mediated by their identities? Data were collected from eight women senior administrators at liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States via a preliminary questionnaire, document review, in-depth one-on-one interviews, and a day of observation with each participant. Data analysis using the constant comparative method revealed findings in five areas: (a) understandings of leadership, (b) identities and enacted leadership, (c) identities and interactions with others, (d) identities and power, and (e) leading in a liberal arts context.

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## Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Women continue to be underrepresented in senior level leadership positions in higher education institutions (Hartley, Eckel, & King, 2009). Until recently, research also has focused on leadership as a male activity (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). A more comprehensive understanding of women and leadership in higher education is needed in order to contribute to fuller understandings of what leadership is in this context and how it is enacted by various people.

In this dissertation, I present a study of women in senior level administrative positions in liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States. In the introductory chapter, I describe the background and context of the study, a summary of the problem in contemporary higher education, the purpose of the study, the research gap, the research approach, and the significance of the study for higher education. In subsequent chapters, I summarize literature relevant to women's leadership and provide details about the research methodology. I conclude with a discussion of the findings, and implications for future research, theory development, policy, and practice.

### *Background and Context of the Study*

No primary definition of leadership has emerged in higher education leadership literature or in general leadership literature (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). Instead, the concepts of "leader" and "leadership" are operationalized in many different ways by scholars. Leaders variously exercise authority over other people (Eagly & Carli, 2007a), empower others to collective action (Astin & Leland, 1991), provide vision and meaning for an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003), and create and manage organizational culture (Schein, 2004). In one view, leadership "consists of influencing,



motivating, organizing and coordinating the work of others” (Eagly & Carli, 2007a, pp. 8-9). In other views, leadership is essentially an act of service (Greenleaf, 1991; Farnsworth, 2007), empowerment (Astin & Leland, 1991; Follett, 1995), or collaboration (Kezar, 2009). It is a process by which members of a group are motivated to work together toward common goals, purposes, and values (Astin & Leland, 1991; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Northouse, 2001). In this study, I did not define leadership in a singular way; I assumed that leadership is dynamic and multi-faceted, inviting a multitude of understandings.

Within this study, I explored how women leaders’ positionality affects their enactment of leadership. Kezar and Lester (2010) proposed positionality as a powerful approach to studying leadership that avoids essentializing women’s and men’s experiences as leaders. Positionality theory emerged from postmodern feminist theory during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The theory posits that an individual’s position within the world impacts his or her perspective (Alcoff, 1988; Kezar & Lester, 2010). An individual’s position is simultaneously informed by his or her intersecting identities, the context in which he or she is acting, and power relations. Kezar and Lester adopted the theory to assert that intersecting identities, context, and power relations shape leadership enactment within higher education, and each of these threads is important to understandings of women’s leadership in higher education.

Positionality theory avoids the problems of cultural feminism, an approach that tends to both universalize and essentialize womanhood in order to offer a cohesive response to misogyny and sexism as well as laud attributes of womanhood that have arisen under restrictive conditions (Alcoff, 1988). Positionality theory denies “that

women have an essence,” and, importantly for this study, denies “that female leaders have a particular way of leading” (Kezar & Lester, 2010, p. 169). It also moves beyond the poststructuralist “idea that the category ‘woman’ is a fiction and that feminist efforts must be directed toward dismantling this fiction” (Alcoff, p. 417). Positionality theory assumes that women “share certain experiences and parts of their identity” (Kezar & Lester, p. 169), and that those similarities may lead to some similar leadership behaviors and experiences. Positionality defines a “woman” by a particular position within an external context rather than by a particular set of internal characteristics (Alcoff). Therefore, her identity is fluid and “relative to a constantly shifting context” shaped by herself and others (p. 433).

Leaders’ identities are complex and overlapping, and they include facets such as gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, and religion. Positionality theory does not privilege one identity over another. Kezar and Lester (2010) noted that “particular facets of identity (such as gender, race, class, sexuality, and religious affiliation) may be more salient than others at any given time” and in any given context (p. 171). Ferdman (1999) suggested that the influence of gender on leadership is not the same for people of all races or cultures, and that the influence of race and culture is not the same for women and men. Therefore, researchers must examine leadership dynamics pertaining to gender, race, and culture simultaneously. Other scholars have also called for leadership research that maintains an “awareness of multiple dimensions of identity and their intersections” (Dean, Bracken, & Allen, 2009, p. 6).

Still, research has shown that gender is one of the most salient identities in people’s lives. Eagly and Carli (2007a) went so far as to claim that “sex provides the

strongest basis of classifying people; it trumps race, age, and occupation in the speed and ubiquity of categorizing others” (p. 85). Therefore, this study focused on leadership as a gendered process, even as I assumed that leaders’ identities were multiple and intersecting.

According to Indvik (2001), “gender refers to the way in which meaning and evaluations are associated with sex by members of a culture” (p. 216). I understand sex as a biological trait and gender as socially constructed, reproduced, and reinforced. Gender has been used to organize society in subtle and systemic ways that advantage men and disadvantage women (Bem, 1993). According to Bem, gender operates in three ways in American society: (a) through androcentrism, which casts men’s experiences as the norm and women’s experiences as other; (b) through gender polarization, which uses gender differences to structure society; and (c) through biological essentialism, which makes androcentrism and gender polarization appear natural because of biological differences between males and females. These “lenses of gender” operate within higher education as in all other parts of American society. Therefore, while institutions of higher education often have a façade of gender neutrality, in reality they perpetuate “gendered processes,” whereby “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine” (Acker, 1990, p. 146). Women leaders face particular challenges within gendered higher education environments, and their ascension to public leadership roles has been stymied by assumptions about women and their leadership potential. Among those assumptions are views about women’s leadership styles, their interactions with others, and the power they hold in those interactions.

*The Problem in Contemporary Higher Education*

While 64% of all higher education administrators are women, senior level leaders remain predominantly male (Hartley, Eckel, & King, 2009), and women still face significant barriers to advancement to senior level leadership posts (Chliwniak, 1997; Eagly & Carli, 2007a). According to the most recent demographic information available about leaders in higher education, women comprise only 23% of college presidents (*The American College President*, 2007). While this represents a significant improvement since 1986 (when less than 10% of college presidents were women), the rate of change has slowed in the last decade (King & Gomez, 2008). In addition, women are much more likely to lead associate's degree-granting institutions (where 29% of presidencies are held by women) than doctorate-granting institutions (where 14% of presidents are women; *The American College President*, 2007).

Women are slightly better represented in some other senior level leadership positions on the pathway to the presidency, although their numbers rarely indicate gender parity. For example, women comprise 40% of chief academic officers, the most common position before becoming a president (Hartley, Eckel, & King, 2009). However, only 25% of women chief academic officers plan to seek a presidency and another 28% are ambivalent about achieving the position (Hartley, Eckel, & King). In total, women hold 45% of all senior administrative posts in higher education, including positions like chief of staff, vice president, provost, and dean, those positions that are considered stepping stones toward a presidency (King & Gomez, 2008). Women are much more likely to be chiefs of staff (55% women) than executive vice presidents (31% women) or provosts (38% women). Most women senior administrators—at all types of institutions and in all

administrative positions—are White: only 16% of women administrators are women of color. Men and women leaders of color hold 16% of all senior administrative posts in higher education, and they are much more likely to hold the position of chief diversity officer (where only 18% of administrators are White) than any other administrative position (King & Gomez).

Generally, senior administrators at baccalaureate-granting institutions are similar to senior administrators at other types of institutions. Women led 23% of baccalaureate-granting colleges in 2006, up from 16% in 1986 (*The American College President*, 2007). Women hold 41% of all senior level administrative posts at baccalaureate-granting institutions (King & Gomez, 2008). Again, women are more likely to hold chief of staff positions at these colleges than any other administrative position; while women hold 64% of chief of staff positions, only 22% of executive vice presidents, 34% of provosts, and 34% of academic deans at baccalaureate institutions are women (King & Gomez).

Less apparent than the lack of women in educational leadership is the lack of understanding of and theorizing about diverse women's leadership. While data are collected on senior administrators' gender, race/ethnicity, age, and years in position, gender generally is presented as a variable, and the characteristics of women administrators often are not available in published reports. Similarly, while there is a robust body of literature on leadership in higher education, many scholars have noted that this literature largely has ignored gender and the experiences of women leaders (Chliwniak, 1997; Coleman, 2003; Jablonski, 2000). Studies of leadership in higher education have considered routinely only the perspectives of male leaders and described leadership in stereotypically masculine ways, without acknowledging that these

understandings of leadership are gendered (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). As Coleman (2003) asserted: “There is a considerable body of work on gender and women in educational management and leadership, but it tends to stand alone, distinct from the mainstream” (p. 326).

Extant studies of women’s leadership often have included only White, middle-class, heterosexual women and have not illuminated the way that these women’s racial/ethnic, class, and sexual identities impact their leadership enactment.

Generalizations about women’s leadership styles tend to promote an essentialized view of women’s leadership, normalizing a universal category of women (Kezar & Lester, 2010; Lyman, Ashby, & Tripses, 2005). Even as feminist scholars note that gender is a complex category and a problematic analytical frame (Tarule, Applegate, Earley, & Blackwell, 2009), very few studies of leadership have considered other identities, such as race/ethnicity and sexuality, along with gender (Eagly & Carli, 2007a). Most studies of leadership were conducted with White, middle-class men and women, but they often are presented as race- and class-neutral (Parker & oglivie, 1996).

In addition, there has been no research on the gendered experiences of leaders at liberal arts colleges. Considering the importance of context to leadership and the multiplicity of contexts in higher education, it seems unlikely that all modes of leadership would work equally well at all kinds of institutions. Still, few studies of leadership in higher education have considered the institutional contexts within which leaders work as a major influence on leadership enactment. As such, few studies of leadership have been conducted with administrators at liberal arts colleges, and to my knowledge, none of the studies of leadership in liberal arts college contexts have considered explicitly the

influence of gender and other identities on leadership. Further, positionality theory has only been applied in community college settings, and its applicability has not been explored at liberal arts colleges.

Shakeshaft (1999) described six stages of research on women and gender in educational administration: stage one, documenting the absence of women; stage two, finding women who have been or are school administrators; stage three, focusing on why there are few women leaders in schools; stage four, studying women on their own terms; stage five, understanding women's leadership experiences as challenging traditional organizational and leadership theories; and stage six, transforming theory to include the experiences of women. According to Shakeshaft, research in stages three and four was ongoing at the turn of the millennium, and research challenging and transforming theory (stages five and six) had just begun. This study, in exploring the perceptions of women administrators at liberal arts colleges, sought to extend leadership theory to include more fully the unique experiences of diverse women leaders.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how the intersecting identities of women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States mediate their enacted leadership. Specifically, this study sought to understand how senior level women administrators with multiple and overlapping identities and backgrounds, working at various liberal arts colleges in a specific region of the United States, define their salient identities and understand the ways those identities mediate their leadership enactment, interactions with others, and their power as leaders. To that end, this study focused on the following research questions:

- How do women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges perceive that their intersecting identities mediate their enacted leadership?
- How do women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges perceive that their identities shape their interactions with other members of the campus community? How do their interactions confirm and contradict their perceptions?
- How do women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges perceive their own power among other members of the campus community? How do they see their power as mediated by their identities?

This study was an important step in broadening understandings of the complex ways in which the leaders' multiple identities interact to shape women's leadership. It focused on the perceptions of women administrators at liberal arts colleges, a context in higher education where leadership has not often been studied.

#### *The Research Gap*

Past research leaves several important gaps in knowledge about leadership in higher education. First, more studies are needed to better understand the ways that women leaders' multiple and overlapping identities affect their enacted leadership and perceptions of power. Studies of gendered leadership in higher education remain at the margins of the vast leadership literature, and studies examining women's complex identities are few. Future research must move beyond essentializing women's leadership styles toward acknowledging women's multiple and constantly negotiated views of leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2010). Research using positionality theory may be especially useful to understand how women express the connections between their identities and their leadership.



Second, leadership research focusing on intersecting identities, power relations, and context merits further investigation (Kezar & Lester, 2010). In their review of leadership theory in higher education, Kezar, Carducci, and Contreras-McGavin (2006) called for explicit examinations of power dynamics embedded in leadership processes. Kezar (2000, 2001, 2002a, 2002b) has employed positionality theory in studies of leadership at a community college, but she has not investigated the potential contributions of positionality in other higher education environments. This study centralized power by making it a focus in the research questions. It used positionality theory to inform the research methodology, data collection, and data analysis.

Third, while many studies have focused on presidential leadership within higher education (e.g., Bornstein, 2003; DiCroce, 2000; Lawrence, 2006; Nelson, 2007; Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2009), fewer studies have considered the experiences of other college and university leaders. Research on other leadership positions enriches understandings of the full range of leadership practice in higher education. Therefore, this study examines the experiences of women leaders serving in a variety of vice presidential roles.

Fourth, while many studies have focused on how women leaders behave (leadership style), fewer studies have focused on what women leaders experience. (One notable exception is Brunner's [2000] study of women superintendents.) Additional research could explore women leaders' perceptions of how they enact leadership, their perceptions of their interactions with various communities, and their perceptions of their own power among those communities. These aspects closely inform the research questions for this study.

Finally, studies within the liberal arts context have not considered the ways that multiple identities mediate leadership enactment and power relations in these environments. To my knowledge, no studies of leaders' identities and power relations have been undertaken with leaders at liberal arts colleges. This study explored women's leadership in this specific context within higher education, illuminating the way that identities, contexts, and power overlap to mediate leaders' actions.

### *The Research Approach*

Data for this study were collected from eight women senior administrators at liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States. They were collected through a preliminary questionnaire, document review, in-depth one-on-one interviews, and a day of observation with each participant. Data analysis was consistent with the constant comparative method, whereby bits of data were compared and grouped in order to seek patterns (Merriam, 1998). I used positionality theory to inform my study, centering the importance of intersecting identities, power relations, and context. The entire study was grounded in the constructivist inquiry tradition, which assumes that knowledge is mutually constructed between the participants and the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This inquiry tradition is consistent with my own worldview that reality is constructed and that knowledge is subjectivist and transactional, created through dialog (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Constructivism was appropriate for this study as I sought to understand, primarily through dialog with the participants, how they perceived that their multiple identities mediated their enacted leadership.

### *Significance of the Study for Higher Education*

This research study moved beyond studies of women's leadership styles that essentialized and universalized women to illuminate the ways that women leaders with multiple and fluid identities construct leadership. It added to understandings of the confluence of women's identities and women's leadership, specifically in liberal arts colleges. I used positionality theory to inform my study, a theory that had not been applied previously to women leaders at liberal arts colleges. I also brought a feminist perspective to the research, knowing that this perspective affected my understanding of leadership and my interpretations of data (Bensimon, 1989). In these ways, this project makes valuable contributions to higher education leadership research, theory, policy, and practice.

## Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I present a review of conceptual, theoretical, and research literatures that inform my understanding of women's senior level leadership at liberal arts colleges. The leadership literature—coming from various disciplines including business, psychology, sociology, and education—is vast, and this review is not intended to be exhaustive. As such, I use the central tenets of positionality to organize my review of the literature, focusing on studies of women's leadership styles, women leaders' interactions with the various communities they serve, and gendered conceptions of power. These three themes, well-represented in the literature, are core facets of how women enact leadership in organizations. Finally, I review research on women's leadership in higher education, concentrating specifically on leadership within liberal arts colleges.

### *Women's Leadership Styles*

Researchers specifically have studied women's leadership in order to determine whether women practice leadership in ways different from men, but there is little agreement in the literature about how women actually lead (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Leadership style is "leaders' characteristic ways of behaving that have a consistent meaning or function" (Eagly & Carli, 2007a, p. 119). Gendered differences in leadership style have been thoroughly researched, with somewhat inconclusive results. Laboratory experiments tend to show differences in leadership style, whereas studies in organizational environments tend to show that men's and women's leadership styles are more similar than different. Some studies conclude that there is most likely no difference in the leadership styles of men and women, just in leadership positions afforded to women and men (Kanter, 1977; Nadim & Singh, 2005; Rhode, 2003) and in individuals'

accommodations to socially constructed leadership norms (Astin & Leland, 1991; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992; Wallin & Crippen, 2007). Other research studies, however, have insisted that men and women have different leadership styles (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

It makes some sense that the demands of particular leadership roles would promote similarity in leaders' behaviors, regardless of gender. However, it also seems plausible that women and men may lead differently. Gilligan (1982) contended that men and women make decisions in different ways. According to her research, women tend to frame and resolve moral problems through a care focus, emphasizing connection, peace, care, and response to need, while men frame and resolve moral problems through a justice focus, emphasizing equality, reciprocity, justice, and rights. Neither way of viewing the world is morally superior, but the differences could prompt women and men to lead differently.

In general, scholars claiming gendered differences in leadership style describe women leaders as more likely to display interpersonally oriented, democratic, and transformational leadership styles than men leaders in the same roles. Aburdene and Naisbitt (1992) coined the term "women's leadership" to include 25 impressionistic leadership behaviors clustered into six traits: empower, restructure, teaching, role model, openness, and questioner. More recently, Adler (2002) identified five "feminine" leadership traits found in women from countries across the globe: empathy, caring, interpersonal sensitivity, a collective orientation, and the cultivation of cooperative relationships. Studies of women's leadership credit socialization rather than biology for

explaining why women lead differently than men (Rosener, 1990, 1995; Trinidad & Normore, 2005).

In a recent review of literature, Eagly and Carli (2007a) divided studies of gendered leadership styles into three categories: (a) task oriented and interpersonally oriented leadership; (b) democratic and autocratic leadership; and (c) transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. In this section, I first use the categories developed by Eagly and Carli to present a summary of findings on gendered leadership styles. I then summarize feminist perspectives on gendered leadership styles. I end with a review of a few studies that consider race and sexual orientation along with gender, and their overlapping effects on leadership styles. Because so much work has been done in this area, I include the results of meta-analyses as well as single studies. Meta-analyses use statistical procedures to analyze multiple studies that include similar variables to determine the overall trend in results. Indvik (2001) noted that meta-analysis “can be especially useful in leadership studies, since some studies have found sex differences whereas others have not” (p. 221).

#### *Task Oriented and Interpersonally Oriented Leadership*

Some leadership research has differentiated between a “task-oriented style, defined as a concern with accomplishing assigned tasks by organizing task-relevant activities, and [an] interpersonally oriented style, defined as a concern with maintaining interpersonal relationships by tending to others’ morale and welfare” (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003, p. 570). Task orientation and interpersonal orientation are not two ends of a spectrum, and leaders can exhibit both task and interpersonal behaviors. Leaders’ jobs generally require both task behaviors and interpersonal behaviors. A meta-

analysis of 87 studies of leadership style found that both task and interpersonal behaviors contributed to leader effectiveness and that interpersonal behaviors were also positively correlated with follower satisfaction (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Research about the task and relationship orientations of men and women leaders is inconsistent. Eagly and Carli (2007a) noted that “gender norms tend to steer male leaders toward a task-oriented style, and female leaders toward an interpersonally oriented style” (p. 124). Some studies have confirmed that women leaders are more likely to emphasize process and relationships than men leaders, who are task or achievement oriented (Helgesen, 1990, 1995; Meehan, 1999). However, other studies have determined that women are more task oriented than men, and that men exhibit relationship behavior more than women (Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992; Robinson & Lipman-Blumen, 2003).

A meta-analysis of 139 comparisons of men’s and women’s leadership styles revealed that men and women were equally likely to exhibit task orientation (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Women nonmanagers (students and employees) and women managers in roles that are equally likely to be held by men and women were more likely to display greater interpersonal orientations than men. However, gender differences in interpersonal orientation disappeared for women and men managers in male-dominated roles. Therefore, women’s task-oriented and interpersonally-oriented leadership styles may vary depending on leadership context, thus making them difficult to generalize.

#### *Democratic and Autocratic Leadership*

Other meta-analyses have compared democratic and autocratic leadership styles, finding that women leaders tend to use a more democratic or participative style of leadership, whereas men leaders tend to use a more autocratic or directive style. A meta-

analysis of 162 studies, each assessing the leadership styles of at least five people of each sex, supported this finding (Eagly & Johnson, 1990), as did a meta-analysis of 50 studies of gender and leadership style among public school principals (Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992). Studies have shown that women may adopt a more democratic leadership style because of negative reactions they receive when they use a more directive style (Astin & Leland, 1991; Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

Differences between men's and women's styles were larger in laboratory studies and smaller in assessment studies, implying that gendered leadership styles are mediated by organizational context and leadership role (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Eagly and Carli (2007a) noted that the effectiveness of democratic and autocratic leadership styles also depends on context. Women in highly masculine settings are more likely to use autocratic styles than women in situations with more women, perhaps because the leadership context demands it (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Overall, in their review of literature on democratic and autocratic leadership, Eagly and Carli (2007a) concluded that men's and women's styles are generally very similar.

#### *Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-faire Leadership*

A large number of studies have differentiated among transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles. The term "transformational leadership" was first used in the 1970s (Burns, 1978; Downton, 1973), and the concept was later expanded and refined. According to Bass (1985), transactional leaders are generally responsive to subordinates' immediate self-interests. Transactional leaders recognize what subordinates want from work and they exchange rewards for subordinates' work. In comparison, transformational leaders motivate subordinates to transcend their own self-



interests for the good of the organization. Transformational leaders raise subordinates' levels of awareness about the importance and value of the group vision and the ways of meeting it. Bass noted that transactional and transformational leadership are not mutually exclusive and that the best leaders are both transformational and transactional. Laissez-faire leaders, on the other hand, generally fail to take responsibility for managing.

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) is the most widely used measure of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership behaviors (Bass & Avolio, 1990). The MLQ measures seven factors of leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (each associated with transformational leaders), contingent reward and management-by-exception (each associated with transactional leaders), and laissez-faire. Many studies use the MLQ to determine whether leaders exhibit transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership behaviors.

Such studies have shown that transformational leaders are more effective than transactional or laissez-faire leaders. In a meta-analysis of 87 studies using 626 correlations, Judge and Piccolo (2004) found that transformational leadership was positively correlated with follower satisfaction with leader, follower motivation, and rated leader effectiveness. This study also showed, however, that transformational and transactional leadership are highly related, calling into question studies which measure leaders as either transformational or transactional.

Studies and meta-analyses have also shown that women are more likely to employ transformational leadership than transactional or laissez-faire leadership (Trinidad & Normore, 2005) and that women are more likely than men to employ transformational

leadership (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Rosener, 1990, 1995). A review of literature found that “the characteristics of transformational leadership relate to female values developed through socialization processes that include building relationships, communication, consensus building, power as influence, and working together for a common purpose” (Trinidad & Normore, 2005, p. 574). A meta-analysis of 45 studies using the MLQ to measure transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership factors found that female leaders exhibited more transformational behaviors and contingent reward behaviors (a factor of transactional leadership) than male leaders (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). Male leaders were more likely to exhibit management by exception (a factor of transactional leadership) and laissez-faire leadership. Gillett-Karam (1994) reported similar findings, determining that women were significantly more likely than men to exhibit four transformational leadership behaviors: risk-taking, demonstrating caring and respect, acting collaboratively, and building trust. Only two transformational behaviors were more likely among men: rewarding others and acting positively.

Other studies have found no differences in the use of transformational leadership by men and women (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). In Mandell and Pherwani’s study of 32 managers, female and male managers did not have significantly different transformational leadership scores on the MLQ. These authors did find that emotional intelligence predicted transformational leadership style, and that female managers had significantly higher emotional intelligence scores than male managers. Still, gender and emotional intelligence did not statistically interact to predict transformational leadership style, implying that emotional intelligence distinct from gender influences

transformational leadership style. However, this study's small sample causes its findings to be less credible than meta-analyses of other research on gender and transformational leadership.

### *Feminist Perspectives on Women's Leadership Styles*

Kark (2004) grouped feminist perspectives on gendered leadership into three categories. First, studies from the "gender reform" perspective tend to treat gender as a variable and consider women as a research category. These studies, very common in the organizational literature on gender and leadership, generally use quantitative methods to compare the ways that men and women differ. They look to eliminate these differences whenever possible. Studies from this perspective tend to say that women and men have different leadership styles because women encounter resistance when they enact traditional (masculine) leadership styles (e.g., Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Gillett-Karam, 1994). Thus, by eliminating resistance to women's leadership enactment, differences between men's and women's leadership styles would be reduced.

Second, studies from the "gender resistance" perspective concentrate on the female advantage in leadership. These studies, fewer in number than those from the gender reform perspective, assert that women make particularly good leaders because their leadership styles differ from men's in areas which relate positively to effectiveness (e.g., Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990, 1995). Rather than seeking to eliminate leadership style differences between men and women, these scholars celebrate women's leadership styles as shaped by women's situations and experiences. Standpoint feminism is one example of a gender resistance perspective, calling for the inclusion of women's unique voices in the production of knowledge (Hartsock, 1983).

Third, studies from the “gender rebellion” perspective question how the category of woman is defined. In these studies, also limited in number, sexuality and gender are considered fluid and shifting categories. This perspective criticizes “gender reform” and “gender resistance” studies for normalizing a universal category of woman in opposition to a universal category of man. Studies from this perspective often take a poststructural or postmodern approach. One study from the gender rebellion perspective considered the narratives of seven diverse women administrators in educational leadership programs (Christman & McClellan, 2008). The researchers determined that the interactions between gender identity and leadership are complex, and that a multidimensional gendered leadership model is needed. In short, “gendered leadership norms are too simplistic” and “women leaders must be willing to shift into multidimensional gender and traverse conventional borders” in order to be successful (p. 3).

Consistent with the gender reform perspective, several scholars agree that generalizations about women’s leadership styles tend to promote an essentialized view of women’s leadership (Kezar & Lester, 2010; Lyman, Ashby, & Tripses, 2005). As stated earlier, most studies of leadership include only White, middle-class men and women, even as they present findings as race- and class-neutral (Parker & oglivie, 1996). Very few studies of leadership have considered other identities, such as race/ethnicity and/or sexual orientation along with gender (Eagly & Carli, 2007a). In the next section, I review several of the uncommon studies of intersecting identities and leadership styles. These studies reveal the complex ways that gender and other identities interact to affect leadership style.

*Intersecting Identities and Leadership Styles*

All people have intersecting identities that they carry with them in all situations. I understand identity as “a self-concept, in part self- and in part socially constructed, always in response to the limitations of what is acceptable” (Lumby, 2009, p. 29). Gender is one of these identities that is partially controlled by the individual and partially imposed on her by others. Multiple identities affect an individual’s position in relation to the context in which she acts and, in certain contexts, certain identities become more salient than others.

Studies of intersecting identities and leadership style illuminate the ways that intersecting identities affect women’s leadership enactment. As noted above, many studies of women’s leadership have included only White, middle-class, heterosexual women and have not illuminated the ways that these women’s racial/ethnic, class, and sexual identities impact their leadership style. An exceptional study by Lumby (2009) used the frameworks of identity and intersectionality to explore how women leaders in England and South Africa saw their gender identity in relation to their leadership and their other identities. Like positionality theory, intersectionality theory assumes that identities are fluid, multiple, and interacting. Lumby’s findings suggested that the multiple identities that affect women’s leadership are broader than the “usual” categories (gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and age). For some of the leaders, educational background and language spoken were also important identities that shaped their leadership experience. Lumby concluded that the impact of gender on leadership “cannot be understood fully without taking account of the metamorphosis of gender as it collides with, permeates and transmutes in the presence of other identities” (p. 37).

Importantly, Lumby asked that researchers be allowed to explore the “other,” since no researcher can embody fully the shifting identities of her participants.

Studies of women leaders of color exemplify the ways that leadership style is influenced by racial/ethnic identities as well as gender. We know little about the characteristics of women educational administrators of color working in the United States, since national, state, and organizational data rarely provide sex and race information together. In addition, too often women of color are not represented in studies of women’s leadership styles (Parker, 2006). For example, Parker (2006) found that African American women executives used directness and control as a means for interaction, rather than shunning directness and control as traditional views of feminine leadership may suggest. Parker and Ogilvie (1996) posited that African American women were more flexible and creative leaders than White men and women.

Research with men and women Asian American leaders similarly has shown that their leadership experiences are not adequately represented through traditional views of leadership. Woo and Khoo (2006) showed that Asian American men and women met a glass ceiling effect when their individual values clashed with a corporate culture of bullying and self promotion and an arbitrary promotions structure. Asian Americans in this study described themselves as particularly adept at listening and consensus-building, thoroughness and follow-through, coordinating teams, and assessing individuals (rather than seeing them only as part of a group). These findings suggest that Asian Americans may bring a unique frame to their leadership. More research is needed to explore how gender and race/ethnicity interact to affect the leadership of Asian American women.

Although there is little literature that focuses on “native/indigenous women’s ways of knowing and doing educational leadership” (AhNee-Benham, 2003, p. 224), a few scholars have considered how perspectives from indigenous women of color inform and expand understandings of educational leadership. In a forum with 14 native school leaders from around the world, AhNee-Benham developed a “Go to the Source” model of educational leadership. This culturally-based leadership model is based on four principles important to native educational leaders: “critical development of the intellect, healthy body and environment, preservation of language, and spiritual wisdom” (p. 231).

Warner (2006) proposed a different dynamic leadership model for American Indian women including four overlapping variables: tradition, observation, narration, and experience. Contradicting work with other minority women, Warner’s (2005) review of three studies of American Indian women leaders concluded that ethnic and gender stereotypes (a “double bind”) did not positively or negatively affect the job satisfaction of American Indian women supervisors. A possible explanation for this finding is that American Indian women tend to lead institutions with high percentages of American Indians, thus mediating the blatancy of ethnic stereotypes. Clearly, though, more research is needed to explain the leadership experiences of American Indian women leaders, and women leaders of color in general.

While perhaps the most often studied, gender and race are only two of the overlapping identities which may mediate leadership enactment. Sexual orientation is also an important aspect of identity; however, very little is known about the ways that sexual identity influences leadership style. Ragins, Cornwell, and Miller (2003) asserted that “although gay men and lesbians constitute between 4% and 17% of the workforce...,

we know very little about their workplace experiences” (p. 45). In their study of the workplace experiences of 534 gay employees (162 of whom were gay employees of color), Ragins, Cornwall, and Miller found that more heterosexism was reported (especially by lesbians) in groups with male supervisors or in male work teams than in groups with female supervisors or in female work teams. Less heterosexism was reported in teams including both White people and people of color than in primarily White or non-White teams. More research is needed to determine how sexuality influences leadership enactment for lesbians in a variety of contexts.

In a historical look at homosexuality and school superintendents, Blount (2003) described three ways that sexuality has shaped school administration at the K-12 level:

First, administrative work, in conjunction with teaching, paralleled the roles of men and women respectively in traditional married households. Second, over much of the past century, school administrators have been required to demonstrate notably masculine qualities, including married status, as their existence in a profession of women repeatedly has been questioned. Finally, over the past half century, school administrators also have been pressed to cleanse from the ranks of school workers those persons with nonmainstream sexualities and/or unconventional gender characteristics, which have been regarded as evidence of homosexuality. (p. 7)

According to Blount, many (men) superintendents exhibit hypermasculine characteristics, and superintendents are often expected to serve as sexual enforcers in school districts.

These expectations may be difficult for many administrators to fulfill, and Blount



asserted that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered administrators may find these expectations especially challenging and demeaning.

Studies of sexual minority administrators in K-12 education have noted several challenges for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered educational leaders. At the center of several of these studies was degree of “outness,” the extent to which educational leaders were open about their sexuality in their professional lives. Through autobiography (as a gay male academic) and interviews with a gay male educational administrator, Koschoreck (2003) argued that sexual minority administrators “can more effectively contravene the normalizing practices of heterosexism by refusing to remain silent about issues of sexuality” (p. 27). However, in an exploratory qualitative study with four sexual minority White school leaders (one male and one female who were “open” about their sexuality, and one male and one female who were “closeted”), Fraynd and Capper (2003) found that

the ability [of sexual minority leaders] to exert sovereign power over the community and harness the sexual agenda was not dependent on the degree to which the leader was open about his/her sexuality to him- or herself or to others, but rather was dependent on the leader’s self-perception of his/her own effectiveness and confidence in his/her staff and community’s perception of the leader’s effectiveness. (p. 116-117)

In a more recent study including six gay school administrators (one man and five women), participants experienced communication challenges, difficulties with identity negotiation, and stress in managing the fit between their sexual identities and professional lives (Tooms & McGlothlin, 2007). These six leaders often separated their work and

personal identities, passed as heterosexuals in their work lives, and struggled to communicate their sexual identities to their colleagues. In a study of the lived experiences of gay and lesbian school administrators, Denton (2009) found that fear was an overarching theme in participants' lives.

Among the four leaders they studied, Fraynd and Capper (2003) found a continuum of sexual identity and a continuum of outness. The leaders expressed pressure to be flawless administrators because of their sexuality. They adopted internal surveillance procedures, for fear of public humiliation if their sexuality was publically known. Two of the leaders—both women—noted that their sexual orientation influenced their career choices. Both decided not to pursue the superintendency because of their sexual orientations. All four leaders noted that their perspectives as members of a stigmatized group led them to adopt an inclusion and advocacy focus for students who struggled in school, and three of the four school leaders in the study disrupted heteronormative power in their communities by confronting community and teacher resistance. At the same time, however, the administrators sometimes “became agents of the heteronormative process by encouraging some of their sexual minority students and staff to develop better internal discipline and external suppression of things lesbian or gay” (p. 111). Fraynd and Capper called for expanded studies including more administrators along the continuum of sexuality, including sexual minority administrators of color.

Additional studies of the multiple identities that women bring to leadership tend to read as life histories and do not attempt to generate theory about how identities mediate leadership enactment (e.g., Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2009). While hearing

individual women's stories is important, I believe more research is needed to understand the complex ways that women's multiple identities shape leadership enactment. Current literature on gendered leadership is rather inconclusive, and the literature on the interactions among multiple identities and women's leadership is sparse.

Any differences in leadership styles (if they exist) emerge "from the unique *experiences* of being a woman or minority, not something essential about *being* a woman or minority" (Kezar & Lester, 2010, p. 165). Women choose to enact leadership in various ways that meet—or challenge—the expectations of others for leaders in diverse contexts. In the next section, I review literature related to women leaders' interactions with others in the communities they serve.

#### *Women Leaders' Interactions with Others*

Women leaders' interactions with others are mediated by their multiple identities as gendered beings, the contexts in which they lead, and the power they feel in their relationships with others. In this section, I review literature related to four areas that affect women leaders' interactions with their communities: gender bias and discrimination, differential perceptions of women leaders' effectiveness, devaluation of women's work, and legitimacy issues.

#### *Gender Bias and Discrimination*

Ample evidence suggests that women leaders continue to face gender bias and gender discrimination in the workplace. The glass ceiling metaphor has become a popular way to describe the subtle prejudice and discrimination that women face when they attempt to access positions of power. The metaphor describes an unseen yet unbreachable barrier for women to high-level employment opportunities (U.S. Glass Ceiling

Commission, 1995). The U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission identified societal barriers, organizational barriers, and governmental barriers that serve as obstacles to women's opportunities. Those barriers include, among others, lack of mentoring, management training, and opportunities for career development for women; alienating corporate climates for women and minorities; differential and biased standards of performance evaluation; harassment; and "conscious and unconscious stereotyping, prejudice, and bias related to gender, race, and ethnicity" (U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 8).

Recent studies have confirmed that glass ceiling barriers still exist within educational settings. Studies have suggested that female superintendents experience less encouragement, mentorship, and sponsorship than do male superintendents (Wallin & Crippen, 2007). Sixteen percent of women within academe reported having experienced sexual harassment at work, and 58% reported having experienced potentially harassing behaviors, in line with statistics from other sectors (Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, & Stibal, 2003).

Women also face gender bias and discrimination in hiring and promotions in a variety of workplace settings. "Evidence suggests that gender and gender-related traits are primary components of interviewers' cognitive structures for evaluating applicants" for jobs (Graves, 1999, p. 161) and that men are often preferred over women applicants for both masculine and gender-neutral jobs. A review of 49 Goldberg experiments, where students evaluate job applications that are identical except for a male or female name, confirmed that men were preferred over women for masculine jobs, and women were preferred over men for feminine jobs. Men were also preferred for gender-neutral jobs, to a lesser extent (Davison & Burke, 2000).

Pratto and Espinoza (2001) noted that race and gender interact to affect hiring discrimination. They argued that “the forms and degree of institutional discrimination experienced by men and women of subordinate ethnic groups are not similar to one another” and that the “stereotypes and categorization processes pertaining to gender are not comparable across ethnic groups” (p. 763). Still, the range of discrimination against women leaders with various other identities may cause them be disadvantaged in comparison to White men leaders.

#### *Differential Perceptions of Women’s Leadership Effectiveness*

As women (and men) enact leadership in various ways within diverse communities, those enactments are perceived and interpreted by subordinates, superiors, peers, and members of other interested communities. Those individuals make judgments about women’s (and men’s) leadership styles, and evaluate their effectiveness in the interactions they share. To some extent, the effectiveness of women’s leadership behaviors depends on women’s conformation to gender norms.

Like differences in leadership styles, differences in perceptions of leadership effectiveness, by gender, also have been researched thoroughly. The results, however, are more conclusive, with many studies confirming that women’s leadership effectiveness is evaluated differently than men’s leadership effectiveness. Most research studies have considered “subjective” evaluations of leaders, using ratings from the leaders themselves, subordinates, peers, and superiors to rate the effectiveness of leaders. Almost no studies have considered “objective” metrics of leader performance, such as increased revenue, production, organizational prestige, or enrollments. The emphasis on subjective evaluations reflects the hiring and promotion processes within most organizations,

including higher education institutions. Few organizations—especially in higher education—use strictly objective measures to evaluate their leaders. Ultimately, subjective evaluations matter most when considering individuals for hiring and promotion to leadership positions and when evaluating the performance of leaders.

Studies of leadership effectiveness generally fall into three groups: (a) studies that find that women leaders are evaluated more negatively than men leaders because leadership is typically associated with masculinity, (b) studies that assert that women are more effective leaders than men because women's leadership styles better fit the needs of modern organizations, and (c) studies that find no link between leader gender and leader effectiveness.

*Women are evaluated more negatively than men leaders.*

Previous reviews of research on gender and leadership have concluded that women leaders are often evaluated more negatively than their men peers, especially when women leaders employ an assertive, agentic, or autocratic leadership style (Eagly & Carli, 2007b; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Women receive prejudiced evaluations as leaders and potential leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2003a), and women leaders fare especially poorly when leader roles are male-dominated or when men serve as evaluators (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

The reason for more negative evaluations of women leaders may be related to people's association of leadership with masculinity. Research found that both male and female middle managers in the U.S. were more likely to ascribe the characteristics, attitudes, and temperaments of successful middle managers to men in general than to women in general (Schein, 1975). A review of cross-cultural studies using the Schein

Descriptive Index in the U.S., Germany, the U.K., China, and Japan also revealed that men were perceived to be more qualified as managers than women were, especially by men (Schein, 2001). While the image of an ideal manager varies across cultures, a good manager consistently was described primarily by the masculine attributes of those cultures (Izraeli & Adler, 1994; Sczesny, 2003). Similarly, in a U.S. military setting, both male and female cadets considered men to have more leadership ability than women and women to have more character than men, perceptions that are congruent with traditional gender stereotypes (Boldry, Wood, & Kashy, 2001). Cadets' success in the corps was best predicted by perceived leadership ability, not perceived character, suggesting that a person's success in the military depended on being male. According to the authors of the study, "No sex differences emerged on any performance measure, suggesting that actual performance differences do not underlie the differential evaluation of men and women in military training" (p. 702).

Studies of women who were not successful in their leadership roles have revealed that women leaders' values sometimes clash with masculine organizational cultures. By expecting employees to behave in rational, autonomous, competitive, action-oriented, and hierarchical ways, organizations may embody traditionally masculine characteristics. These expectations constrain the leadership behaviors of both men and women (Maier, 1999). In a study of three women faculty members in Australia who were chosen to head their departments but then left their posts within one year, Kloot (2004) found that the women had different perceptions of management roles and different management values than the masculine-oriented management culture in which they tried to operate.

Similarly, Grogan (2008) used feminist poststructuralism to examine the two-year tenure of a woman superintendent in a small Southern U.S. city and concluded that “women in the superintendency still face issues of gender stereotyping that influence the way they are perceived as leaders of school systems” (p. 634). Specifically, Grogan found that this woman superintendent, Mrs. Teeter, was expected to exhibit “feminine” traits in her superintendency, such as a warm, friendly, and modest personality, and to act “masculine” as her male predecessors had. Because of these conflicting expectations, Teeter was perceived differently than a man in this role may have been. Her credibility as a leader was questioned, she was hyper-visible in the media, and she was criticized for not being adequately committed to the community.

Evaluation of leaders’ competence is complex, and scholars disagree about how evaluations of leaders are linked to gender of the evaluator. In two simulations of the hiring process with undergraduate students at the University of Kansas, female participants set harsher standards of hiring female applicants than male applicants and were less likely to hire women than men, while male study participants did not show gender bias in their hiring decisions (Biernat & Fuegen, 2001). This finding is not congruent with other studies included in a meta-analysis that showed that women leaders fare especially poorly with male evaluators (Eagly & Karau, 2002). It is also incongruent with a study of 360-degree evaluations of 2,816 executives over 5 years, where women were ranked more highly than men in most of the leadership dimensions, by both male and female observers (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2009). The exception was “envisioning”—“the ability to recognize new opportunities and trends in the environment and develop a new strategic direction for an enterprise” (p. 62)—where women were rated lower by their



male peers, but not in self-assessments or assessments by subordinates, supervisors, or female peers.

Leader behaviors that are effective for men may not be viewed as effective for women (Eagly & Carli, 2007a; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Yoder, 2001). For example, agentic communication styles that work well for men leaders are perceived as harsh or brash for female leaders (Tannen, 1995). Agentic men are considered more socially skilled and more hireable than agentic women, and women are expected to have stereotypically communal qualities in order to be considered hireable (Rudman & Glick, 2001). Research also has shown that “women receive greater recognition for their successes when they are modest, whereas men receive greater recognition when they are somewhat self-promoting” (Carli & Eagly, 1999, p. 212).

Therefore, many studies have shown that leader behaviors of men and women are evaluated differently, and that women are evaluated more negatively than men. Other studies, however, from scholars who adhere to the belief that men and women have different leadership styles, have found that women are more effective leaders than men, even if women’s leadership styles are underused.

*Women are more effective leaders than men.*

In several reviews of gender and leadership literature, meta-analyses determined that women are more effective leaders than men because women’s leadership styles better fit the needs of modern organizations. Appelbaum, Audet, and Miller (2003) determined that women’s styles of leadership are different from men’s, and that women’s styles are more effective than men’s styles within team-based, consensually-driven organizational structures. The authors claimed that these organizational structures are prevalent among

contemporary organizations. In a meta-analysis calling for systematic integration of research on the advantages and disadvantages that women's styles of leadership hold, Eagly and Carli (2003b) also "show[ed] that the areas of leadership style in which women exceed men are associated with gains in leader effectiveness, whereas the areas in which men exceed women have negative or null relations to effectiveness" (p. 851). Similarly, in a review of 47 studies using the MLQ, a meta-analysis concluded that women exceeded men on measures of perceived leadership effectiveness (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt suggested that perhaps women are rated as more effective leaders because women have to meet a higher standard than men and maintain better performance to achieve and retain leadership roles. Or, perhaps the socialization of women yields more effective leadership styles, such as transformational leadership.

A recent study in 76 school districts in Ohio found significant differences in the perceptions of teachers and administrators toward the leadership behaviors of male and female secondary school principals (Nogay & Beebe, 2008). Participating male and female principals, superintendents, and teachers rated the leadership behaviors of the principal in their school district using Hallinger's Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale. This questionnaire measures principals' leadership behaviors in the areas of defining the school mission, managing curriculum and instruction, and promoting school climate. In Nogay and Beebe's study, female principals were perceived as better than male principals on many measures of leadership behavior, by both teachers and superintendents. Female principals' self-perceptions of their behaviors were also significantly different from male principals' self-perceptions.

In two studies which are oft-cited in the leadership literature, Helgesen (1990) and Rosener (1990) independently determined that women are better managers than men because they employ a nontraditional style of leadership emphasizing inclusion and connection. Helgesen followed four women executives throughout their days, mirroring Mintzberg's earlier "diary studies" with men managers. She described that the women in her study worked very differently than Mintzberg's men managers: they were willing to share information with others; they focused on the "big picture" of leadership, rather than individual leadership tasks; and they viewed their jobs as only one element of their multi-faceted identities. She concluded that women's leadership styles are highly effective in modern organizations.

Similarly, Rosener (1990) concluded that women's leadership styles can be highly effective in an increasingly competitive and diverse economic climate. Via a questionnaire sent to women and men leaders around the world and follow-up interviews with selected women leaders, Rosener noted that women are more likely than men to exhibit transformational leadership behaviors, or, in the language she prefers, interactive leadership behaviors, such as encouraging the participation of others, sharing power and information, and enhancing the self-worth of others. She also noted that these styles have proven "to be effective, perhaps even advantageous" in the organizations that women lead (p. 125). Rosener suggested that embracing a range of leadership styles will allow organizations to be stronger and more flexible.

*Leader gender is not related to leader effectiveness.*

Other studies have found no link between leader gender and evaluations of leader effectiveness. Bartol's (1999) review of laboratory and field studies suggested little

impact of rater gender on performance evaluation, and little difference between men's and women's self-evaluations. Daughtry and Finch (1997) studied effective leadership of vocational administrators as a function of both gender and leadership style, using the MLQ. They found that both gender and transformational leadership style best predicted self-perceived effectiveness, but only transformational leadership behaviors predicted others-perceived effectiveness.

Meta-analyses have noted that the links between gendered leadership styles and those styles' effectiveness cannot be generalized, since the effectiveness of various styles is contingent on organizational environment (Eagly & Carli, 2003a; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). For example, Yoder (2001) suggested that transformational leadership may provide "a congenial context for the expression of women's effective leadership" but noted that "transformational leadership works best in times of birth, growth and revitalization" (p. 825). Some scholars have questioned whether transformational leadership behaviors are suited to higher education, positing that transformational leadership is most effective in times of change and that academics are often unresponsive or averse to change (Young, 2004). Therefore, it is imperative to consider leadership style and effectiveness within context. A subsequent section of this literature review chapter considers leadership theory and research in higher education, and specifically within liberal arts colleges.

### *Devaluation of Women's Work*

Researchers also have found that women's work in organizations consistently is devalued, affecting their interactions with others. In her review article on gender stereotypes, Heilman (2001) noted that people devalue the work of female managers and

attribute success to external factors rather than to women's competence. When external attributions cannot be made, people dislike and derogate successful female managers, using familiar terms such as "bitch," "ice queen," and "battle axe."

The devaluation of women's work also is evident in wage gaps between male and female workers. Pfeffer and Davis-Blake (1987) found that the proportion of women in a college or university administration was correlated with lower salaries for both men and women administrators, indicating a devaluing of women's work. Research with over 5,000 faculty members at 306 institutions across the United States confirmed that female faculty members received lower wages simply because of their gender (Hagedorn, 1996). This wage gap was found to be correlated with reduced job satisfaction, increased stress, and increased likelihood for women faculty members to leave academe.

The median income for full-time women workers in the U.S. was only 77% men's median income in 2008 (Catalyst, 2010), although the gender gap in earnings varied according to race, age, and education level (Roos & Gatta, 1999). The median weekly earnings for women in full-time management, professional, and related occupations was \$892, compared to \$1,238 for men in those occupations (Catalyst, 2010). Gender-wage gaps were widest for Whites and Asian Americans: the median weekly earnings for all full-time working White women in the U.S. (in all occupations) was \$654 in 2008, compared to \$825 for White men, \$554 for African American women, \$620 for African American men, \$753 for Asian American women, \$966 for Asian American men, \$501 for Latinas, and \$559 for Latinos. Economic gains associated with marriage were greater for men than for women. Men earned more than women in all educational categories and age groups, although the wage gap was smaller for men and women aged 20 to 34 than

for older workers. Differences in women's and men's work patterns only partially explain these differences in wages (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2003), leading the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2008) to determine that discrimination is a factor in the wage gap.

### *Legitimacy Issues*

Legitimacy issues also affect women leaders' interactions with others. Eagly (2005) posited that it is more difficult for female leaders (and other "outsiders") to achieve legitimacy as spokespersons for a community. In groups (at least in groups of White people), men are typically considered more competent than women and exert more influence than women (Carli & Eagly, 1999). A review of empirical research on group gender composition found that increases in the proportion of women in a work group resulted in positive effects for women, including less performance pressure and social isolation; increased self-reported efficacy, competence, and ability; and increased job and pay satisfaction (Tolbert, Graham, & Andrews, 1999). Such results may differ depending on the racial/ethnic or cultural makeup of the group. Research with 40 White and 40 African American eighth graders in the Northeastern U.S., matched on parents' occupational status and assigned to same-race groups, suggested greater gender equality among African Americans than among Whites (Filardo, 1996). Among the White groups, males showed more participation, more attempts at influence, fewer incomplete and interrupted statements, and fewer behaviors of social facilitation than females. None of those gender differences were significant in the African American groups.

Differences in the evaluation of men and women leaders may also stem from differences in assumptions about men's and women's competence and legitimacy.

Biernat and Kobrynowicz (1997) found that women were held to lower minimum standards but higher confirmatory standards in hiring processes. This means that women are more likely to make “the short list” for a job but less likely to be selected from that pool as the best candidate. These differential standards convey the expectation that women are not as competent as men (and must be held to lower minimum standards) and imply that more evidence of skill is required from women than from men (thus, the higher confirmatory standards for women).

Similarly, Ridgeway (2001) asserted that gender differences in influence and leadership occur because people presume that men are more competent and legitimate as leaders than women are. Token status exacerbates the difficult interactions of women in male-dominated organizations, since tokens receive considerable attention that heightens pressure on them to perform well (Kanter, 1977). Status and power vary by race and ethnicity as well as gender; women of color are more likely than White women to report the need to work harder than their male counterparts (Manuel, Shefte, & Swiss, 1999).

In summary, women in leadership face complexity in their interactions because of gender bias and discrimination, differential perceptions of women leaders’ effectiveness, devaluation of women’s work, and legitimacy issues. Beliefs about women leaders’ effectiveness, competency, and legitimacy, as well as the value of their work, may disadvantage women leaders in comparison to men leaders, and diminish the power and influence that women leaders hold in organizations. The next section explores women leaders’ conceptions of power within the various communities they serve.

### *Gendered Conceptions of Power*

No matter the definition or style of enactment, neither leadership nor the organizations in which leaders operate are power neutral (Fletcher, 2004; Flynn, 1993). Multiple researchers have found that both men and women have strong interests in power (Eagly & Carli, 2007a; Winter, 1988). However, research also has shown that men and women tend to think about power differently (Brunner, 2000; Chliwniak, 1997; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2007a; Hartsock, 1983): many men tend to understand it as competitive, hierarchical, and a zero-sum game, whereas many women construe power as cooperative, interdependent, and increased when shared with others. In this section, I first review various theoretical conceptions of power, followed by a discussion of women leaders' conceptions of power.

#### *Theoretical Conceptions of Power*

Scholars have conceptualized power in a variety of ways, with some making useful distinctions between power-over, power-from, power-to, and power-with (Allen, 1999; Follett, 1995; Hollander & Offermann, 1990). Most classic theoretical conceptions of power assumed that leaders had power-over others and things (Simon, 1953; Weber, 1924). In this view, power is possessed and wielded as domination, control, and command. Power-from conceptions focus on an individual's "ability to resist the power of others by effectively fending off their unwanted demands" (Hollander & Offermann, 1990, p. 179). Increasingly, studies of leadership have shown greater interest in followers and leader-follower dynamics, acknowledging that both leaders and followers have power within organizations. Hollander and Offermann differentiated power-from from power-to, defined as empowerment and self-determination.



A contrasting paradigm of power influenced by feminist theory concentrates on power-with conceptions. Understandings of power from Arendt (1970), Pitkin (1972), and Hartsock (1983) emphasized that power is found in communities, not in individuals. Arendt defined power as action “in concert” and asserted that power exists only in groups (p. 44). This view distinguishes power, which operates for the good of the community, from strength, force, authority, and violence. Such power is “an expandable resource that is produced and shared through interaction” (Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 1). This type of power is consistent with caring for others, rather than at odds with it (Ropers-Huilman, 1999).

In one of the most influential understandings of power, Foucault (1984) conceptualized power as a productive mechanism which produces individuals and contexts, rather than dominating or controlling them. Foucault argued that power is inextricably related to discourse and the knowledge and meanings that discourses produce. Discourse defines acceptable ways of thinking, feeling, and acting in a given context. According to Foucault, we are all involved in spheres of power all of the time because we are all involved in discourse production and reproduction, which in turn restricts and allows particular ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Therefore, power does not operate in a top-down fashion, but instead it circulates, operating in localized ways. Power does not require a subject (a leader) in order to operate in society, and power is not possessed, but instead is exercised within networks. This view is perhaps consistent with power-with understandings of power. However, Foucault left little room for individuals and groups to contest systems of power, constructing power as an immovable structure that operates through discourse to incorporate and manipulate all

individuals and interactions (Fairclough, 1992). He has been criticized for ignoring modes of struggle and resistance (power-to and power-from) which have the potential to transform power structures (Allen, 1999; Fairclough, 1992).

Even as Foucault (1984) conceived of power as productive, he did not deny that power, through knowledge, serves some and oppresses others. Ferguson (1984) took Foucault's understanding of power as a productive mechanism further, asserting that power produces systems of oppression and privilege. Ferguson asserted that male power within organizations and families (power-over) has led to a subordinate positioning of women in institutions. Feminine attributes (and leadership styles), in this understanding, have little to do with being female and more to do with being powerless and subordinate in society.

Allen (1999) criticized past feminist scholars for conceiving of power as only a resource (something that is possessed), domination (something that oppresses), or empowerment (which denies the ways that women are differently empowered and involved in the subordination of others). In Allen's view, each conception was incomplete and overemphasized one aspect of power. She proposed a feminist theory of power borrowing from Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Hannah Arendt, which is capable

of making sense of the complex and multifarious power relations in which women find ourselves, which are such that we can be both dominated and empowered at the same time and in the context of one and the same norm, institution, and practice. (p. 25)

In Allen's view, conceptions of power "must be able to make sense of masculine domination, feminist empowerment and resistance, and feminist solidarity and coalition-building" (p. 123). She defined power "simply as the ability or capacity of an actor or set of actors to act" (p. 127). She distinguished among three features, but not completely distinct aspects, of power. First, power-over is defined "as the ability of an actor or set of actors to constrain the choices available to another actor or set of actors in a nontrivial way" (p. 123). Power-over includes both decisions and nondecisions that constrain the choices of others. Domination is only a particular application of power-over, which is fundamentally relational. Second, power-to, in Allen's conception, is "the ability of an individual actor to attain an end or series of ends" (p. 126). In other words, power-to is essentially synonymous with empowerment. Resistance is a particular application of power-to. Third, power-with is "the ability of a collectivity to act together for the attainment of an agreed-upon end or series of ends" (p. 127). Solidarity, acting together to challenge, subvert, and overturn a system of domination, is a particular application of power-to. Allen's description of power, in its three facets, illuminates the way that various conceptions of power have been borrowed by the feminist movement to create more inclusive understandings of power.

In a fundamental explication of power coming from organizational theory, French and Raven (1959) claimed that individuals can draw on five bases of power: reward, coercive (punishment), legitimate, referent (identification with other), and expert. Subsequent studies have shown that these five bases of power yield different results in organizations. Coercive power generally is negatively correlated with satisfaction and productivity, while expert and referent power are positively associated with satisfaction

and productivity (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989). Studies of reward power were inconclusive, and legitimate power was shown to have little effect on satisfaction and productivity. These studies call into question the effectiveness of power as a coercive and domineering force.

Hartsock (1983) contended that classic understandings of power—including Foucault's—are gendered masculine and destructive, arguing “that in the contemporary Western world, the gender carried by power associates masculinity with domination and by means of this connection fuses sexuality, violence and death” (p. 151). She went on to assert that

when women (not necessarily feminists) write about power, they put forward accounts that are both strikingly similar to each other and strikingly different from those of [men]. . . . Women's different understanding of power provides suggesting evidence that women's experience of power relations, and thus their understanding, may be importantly and structurally different from the lives and therefore the theories of men. (p. 151)

For this reason, Hartsock called for the inclusion of women's unique voices in the production of knowledge about power.

Within positionality theory, power is understood “as pervading all contexts, historical situations, and interpersonal relationships; it is seen as more central to the way people make meaning and shape perspectives; it is socially constructed between people” (Kezar & Lester, 2010, p. 167). Positionality theory assumes that power conditions shape people, but also that people have the agency to shape power conditions and the resulting relations (Kondo, 1990). I see these assumptions as consistent with Foucault's (1984)

understanding of power as a productive mechanism, Arendt's (1970) understanding of power as operating within communities, Allen's (1999) conception of power as multi-faceted, and Hartsock's (1983) conclusion that women's understandings of power may be importantly different from men's understandings.

Women's multiple understandings of power have informed and expanded conceptualizations of power, and they can continue to lead to a more "liberatory understanding" of power (Hartsock, 1983, p. 253). Such theorizing of power must be grounded in diverse women's life experiences as workers and leaders. Kezar, Carducci, and Contreras-McGavin (2006) urged researchers to conduct explicit examinations of the power dynamics embedded in leadership processes. In the following section, I highlight studies of women's leaders conceptions of power, in order to illustrate the ways that these conceptions of power support and contest theoretical conceptions of power.

#### *Women Leaders' Conceptions of Power*

Women's leadership models that claim that women have different leadership styles than men emphasize women's propensity to share power and information rather than holding it for themselves (Rosener, 1990). AhNee-Benham and Cooper (1998), in their study of nine minority women leaders, asserted that these women redefined "power and authority in ways that equate power with connectedness" rather than domination (p. 145-146). A twelve-year longitudinal study of 211 males and 180 females at a large U.S. utility company found that successful male managers were likely to use "reactive power," defined as engaging "in an assertive or aggressive action, against someone, usually an authority figure or another person or group with power" (Jacobs & McClelland, 1994, p. 35). Successful female managers, on the other hand, tended to use "resourceful power,"

defined as acting “on behalf of another person either by protecting, helping, supporting, inspiring, teaching, or otherwise promoting the welfare of another” (p. 35). This study included men and women from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds: 68% of the participants were White, 24% were Black, 7% were Latino(a), and 1% were of other races/ethnicities. However, Jacobs and McClelland did not examine the ways that race and gender interacted to affect the way leaders understood power.

Schwartz and Rubel (2005) used hierarchical linear modeling to assess the importance of 10 basic values to men and women. Their meta-analysis of 127 samples from 70 countries ( $N = 77,528$  individuals) revealed that males placed greater emphasis on power as a personal value than females (the largest sex difference found in the study). Country was found to moderate sex differences. While Schwartz and Rubel’s study was large, it defined power in restrictive ways, limiting the usefulness of the study in explaining the values of women and people of color. For the study, the basic value “power” was defined in a typical power-over way, including social status and prestige, and control and dominance over people and resources.

Women leaders in education often have difficulty talking about power as dominance or authority (Brunner, 2000; Trinidad & Normore, 2005). Trinidad and Normore noted that women value influence over power, whereas women superintendents in Brunner’s work preferred to talk about leadership style rather than power. While women in educational leadership may find talking about power challenging, some research has shown that typically feminine enactments of power may be particularly effective. Hollander and Offermann (1990) noted that effective leadership depends on

reciprocity, power sharing, and empowerment, characteristics typical of women's understandings of power.

In a survey of 20 participants, de Casal and Mulligan (2004) found that women enrolled in educational leadership/administration programs perceived power as automatic for men, and as something men expect and to which they think they are entitled. In contrast, the emerging women leaders perceived power as something they have to earn and as something negative for women to have. Women in de Casal and Mulligan's study defined power in a particular way, as something that individuals possess (a resource), rather than something that is enacted in relationships (as Foucault [1984], Arendt [1970], and Allen [1999] conceptualized). The emerging leaders also expressed that men view power as control (power-over), whereas women view it as empowering others (power-with). Still, in the responses of study participants, only power as control was understood as "true" power.

Shields (2005) conducted interviews with five women leaders in educational administration in order to understand how the leaders conceptualized and used power. In her study, women leaders did not see individuals as inherently having power or being powerless. Instead,

they agreed that there are people who are "powerless in certain situations," who "end up in situations where it is difficult to see they have power," people who "believe they are powerless," or who "don't feel they can speak" in a given situation. Generally they were clear that "people can choose to be powerless," to "give power away," and that they can learn to be powerless. . . . Power, as they

spoke about it, is a force that emerges from the interplay of social situations and contexts and the relations that exist in dynamic form within them. (p. 80, 83)

Women leaders in school settings participating in a study by Lyman, Ashby, and Tripses (2005) talked about leveraging personal or relational power rather than positional power. Women leaders in business did not articulate personal or professional power to be a strong motivator for them (Werhane et al., 2006). Research has shown that women generally possess lower levels of status and power than men do, particularly power based on expertise or legitimate authority (Ridgeway, 2001). In a review of sociological research, Smith (2002) concluded that women have less authority than men in the workplace and people of color have less authority than Whites. Therefore, women and people of color may choose to leverage personal power over positional power or authority since positional power is less available to them.

A review of the literature on gender and social influence posited that males exert greater influence over others than females do because: (a) females are generally presumed to be less competent than males and therefore less credible as influence agents, and (b) when women are perceived to be as competent as men, they often are seen as violating prescriptive gender norms that require women to be communal (Carli, 2001). As a result, people, especially males, often dislike highly competent women and reject their contributions. Therefore, “in order to be influential, women must combine agentic qualities such as competence and directiveness, with communal qualities, such as warmth and friendliness” (Carli & Eagly, 2001, p. 632).

Power is an important factor in the evaluation of women and men leaders. In a study of the power of speech style, Geddes (1992) determined employees were most



satisfied with male and female managers who used a mixed speech style (incorporating stereotypically masculine or powerful elements as well as stereotypically feminine or powerless elements). Similarly, Ragins (1991) suggested that it was the power subordinates associated with women and men managers, not their gender per se, that influenced how subordinates evaluated them. Because subordinates generally afford more power and status to men managers than to women managers, and because perceived power is positively related to leader effectiveness, Ragins cautioned against comparing high-status men with low-status women in studies of gender and leadership effectiveness. Kanter (1977) also argued that apparent sex differences in the behavior of organizational leaders were not the result of gender differences in leadership style, but were instead a result of the different power and positions men and women hold in organizations.

Clearly, power is important in shaping the leadership enactment of women in a variety of contexts. In the next section, I focus specifically on leadership within higher education, a complex context within which to study women's leadership. Positionality theory asserts that leadership is inherently contextual, so it is necessary to look at studies conducted within this environment.

### *Women's Leadership in Higher Education*

In this section, I call attention to studies of women's leadership in higher education. I foreground leadership theories in higher education that explicitly acknowledge that the multiple and overlapping identities of leaders contribute to their understandings and practice of leadership. While I focus primarily on studies that foreground gender as an important identity of leaders, I also include studies that consider how race/ethnicity, sexuality, class, and religion interact with gender to affect leadership.

At the end of the section, I describe the context for leadership within liberal arts colleges. Few studies of leadership at these institutions exist, and to my knowledge, no studies of gendered leadership have focused on the liberal arts college context. These institutions represent a unique context in which leadership has not been adequately explored.

Findings from literature regarding women's leadership in higher education mirror findings in other sectors. Studies of leadership style are inconclusive about the influence of gender. A summary of research on leadership in higher education reported the following:

Women's leadership is associated with a more participatory, relational, and interpersonal style and with different types of power and influence strategies emphasizing reciprocity and collectivity. Moreover, women leaders tend to conceptualize leadership as collective rather than individualistic, emphasize responsibility toward others and the empowerment of others to act in the organization, and deemphasize hierarchical relationships. (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006, p. 53)

However, those findings are not uncontested within the context of higher education. Jablonski (2000), after interviews with seven women presidents and 35 men and women faculty members at small institutions in the Northeastern U.S., found a significant gap between theory and practice in presidential leadership. She concluded that the women presidents at all seven campuses "*believed they utilized participatory and empowering forms of leadership, but their faculties' perceptions often differed*" (p. 243). Instead, faculty members on five of the campuses described their women presidents as hierarchical, entrepreneurial, and task oriented. Jablonski noted that "in theory, the

presidents espoused generative leadership, but their colleges' governance structures, committees, and boards of trustees could not support such a model" (p. 249).

Schmuck, Hollingsworth, and Lock (2002) interviewed four women who left administrative posts at U.S. colleges or universities. They concluded that the women leaders were unsuccessful in their posts because their transformational visions collided with the purposes of the larger institution. In short, the findings of Jablonski (2000) and Schmuck, Hollingsworth, and Lock suggest that women's leadership practice within higher education is constrained by the particular contextual characteristics of higher education institutions. These contexts often include traditionally masculine systems of hierarchy and positional power.

Scholars who do not find gender differences in leadership style often trace the dearth of women in higher education leadership to gendered differences in leaders' evaluations. Chliwniak (1997) posited that

perhaps the greatest gender differences lie in how men and women are stereotyped or labeled within organizations and the evaluation criteria utilized to determine their effectiveness as a leader or the leadership style they have adopted. (p. 53)

Nidiffer (2001) suggested that men are considered "natural" leaders in higher education because of a "feminine-deficit" model of leadership: the current expectations of leaders are aligned with socialized expectations of male behavior. In this model, women must acquire leadership competencies that violate expectations of femininity. Nidiffer posited an "integrated" model of educational leadership that blends masculine and feminine competencies. This model of leadership would require a blend of

stereotypically masculine and feminine traits, thus expecting both men and women to draw on socialized and acquired leadership competencies. However, Eddy (2009) suggested that an integrated model benefits men; since leadership is male normed, women community college presidents in Eddy's study had to work within the traditionally masculine systems of hierarchy and positional power in order to achieve their positions. Men in her study, on the other hand, only minimally drew on the traditionally feminine leadership methods of collaboration and teamwork.

*The Influence of Intersecting Identities on Higher Education Leadership*

As in contexts outside of higher education, identities such as race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, and religion interact with gender to influence women's leadership in higher education contexts. Studies of women leaders in higher education often have included White, middle class, heterosexual women, and have not focused on how those identities affect women's leadership. Several exceptional studies have explored the way that intersecting identities affect women's enactment of leadership within higher education.

In a review of 78 recently published research articles on administrative work in higher education, Kile and Jackson (2009) found that 31% of those studies focused on diversity: 18% looked at issues related to gender, 3% examined issues related to race/ethnicity, and 10% explored the intersection of gender and race/ethnicity. Several studies in education have used qualitative methods to examine the way that women of color construct themselves as leaders. In a historical analysis of African American women educational leaders, Murtadha and Watts (2005) revealed that African Americans have provided educational leadership throughout U.S. history, and that social justice advocacy and community engagement have been primary imperatives for Black

educational leaders. Through narratives of four Asian American women administrators in higher education, Ideta and Cooper (2000) contested misconceptions of Asian Americans as the “model minority” who are unfailingly successful in academe, do not face discrimination, and do not dispute unfair treatment. The authors found that these Asian American women experienced painful instances of sexism and racism within institutions of higher education, and that they reacted to those experiences in strong and determined ways inconsistent with stereotypical expectations of Asian Americans as passive. Ideta and Cooper’s findings show a need for additional research with Asian American women leaders in higher education to counter stereotypical ideas about who these women are.

Méndez-Morse (2003) discussed how Chicana feminism offers an alternate perspective on educational leadership. She offered a metaphor of oppressions as threads, woven together to form a “confining mantle” worn by many women of color (p. 166). The threads of oppression based on gender, race/ethnicity, class, language, religion, and sexuality interweave to affect women’s leadership. Chicana feminists recognize the ways these interweavings influence the lives of women: for example, the influence of Latina culture on appropriate roles for women and girls; the importance of cultural and religious icons (such as the Virgen de Guadalupe) in providing examples of strong women; the limitations on the working lives and earning power of Latinas as a result of gender and ethnicity; the way that Catholicism maintains patriarchy, denies the sexuality of women, and contributes to homophobia within the Latina community; and the importance of bilingualism in motivating Mexican American community members to action.

Even given these compelling examples of the ways that multiple identities intersect in the lives of women, Méndez-Morse (2003) noted that few studies of

educational leadership have considered multiple sources of difference and the interweaving roles they play “in the lives and practice of educational leaders” (p. 172). One exception is Méndez-Morse’s (1997) study of four Mexican American female superintendents, in which she found that spousal support was an important source of support for them throughout their careers. Méndez-Morse (1997) also found that these superintendents faced gender discrimination more often than racism, suggesting that different identities may have differential effects in different contexts.

Religious affiliation of individuals and organizations also uniquely mediates women’s leadership in context. Women leaders in Christian institutions may face particularly chilly campus climates because of interpretations of the Bible’s assignment of gender roles (Wood, 2009). As noted above, Méndez-Morse (2003) proposed that Christianity, and specifically Catholicism, has oppressed women through maintenance of a strong patriarchal paradigm, contradictory and generally restrictive messages about women’s sexuality, and a strict stance toward homosexuality. Therefore, Christian and Catholic institutions of higher education may provide especially complex environments for women’s leadership, and women leaders subscribing to particular religious beliefs may face particular leadership challenges.

Although research on underrepresented school administrators has increased in the past two decades, research on educational leadership remains largely heteronormative. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered school administrators are rarely acknowledged or discussed (Blount, 2003; Capper, 1999; Fraynd & Capper, 2003; Koschoreck, 2003; Lugg, 2003; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003). While researchers recently have focused on the experiences of sexual minority students and teachers (e.g., Sears, 2005), administrators

often are cast only as enforcers of heterosexual norms, without the possibility of being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered themselves (Lugg, 2003; Lugg & Koschoreck, 2003; e.g., Harbeck, 1997). Studies of sexual minority educators that include school administrators alongside teachers have not differentiated between administrators' and teachers' experiences (Griffin, 1992; Kissen, 1996).

Capper (1999) concluded that “queer research in administration can open another window on power and oppression in schools, and further expose how heterosexism constrains everyone” (p. 5). She highlighted a number of methodological issues related to doing research with sexual minority administrators, including difficult access to administrators who are not publicly out, the importance of confidentiality, and the danger of minority populations feeling used by researchers. Theoretical issues include the dangers of reifying categories of sexuality and essentializing minority experiences, and the difficulty of establishing the relevance of gay and lesbian theory for a broader group of educational administrators.

Gender, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, and sexual orientation are only some of the many identities that women bring to their leadership roles. Kezar's (2000, 2001, 2002a, 2002b) studies of leadership at a community college explored how multiple identities of higher education leaders interact with institutional context and conditions of power to affect understandings and enactment of leadership. She employed positionality theory in order to examine how

*Positioned individuals* (assuming that individuals co-construct their location culturally, organizationally, and historically while interacting with others)  
*possessing multifaceted identities* (assuming that individuals are shaped by

formative conditions such as family, culture, community, religion, etc.) *within a particular context* (assuming most contexts are fairly unique and particular) *influenced by conditions of power* (assuming power relationships and dynamics pervade culture, social structures, and history) *construct* (develop context and negotiate this understanding with other individuals' understandings) *leaders in unique (individual level) and collective (group level) ways simultaneously* (assuming interdependent webs of situated individuals connected by their changing positions on various issues). (2000, p. 727)

Kezar interviewed 24 faculty and 12 administrators at a community college, sampling for gender, race/ethnicity, and role within the organization. She found that “personal definitions of leadership were related to individuals’ positioning (i.e. positionality theory) on campus by gender, race/ethnicity, role within the institution, field of study or discipline, and level of administrator” (2002b, p. 99). Definitions of leadership from faculty in liberal studies areas tended to emphasize openness, diversity of viewpoints, collaboration, and collective leadership, whereas definitions from faculty in careers areas emphasized sanctioned authority, individuality, influence, and directives. Faculty members in both careers and liberal studies areas tended “to emphasize behaviors and characteristics of a leader or a process” in their definitions of leadership (p. 100), whereas administrators tended to provide more elaborate personal definitions of leadership centered on the philosophy of the organization.

Interestingly, Kezar (2002b) also found that administrators were more attuned than faculty to the ways that gender was related to leadership. In general, White women and people of color tended to emphasize non-positional leadership and were more likely



to mention an experience with oppression as influencing their understandings of leadership. In contrast, “careers faculty and White male administrators and faculty describe[d] the most traditional images of leadership” (p. 105). Kezar concluded that individuals’ multiple identities overlap to shape their conceptions of leadership.

Kezar’s work illustrates the potential of positionality theory for illuminating the ways that identities, context, and power shape various understandings and enactments of leadership. At present, however, higher education research does not reflect a deep understanding of the ways that multiple identities shape women leaders’ enactments of leadership in educational contexts, or a full understanding of how leadership context mediates women’s leadership. In the following section, I discuss leadership within the particular context of liberal arts colleges. Research in this area is sparse, and generally does not include understandings of leaders as positioned—gendered, classed, racial, sexual, religious—beings.

#### *The Liberal Arts College Context*

As made evident in many of the studies cited above, context is important to the enactment of leadership. Organizational theorists have called attention to the various models of organizational functioning in higher education (Birnbaum, 1988) and the multiple leadership frames needed to manage within complex organizational systems (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Positionality theory suggests that the position of an individual can vary in different contexts. Certain identities may be more salient in certain situations or contexts. Because all organizations have local contexts and culture (Schein, 2004), leadership is shaped by the context in which leaders are acting. Yet, as stated earlier, few studies of higher education leadership have considered institutional context as an

important mediator of leadership enactment. Additionally, few studies of leadership have been conducted with administrators working within the liberal arts college context.

Liberal arts colleges were among the earliest American colleges founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Brubacher & Rudy, 2007). These colleges focused on broadly educating the religious and lay leaders of the new world. Throughout the next 200 years, liberal arts colleges opened all over the country and dominated the higher education landscape. Since World War II, however, the advent of the American research university and the expansion of higher education to a larger and more diverse section of the population have caused liberal arts colleges to become a diminishing sector of higher education. Today, there are fewer than 300 liberal arts colleges in the United States; these institutions award about 4% of all American baccalaureate degrees (Koblik, 1999).

Liberal arts colleges represent a classification of higher education institutions as well as a value system. Liberal arts colleges are strictly defined based on the number of students who pursue certain subjects of study. In practice, liberal arts colleges are committed to undergraduate education in small residential living and learning environments. Liberal arts colleges generally enroll between 500 and 3,000 students each. They stress the importance of student-faculty relationships; faculty members are committed to their teaching and advising roles and class sizes are small (Annapolis Group, n.d.). Liberal arts colleges generally require a set of core courses that are deemed essential to a broad-based education. Their aims include:

Developing the intellect and the capacity for lifelong learning; shaping ethical judgment and the capacity for insight and concern for others, our habitats, and the future; increasing understanding of cultures, languages, and societies, and the

connections among them; comprehending relationships between landscapes and built environments, institutional systems and conditions of populations; expanding scientific horizons and mastering common scientific literacy and technology competence; nurturing democratic and global knowledge and engagement—and, yes, even reaching out to try to understand adversaries.

(Zinser, 2004, p. 40)

An emphasis on liberal education is not exclusive to liberal arts colleges, but such an emphasis is most likely to occur at liberal arts colleges (Impacts, 2005). Beyond these commitments, however, liberal arts colleges are amazingly diverse in their selectivity, affiliation, focus, prestige, and financial resources (Astin, 1999; Koblik, 1999; Oakley, 2005). Though most liberal arts colleges are private, a few public liberal arts colleges also exist. Some have extensive postbaccalaureate programs, even as they maintain a residential undergraduate environment.

It is clear from research that liberal arts colleges provide distinctive benefits to students (Astin, 1999; Canada, 1999; Impacts, 2005; Kuh & Umbach, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pascarella, Wolniak, Cruce, & Blaich, 2004; Umbach & Kuh, 2006). For example, after controlling for confounding influences, Pascarella et al. (2004) determined that liberal arts colleges performed significantly better than research universities and regional institutions on nearly all of Chickering and Gamson's (1991) good practices for undergraduate education during students' first years. I posit that liberal arts colleges also provide a unique context for leadership enactment. In the following sections, I outline some of the challenges facing leaders at liberal arts colleges. Then, I

review some studies of leadership at liberal arts colleges, illustrating the extent to which gendered leadership at liberal arts colleges remains unstudied.

*Leadership challenges at liberal arts colleges.*

Even as liberal arts colleges confer proven positive benefits upon students, Oakley (2005) identified three main challenges facing contemporary liberal arts colleges: the problem of identity, the surprising variety among liberal arts colleges, and the “narrative of decline” that has become embedded in discussions of liberal arts colleges. Oakley noted that leadership is central as institutions handle questions like “How do we remain relevant in contemporary higher education?” and “How do we make that case to students and families?”

As the American system of higher education becomes more intensely competitive and market-focused (Newman & Couturier, 2001), liberal arts colleges face particular challenges in attracting students. While proponents of liberal arts education claim that it is valuable in getting a job (Herman, 2000; Hersh, 1999), the “practical arts” (including occupational and professional programs) continue to expand at American institutions of higher education (Brint, Riddle, Turk-Bicakci, & Levy, 2005) and numbers of liberal arts colleges have dwindled. At the same time, the small class sizes, low student-to-faculty ratios, and robust core curricula that differentiate liberal arts colleges from other kinds of institutions are expensive to provide (Lapovsky, 2005). Many other institutions beyond liberal arts colleges also purport to offer “liberal education.” Leaders of American liberal arts colleges must choose to maintain their institutions’ values during the current economic crisis, or lead change efforts to develop new missions and modes of operation for the institutions. As Fisher and Koch (2004) concluded, liberal arts presidents must be

entrepreneurial in order to effectively lead these campuses through extremely difficult times.

Presidents, in particular, are pivotal in making decisions about institutional change at liberal arts colleges (Kraatz & Moore, 2002). Kraatz and Moore found that liberal arts colleges led by presidents coming from lower-status colleges or colleges with professional programs were more likely to develop professional programs (thus threatening their status as a liberal arts college). Such decisions are controversial on campuses and in the liberal arts college community. Meyers (2005) called on leaders at liberal arts colleges to “resist the temptation to gradually erode the very factors that distinguish [them] from major research universities” (p. 201).

*Studies of leadership at liberal arts colleges.*

Leadership studies at liberal arts colleges are few. A study of 208 chief academic officers at multiple kinds of institutions included leaders from liberal arts colleges and other types of institutions (Walton & McDade, 2001). Chief academic officers at liberal arts institutions, unlike chief academic officers at other kinds of institutions, wished they had more conflict resolution training before assuming their position, perhaps insinuating that the leaders at liberal arts colleges adjudicated more disputes than their peers at larger institutions. Chief academic officers at liberal arts institutions also wished they had more experience before assuming their current position, indicating that they had moved up through the administration rather quickly.

Several older studies considered the leadership styles of presidents at liberal arts colleges. In a study of ten liberal arts colleges selected for their high faculty morale, Rice and Austin (1988) found at each college “*strong, participatory leadership* that provides

direction and purpose while conveying to faculty the empowering conviction that the college is theirs” (p. 54). Rice and Austin determined that this style of leadership—consistent with transformational leadership—contributed to faculty satisfaction at all ten colleges.

Similarly, Astin and Scherrei (1980) found that the administrative styles of presidents and other administrators at 49 private liberal arts colleges correlated with faculty and student satisfaction. Through questionnaires examining administrators’ self-reported leadership behaviors and students’, faculty members’, and administrators’ perceptions of administrative behaviors, Astin and Scherrei identified four presidential styles and five administrative styles among administrators at the colleges. Astin and Scherrei used questionnaires examining students’ and faculty members’ self-reported satisfaction levels to link presidents’ and administrators’ leadership styles with student and faculty satisfaction. They found that faculty at institutions with “counselor” presidents and “task-oriented” administrations were most satisfied. Faculty at institutions with “bureaucratic” presidents and “entrepreneurial” administrations were least satisfied. Students were most satisfied at institutions with “egalitarian” presidents and “humanistic” administrations. Students were generally dissatisfied at institutions with “bureaucratic” presidents and “hierarchical” administrations.

While Astin and Scherrei’s (1980) findings are significant, their study did not examine the ways that leaders’ identities (such as gender) were associated with either administrative style or faculty and student satisfaction. To my knowledge, no studies of leadership within the liberal arts context have considered the ways that multiple identities

mediate leadership enactment and power relations in these environments. This is an area ripe for further research.

### *Conclusion*

Studies of leadership are numerous and come from multiple disciplines. While researchers both within and outside of higher education have studied women's leadership, there is little agreement about how women lead or whether women's leadership styles differ from men's styles. Studies have shown that women leaders face gender bias and gender discrimination, differential perceptions of effectiveness, devaluation of their work, and legitimacy issues that may disadvantage women leaders in comparison to men leaders. Assumptions about women leaders' effectiveness, competency, and legitimacy make enacting leadership complicated for women.

Studies considering gendered conceptions of power have found that men and women tend to think differently about power. Many men resonate with "power over" understandings, whereas many women resonate with "power with" conceptions. Historically, theoretical conceptions of power have focused on "power over," but paradigms of power emerging from feminist theory have expanded understandings to include women's conceptions of power. Studies in education have shown that women leaders often emphasize sharing power and information, value influence over power, and leverage personal or relational power rather than positional power.

While selected studies in higher education have considered the ways that multiple identities affect women's leadership, higher education research does not reflect a full understanding of the ways that leaders' positionality mediates their leadership enactment. Studies of women's leadership often have included perspectives from White, middle-

class, heterosexual women only, and they have not explored the ways that multiple identities mediate leadership. Further, no studies of gendered or positioned leadership have been conducted in liberal arts college contexts. In contrast, my study examined the ways that the intersecting identities of women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges mediate their enacted leadership. Unlike previous research on leadership at liberal arts colleges, this study focused on gender and positionality as key mediators of leadership enactment, interactions with others, and power. In the following chapter, I summarize the research methodology used for this study.



### Chapter Three: Research Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the methodology used for this study, including the research questions, study design, participant selection strategies, data collection methods, strategies to obtain participant consent and ensure participant confidentiality and protection, positionality and preconceptions of the researcher, data analysis procedures, validity or trustworthiness criteria, and limitations of the research design.

#### *Research Questions*

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how the intersecting identities of women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States mediate their enacted leadership. The study focused on the following research questions:

- How do women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges perceive that their intersecting identities mediate their enacted leadership?
- How do women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges perceive that their identities shape their interactions with other members of the campus community? How do their interactions confirm and contradict their perceptions?
- How do women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges perceive their own power among other members of the campus community? How do they see their power as mediated by their identities?

#### *Study Design*

As stated earlier, this study was grounded in the constructivist inquiry tradition, which assumes that knowledge is mutually constructed in dialog between the participants and the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Constructivism posits that reality is locally

constructed and that knowledge is subjectivist and transactional (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). As constructivists aim to understand human action (Creswell, 2009; Schwandt, 2000), they acknowledge that interpretation requires the engagement of one's own biases, beliefs, and values (Schwandt). Researchers in the constructivist tradition put forward their findings with less certainty and authority than positivist assumptions would afford. This inquiry tradition was appropriate for this study as I sought to understand, primarily through dialog with and observation of the participants, how they perceived the interactions between their multiple identities and their enacted leadership.

In line with the assumptions of constructivism, I used a qualitative research design in order to explore my research questions. Qualitative research seeks to understand the meanings that individuals construct around processes or phenomena (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998). Qualitative researchers see themselves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. In line with a qualitative research design, I collected data in context (Creswell; Merriam), used multiple sources of data to learn about each leader's experience in order to ensure construct validity (Yin, 2003), and studied multiple leaders in order to enhance the transferability (or external validity) of my research findings (Merriam; Yin). I employed constant comparison of data with emerging themes and purposive sampling (Creswell), and I sought maximum variation in my sample in order to explore varying experiences of leadership. Such sampling yielded more conceptually dense and maximally useful findings (Merriam).

As noted above, positionality theory centers the importance of intersecting identities, power relations, and context. Positionality theory guided the construction of my research questions, the development of the identities and leadership questionnaire and

subsequent interview questions, and determinations about the research design. In the analytical process, I used constant comparison to identify themes in addition to those suggested by positionality.

### *Participant Selection Strategies*

I used *U.S. News and World Report Best Colleges* (2010) rankings and The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2010) to identify liberal arts colleges for potential study. Both *U.S. News* and The Carnegie Classification include categories of higher education institutions that focus on baccalaureate education and include the institutions commonly known as liberal arts colleges. *U.S. News* is well-known for its annual ranking of colleges in a variety of categories. Although the rankings themselves are hotly contested (Jaschick, 2007), the rankings do provide one way of classifying institutions into categories and comparing institutions to their peers. According to *U.S. News*, “liberal arts colleges emphasize undergraduate education and award at least 50 percent of their degrees in the liberal arts” (2010). In 2010, the *U.S. News* Liberal Arts Colleges category contained 266 schools. The Carnegie Classification, Baccalaureate College—Arts & Sciences, mostly overlaps with the *U.S. News* Liberal Arts Colleges category, though it contains 287 schools. According to The Carnegie Classification, the Baccalaureate Colleges—Arts & Sciences category includes institutions where baccalaureate degrees represent at least 10% of all undergraduate degrees, where fewer than 50 master’s degrees or 20 doctoral degrees are awarded per year, and where at least half of bachelor’s degree majors are in arts and sciences fields (2010). For this research, I used only liberal arts institutions that were included on the

*U.S. News* liberal arts colleges list and were classified as Baccalaureate Colleges—Arts & Sciences by The Carnegie Classification.

Participants were women senior administrators at liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States. I defined the Upper Midwest to include Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. I limited the population of institutions included in this study in order to better understand how diverse women administrators at liberal arts colleges in this particular region understand leadership, and to ensure that I could travel to each of the institutions to conduct interviews and observations in person. The region contains 24 liberal arts colleges, which vary in enrollment size, selectivity, residential status, cost, and *U.S. News and World Report* ranking. Three public liberal arts colleges and 21 private liberal arts colleges are included in the population. All of the institutions are located in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin; the Dakotas do not have any liberal arts colleges. All liberal arts colleges in the region enroll primarily full-time, four-year undergraduate students. The smallest college in the region enrolled 669 students in fall 2008; the largest college enrolled 6,275. The cost to attend these institutions ranged from less than \$10,000 to nearly \$40,000 annually. See Table 1 for additional details about all 24 institutions.

Via a search of each institution's Web site, I located a population of women senior administrators at the 24 colleges. I included only those administrators who had all of the following characteristics: they lead their institution (presidents and/or chancellors) or report directly to the leader of the institution; they serve on the leader's cabinet or senior administrative team (making them collectively accountable for institutional policy); they interact with the board of regents or board of trustees; and they are the

Table 1

*Liberal Arts Colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States (N = 24)*

Institution	State	Control <sup>ab</sup>	Total Enrollment, Fall 2008 <sup>c</sup>	Acceptance Rate <sup>c</sup>	Enrollment Profile <sup>a</sup>	Transfer-In Rate <sup>a</sup>	Residential <sup>a</sup>	2009-2010 Tuition and Fees <sup>c</sup>	U.S. News Ranking <sup>c</sup>
Beloit College	WI	Private	1,388	62.8%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$33,418	62
Carleton College	MN	Private	2,000	27.5%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$39,777	8
Central College	IA	Private	1,558	77.3%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$25,010	122
Clarke College	IA	Private	1,156	62.0%	Very high undergraduate	High	Primarily residential	\$23,520	Tier 3
Coe College	IA	Private	1,326	63.0%	Very high undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$29,270	97
College of Saint Benedict	MN	Private	2,110	75.1%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$29,526	80
Concordia College at Moorhead	MN	Private	2,823	78.4%	Very high undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$25,760	Tier 3
Cornell College	IA	Private	1,115	43.6%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$29,580	85
Grinnell College	IA	Private	1,678	43.0%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$36,476	14

Gustavus Adolphus College	MN	Private	2,607	74.9%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$31,810	80
Lawrence University	WI	Private	1,503	58.8%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$34,596	59
Luther College	IA	Private	2,423	80.3%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$32,290	89
Macalester College	MN	Private	1,900	41.1%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$38,174	29
Northland College	WI	Private	669	74.1%	Very high undergraduate	High	Highly residential	\$24,021	Tier 4
Ripon College	WI	Private	1,057	78.9%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$25,445	122
Saint John's University	MN	Private	2,063	74.0%	Very high undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$29,526	68
Saint Norbert College	WI	Private	2,137	81.1%	Very high undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$26,972	Tier 3
Saint Olaf College	MN	Private	3,073	58.9%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$35,500	49
Simpson College	IA	Private	2,054	88.3%	Very high undergraduate	Low	Primarily residential	\$25,733	Tier 3
University of Minnesota-Morris	MN	Public	1,607	70.9%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	In-state: \$10,692 Out-of-state: \$10,692	Tier 3
University of Wisconsin-Green Bay	WI	Public	6,275	71.7%	Very high undergraduate	High	Primarily residential	In-state: \$6,614 Out-of-state: \$14,187	Tier 4

University of Wisconsin-Parkside	WI	Public	5,167	78.7%	Very high undergraduate	N/A	Primarily nonresidential	In-state: \$6,068 Out-of-state: \$13,376	Tier 4
Wartburg College	IA	Private	1,799	73.9%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$27,450	Tier 3
Wisconsin Lutheran College	WI	Private	753	76.3%	Exclusively undergraduate	Low	Highly residential	\$21,180	Tier 3

<sup>a</sup>From The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2010. <sup>b</sup>All private institutions in this table are not-for-profit. <sup>c</sup>From *U.S. News and World Report*, 2010.

leader or primary representative of an administrative division. These criteria garnered administrators with the following titles: president, chancellor, provost, vice president, vice chancellor, and/or dean. The study specifically omitted individuals with titles like “special assistant to the president,” since these types of administrators often sit on the president’s cabinet but do not have a division reporting to them. When I was unable to determine the administrators who fit my criteria from the institution’s Web site, I called the president’s office at the institution to ask what administrators may qualify. In all, I identified 155 administrators who met these criteria: 46 women (30%) and 109 men (70%). The group of 46 women administrators served as the population for participant selection.

#### *Data Collection Methods*

In September 2010, initial data collection methods were piloted with one woman leader who fits all of the criteria listed above. The pilot participant was asked to complete and offer feedback on the questionnaire, interview protocol, and observation experience, and her comments were incorporated into the final versions of the data collection tools. The data collected from the pilot participant were not included in the final findings for this study because the leader is a fellow student in my doctoral program and therefore is known to members of my dissertation committee.

In late September 2010, I sent an e-mail to all other potential participants inviting them to complete a short online questionnaire (see Appendix A: Identities and Leadership Questionnaire). This e-mail contact was designed to facilitate the participants’ knowledge of me as a researcher and to collect demographic information about the potential participants so as to select a sample for further phases of my research. Specifically, the



questionnaire asked each participant's gender (to ensure each administrator self-identified as a woman), race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital/partnered status, parenting/caretaking status, age, spiritual/religious beliefs, geographic background, and socioeconomic class background. Questions on the preliminary questionnaire related to sexual orientation were crafted using the recommendations of The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law (2009).

The online questionnaire was administered on a password protected site via UMSurvey, a survey tool provided by the University of Minnesota. An informed consent statement was included at the beginning of the questionnaire. Participants were given approximately 3 weeks to complete the questionnaire. Twenty women senior administrators, plus the pilot participant, completed the questionnaire, for a response rate of 47%.

From the questionnaire responses, I selected eight participants for further participation in the study. I scheduled in-person interviews and observation sessions with each of the eight participants. I used purposive sampling to select information-rich cases for this study (Patton, 1990): women leaders from this population with a variety of identities, at a variety of liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwest. Although I attempted to ensure that women of various races/ethnicities, sexual orientations, marital/partnered statuses, ages, spiritual/religious beliefs, geographic backgrounds, and socioeconomic class backgrounds were included as participants, my sample was restricted by the characteristics of the population of women who completed the initial questionnaire and by each woman's willingness to participate in my research. Participants were therefore less diverse in race/ethnicity and sexual orientation than I would have liked. However,

the sample did include women who differed in many other ways: in age, marital status, religious/spiritual beliefs, employment and educational experiences, geographic origin, socioeconomic class background, and the ways that they described their enacted leadership. Enabled by this small group of participants, I sought in-depth knowledge about each leader, in line with a qualitative research design (Ragin, Nagel, & White, 2004).

Prior to conducting interviews with selected participants, I requested copies of each leader's curriculum vita and biography and familiarized myself with her professional and scholarly experiences. Information from these documents was useful as I prepared for further data collection and constructed a description of each leader in the data analysis stage. Prior to the interviews, I also provided participants with a list of planned interview questions so that they could think about their responses.

In October and November 2010, I conducted one semi-structured face-to-face interview with each selected participant (see Appendix B: Interview Protocol). I asked participants what brought them to their leadership position at a liberal arts college, what identities are salient to who they are, how those identities play a part in their leadership and interactions with others, how they define "a leader" and how they describe their leadership styles, how they define "power" and how they enact it, what they like and dislike about their job, and about their professional goals. Interviews lasted 1 to 2 hours, and they were audio recorded and transcribed in full, so that the words of participants could be retrieved verbatim. In line with my study design, I traveled to various liberal arts colleges to conduct interviews in person. Interview transcripts were shared with each participant to ensure accuracy and representativeness.

After the interview, I observed each participant going about her daily work as a woman administrator at a liberal arts college (6 to 8 hours). That day was spent on campus or in the leader's local community—in her office, in meetings, or in her usual surroundings. My observations were targeted, looking for ways in which the interview responses of the participants were reinforced, complicated, or contradicted by their interactions with others and their exercise of leadership on campus. Everything I heard about individual campus environments was kept strictly confidential. The unit of my observation remained the leader herself, and I considered and analyzed primarily her actions (in reaction to others). I kept brief field notes of my observations throughout the day, and I prepared more detailed notes of my observations within 24 hours of the observation period.

In March 2011, I contacted each participant again via e-mail. I engaged in member checking, whereby I shared my preliminary analysis to ensure that participants' views were accurately represented in the findings (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I provided a preliminary summary of my research findings and invited participants to offer feedback. I asked each participant to consider the way that she was represented within the research and contact me if she wished to be represented differently. I also asked each participant one or two individualized clarifying questions that addressed complexities emerging from my earlier stages of data collection and analysis. I integrated participants' responses into the final summary of my research findings.

#### *Participant Consent, Confidentiality, and Protection*

This study was approved by the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects prior to beginning the study (see Appendix

C: Institutional Review Board Approval). Because all participants were consenting adults who work in a variety of institutions, and because I studied individual leaders rather than their institutional contexts, I did not seek Institutional Review Board approval from the institutions at which the leaders worked. All participants were provided with informed consent statements prior to taking the questionnaire and participating in face-to-face interviews. In order to assure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all participants in all interview transcripts and field notes. I stored data from the questionnaire, interviews, and observations in encrypted files on a computer in a locked office. Interview tapes and paper documents with participant names and contact information were kept in a locked file. All interview recordings were destroyed at the end of the study.

This study presented minimal risks for the participants; however, identities are very personal and discussing multiple identities may have been challenging for some participants. Therefore, it was important to foster participants' trust in me and the research process, create a safe and private interview space, and assure participant confidentiality. I encouraged leaders to frame my research activities in whatever ways they deemed appropriate when explaining my presence to colleagues (e.g., "She's shadowing me for the day," "She's an aspiring administrator," or "She's doing research on leadership at liberal arts colleges"), in order to protect their identities as participants in this study. Several participants noted that the research process provided a positive space for them to consider how their positionality mediated their enacted leadership, their interactions with others, and their power.

*Positionality and Preconceptions of the Researcher*

My own positionality may have affected discussions of identity within participant interviews and my interpretation of the data. Because positionality theory underlay this research, I acknowledged my own positionality and preconceptions throughout the research process. My experiences, education, and identities create my subjectivity as a person and as a researcher.

I am a feminist, White, heterosexual, married with no children, politically liberal, middle class woman in my late 20s. I was raised on a farm in the Upper Midwest, and my rural upbringing with a stay-at-home mother continues to shape my understanding of and expectations for families and communities. I had a comfortable and sheltered childhood, learning I was “poor” only when I completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid at age 17. The community in which I grew up was almost exclusively White, land dependent, and conservative.

I earned a Bachelor’s Degree from a Catholic liberal arts college for women in 2005, and my experience in that environment continues to shape my understandings and expectations of higher education. My parents and siblings are also college educated, and the importance of higher education was stressed throughout my formative years. My subsequent work experience in higher education was in the Department of Enrollment, Planning, and Public Affairs at my alma mater, where I conducted institutional research that informed strategic planning and external marketing for the institution. This experience fostered a great appreciation of the liberal arts college experience.

Since 2007, my educational and work experience has been at a research university in the Upper Midwest. I earned a Master’s Degree in 2008, and I became a Doctoral

Candidate in 2010. My coursework included elective study on gender in higher education, racial and ethnic diversity in higher education, and women in educational leadership. My research focused primarily on the identity development of Catholic women's college students. These experiences shaped my understanding of and interest in identity research and feminism.

I acknowledge that my multiple identities put me in a position of simultaneous privilege and oppression, and I expect that my perceived identities had power implications throughout my research. Like other researchers, I humbly explored the "other," since no researcher can embody fully the shifting identities of her participants (Lumby, 2009). Rather than trying to escape or ignore my own biases, I actively engaged them throughout the research. I believe: that liberal arts colleges are excellent environments for teaching, learning, and leading; that gender is an important identity that affects the ways that people see the world and the ways they act based on that perspective; that women leaders' multiple identities yield unique leadership perspectives; and, most importantly, that exploring the ways that identity mediates leadership enactment guided me to richer theoretical understandings of leadership and broader understandings of my own interactions with both leaders and followers.

#### *Data Analysis Procedures*

I began data analysis while data collection was still in process, utilizing the constant comparative method to seek patterns in the data (Merriam, 1998). This method was originally forwarded by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967) and is used widely in qualitative research. In line with the constant comparative method, I personally transcribed all of the interviews and prepared detailed field notes from my observations

using Microsoft Word to organize and prepare the data for analysis. Then, I read through all of the data to obtain a general sense of its content and meaning. From these initial readings, I developed preliminary codes to categorize related bits of data. Essentially, “coding means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 43). Bits of data were constantly compared and grouped into the preliminary codes, and codes were constantly created or revised in order to better fit the data.

In crafting my codes, I specifically looked for themes I expected to see based on literature related to women’s leadership in higher education and positionality theory, as well as surprising, unusual, or unanticipated themes (Creswell, 2009). In order to ensure the fit and relevance of the codes, I labeled phenomena using short and descriptive labels, and I attempted to discern the multiple meanings that may have underlain participants’ words and actions. I also considered each of the codes in relationship to each other. Codes were merged and expanded as necessary to create useful categories of meaning. I started with a large number of codes and eventually merged them into about 30 themes clustered in five broad areas. In each case, I considered how the codes related to positionality theory or how they suggested new themes to describe the experiences of participants. Finally, I integrated the themes from the data into a larger narrative that described the experiences of participants in the study. I used Microsoft Word to aid in each step of the coding process.

The basic strategy of the constant comparative method is consistent with the constructivist inquiry tradition guiding this study and the tenets of positionality theory.

Through this analysis, I developed a local understanding of how the multiple identities of women leaders in specific liberal arts contexts mediate their leadership enactment.

*Validity or Trustworthiness Criteria*

Throughout the coding process I engaged my own reflexivity and interpretations of the data. However, in qualitative research, validity of findings can be assured through multiple strategies, including member checking, thick description, and peer debriefing (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). I used each of these strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of my findings. I provided participants with initial findings from the data analysis so that they could comment on the findings, thus engaging in member checking to ensure that participants' views were accurately represented in the findings. I used thick description to convey the perspectives of each of the participants and to ensure that readers can make informed judgments about the transferability of findings (Geertz, 1973). I engaged with two peer debriefers who reviewed my proposed methods and my findings in the coding stages and provided an assessment of the project near the end of the study. Both peer debriefers were doctoral candidates in higher education who were familiar with qualitative research, as well as literature on identity, gender, and leadership. In addition to these strategies, I also provided disconfirming information that did not support my themes where available. This practice made my interpretation of the data more realistic, and thus, more valid (Booth, Columb, & Williams, 2008; Creswell, 2009; Ragin, Nagel, & White, 2004). Data also were collected through multiple methods, including questionnaires, document review, in-person interviews, and observations, and I built themes using the perspectives of multiple



participants, thus triangulating different sources of information (Shavelson & Towne, 2002).

### *Research Design Limitations*

Even though multiple strategies were used to ensure the trustworthiness of my findings, my study has two important limitations. First, my findings are particular rather than generalizable, in line with positionality theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). My intention in this study was to generate a local explanation about how the participants perceived that their multiple identities mediate their leadership enactment. I hope that the local explanation achieved through this research contributes to a fuller understanding of the range of ways that identities, context, and power mediate leadership. I believe my use of thick description will allow readers to understand more fully the ways that intersecting identities mediate study participants' enactment of leadership and to determine the extent to which my local findings illuminate transferable leadership theory. Second, my identity as a young, feminist, White, heterosexual, middle class woman may have affected discussions of identity within participant interviews and my interpretation of the data. Throughout this study, I acknowledged my own subjectivity due to my experiences, education, and identities.

Even given these limitations, this study yielded rich information about the leadership experiences of women senior administrators at liberal arts colleges. Research findings are discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four: Findings

This research yielded rich information about the leadership experiences of women senior administrators at liberal arts colleges. It illuminated ways that multiple identities mediate leaders' understandings and enactments of leadership, their interactions with others, and their understandings and enactments of power. In this chapter, I share findings from the study. First, I describe the participants' individual cases to help the reader understand the identities of each senior woman administrator. Second, I share thematic findings that cut across multiple cases. I highlight themes in five broad areas: understandings of leadership, identities and enacted leadership, identities and interactions with others, identities and power, and leading in a liberal arts college.

### *The Participants*

I interviewed and observed eight women senior administrators as a part of this research. Demographic information about participants is given in Table 2. All but one of the participants identified as White, and all identified as heterosexual. In my recruitment of participants, I sought more diversity in race and sexual orientation, but only one woman of color completed my questionnaire, and the two lesbians who completed it declined to participate in interviews and observation sessions. The dearth of women of color participating in this research reflects the predominance of White women in senior leadership positions in higher education (King & Gomez, 2008), while the disinclination of lesbian women to participate may reflect the difficulties that an unknown researcher encounters when attempting to garner perspectives from members of the sexual minority (Capper, 1999). The lack of women of color and lesbians participating is a limitation of this study.

Table 2

*Interview and Observation Participants (N = 8)*

Name <sup>a</sup> /title	Years in current position	Race/ethnicity	Sexual orientation	Marital/parenting status	Age	Spiritual/religious beliefs	Geographic background	Socioeconomic class background
Ms. Alice White, VP for student development	11	Latina/ White	Heterosexual	Married, 2 children	47	Catholic	Twin Cities, MN	Middle middle class
Dr. Becky Jones, VP for student development	4	White	Heterosexual	Single, no children	44	Lutheran	Southwest MN	Lower middle class
Ms. Elizabeth Howard, VP for business affairs	2	White	Heterosexual	Married, 2 children	48	Ordained minister in her Christian church	Central IA/ Houston, TX	Middle class
Dr. Hannah Lee, VP for enrollment management	2	White	Heterosexual	Divorced, no children	51	Loosely Christian, does not attend church regularly	Suburb of Chicago, IL	Lower middle class
Dr. Lisa Robertson, VP for international development	20	White	Heterosexual	Single, no children	53	Presbyterian	Germany/Twin Cities/Western MN	Upper middle class
Dr. Maren Peterson, VP for student life	19	White	Heterosexual	Married, 2 children	59	Lifelong Lutheran	Southeast MN	Middle class
Dr. Margaret Lynn, VP for student life	3.5	White	Heterosexual	Married, 1 child	59	Christian	Urban area in Midwest	Middle class
Ms. Nimi Craig, VP for enrollment & communication	4	White	Heterosexual	Married, 1 child	40	Catholic	Southeast MN	Severely financially challenged

<sup>a</sup>*Pseudonyms selected by the participants.*

The sample was diverse in many other ways. Participants held a range of administrative positions in finance, enrollment, and student life, and they were at various stages of their careers. They came from various socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds. All identified as Christian, but they described a range of spiritual beliefs. They employed a variety of leadership tools in their positions at liberal arts colleges, and they had been trained in a range of educational programs. Further information about each participant is shared below. I include identities salient within the literature and leaders' own self-descriptions, a description of the way each leader represented herself through her dress and her office space, and a brief summary of the leadership style that each administrator employed. Participants are identified by self-selected pseudonyms.

*Alice White*

Alice White identified as a biracial (Latina and White), heterosexual woman in her late 40s. She was married with two primary-school-aged children. She described herself as Catholic but noted that her husband was Jewish and that she and her husband were raising their children Jewish. An adopted daughter of parents from the Twin Cities in Minnesota, she grew up in a middle class home. She came into her position of leadership in her mid 30s and stated that her youth made it more difficult for her to establish herself as a leader. She had held her current position as vice president for student development for 11 years. She had a master's degree in higher education.

On the day I observed her, Alice wore black pants and a black and white sweater. She had short, black, wavy hair, and she wore makeup, small earrings, and a wedding ring. Her office was painted yellow, and it had two walls of windows overlooking the campus. The space was filled with colorful art pieces and pictures of Alice's two

children. The room had a very large desk, covered with stacks of papers, a computer, and a phone, but Alice never sat at her desk. We spent most of our time together in meetings. Alice noted that she spent only a few minutes in her office each day because she had so many meetings. She carried a laptop and a smart phone with her everywhere so that she could access her e-mail and phone messages. Her administrative assistant kept her apprised of things happening in the office.

In her leadership, Alice constantly tried to challenge and support her staff. She tried to see challenges as opportunities to grow and change for the future. She described herself as a visionary leader, saying “I tell people what my vision is and I make them excited about it.” Alice worked at a liberal arts college for women, so she noted: “I’m a role model in different ways than I would be at an institution that doesn’t really notice, or doesn’t embrace gender as a mission element.” Alice saw her leadership position as her way of doing good in the world, and she hoped that the good work she did was multiplied by all of the students that she impacted.

### *Becky Jones*

Becky Jones identified as a White, heterosexual woman in her mid 40s. She noted that being a political and social liberal as well as an ally of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people were important parts of her identity. She was single, with no children. She described herself as Lutheran but noted that religion had only become an important part of her identity since joining the administration at a liberal arts college in a fairly conservative religious community. Becky grew up on a farm in Southwest Minnesota. She had held her current position as vice president for student development for 4 years. Her doctorate was in higher education.

When I met Becky, she wore a casual black dress and a pink cotton scarf with flat dress shoes. She had short hair, and she wore no makeup. She wore small earrings and no other jewelry. We sat in two arm chairs in her small office while I interviewed her. The walls were dominated by two Native American art pieces, bookshelves filled with higher education classics and books about leadership, and her four diplomas. A “Safe Space” sign hung by the door.

Becky described herself as a good listener and noted that people came to her to talk about both personal and work-related issues. Because people felt comfortable talking to her, Becky often held information which later became useful in her leadership decisions. She also noted that “I think of myself as, and I want to be perceived as, someone who is smart, someone who values intellect.” That is partially why she chose to earn a Ph.D. and work in higher education.

*Elizabeth Howard*

Elizabeth Howard identified as a White, heterosexual woman in her late 40s. She was married with two sons, one of whom was gay. She was an ordained minister in her Christian church. While she was raised in Central Iowa, her middle-class family moved to Houston, Texas, when she was in high school. Elizabeth was a social liberal who strongly believed in the power of education to improve the lives of people and economies. She had extensive work experience in corporate America before moving into higher education, and she had held her current position as vice president for business affairs for 2 years. She was a Certified Public Accountant with a master’s degree in business administration.

On the day I observed her, Elizabeth was dressed professionally in black pants, a purple sweater, and low heels. She looked quite feminine: petite in stature, highlighted hair, and makeup. Her office was noticeably lacking in clutter, and her administrative assistant told me it was always that clean. There were no loose papers. Her desk held her laptop computer, a phone, a calculator, a single tray of papers, and a wire rack filled with folders. A nearby bookshelf contained a few books, several campus reports, and family pictures. Her diplomas hung on one wall. Elizabeth carried her materials for the week in a black leather binder. She prepared this binder for herself every Monday.

Elizabeth described herself as a very reflective person. Each year, she chose a theme for her personal growth, to help her improve herself. In the previous year, her theme was identity. She thought and journaled about her various identities, musing whether they were all about the past experiences she had, or if she could actively shape them. Elizabeth left her last position in higher education due to a disagreement with the president. This experience continued to affect her leadership because she knew she was not willing to compromise her values for anything, even though her choices may have professional consequences.

### *Hannah Lee*

Hannah Lee identified as a White, heterosexual woman in her early 50s. She was divorced and had no children, and she had been dating a man for several years. She described herself as “loosely Christian” but did not attend church regularly. She was raised in a lower middle class family in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. Although she had been working as a higher education administrator for nearly 30 years and had been in cabinet-level positions for nearly 20 years, she had held her current role as vice president

of enrollment management at a liberal arts college for only 2 years. She had a doctorate in higher education and aspired to be a college president.

On the day I met her, Hannah wore a navy blue pant suit with a white shirt, a chunky necklace, three rings, two bracelets, pearl earrings, blue tights, and blue low-heeled shoes. Her brown hair was cut in a pixie hairstyle and she wore heavy eye makeup and fingernails in a short French manicure. Hannah's office was small with white and grey walls, blue carpet, and no windows. Her desk held a picture of her significant other and a dog and a framed copy of David Ambler's "Guidelines for working with students" in addition to a computer, a phone, and stacks of papers. A flat calendar covered the middle of the working surface, and Hannah's neat handwriting noted deadlines and appointments in each square. Bags of admissions materials were stored under the desk, and a built-in bookshelves held many leadership and organizational management titles. Overall, the office appeared full but organized.

Hannah enjoyed saving institutions from crises and building successful enrollment management processes for institutions. She was the first vice president for enrollment at her previous three institutions. In her words:

I like that stage of the development cycle: come, create an infrastructure, teach us, build capacity, get us in a good spot. . . . And then, once you are in a good spot, then I'll probably either get additional responsibilities and stay, or leave and go somewhere else and do it again.

Hannah described her leadership as both pragmatic and intentional. Her Depression-era parents imparted on her a belief in "no waste" which she translated into her leadership role. She was always looking for ways to maximize time and increase efficiency.



*Lisa Robertson*

Lisa Robertson identified as a White, heterosexual woman in her early 50s. She was single, and she had a male significant other with whom she spent time. Her background was in law and she was interested in language learning and global education. Born in Germany, she grew up in the Twin Cities and Western Minnesota in an upper middle class family. She was Presbyterian, and she had held her current position as vice president for international development for 20 years.

When I met Lisa, she was dressed very professionally in a black skirt, red blazer, black tights, and stylish black heels. She wore a bracelet, earrings, a ring, a necklace, and a watch. She wore either light or no makeup. Her office was large, with decorator green walls and windows along one side. Photographs of nature hung on the walls. She had a sleek wooden desk featuring a globe with the countries labeled in French and a gavel. The desk was uncluttered, but Lisa admitted that she cleaned her office just before my visit. Her bookshelves were filled with books with global, leadership, and law topics as well as a number of college awards. We sat on a sofa and arm chairs around a low glass table while I conducted her interview. Throughout the day, Lisa sipped coffee from a pottery mug.

Lisa described her parents as “adventurous” and acknowledged that she also took on this identity. She traveled often for both business and pleasure, and she saw herself as an “intrepid” traveler and a multilingual and multicultural person. According to Lisa, these experiences gave her a global perspective and made her more willing to take risks than many other higher education leaders.

*Margaret Lynn*

Margaret Lynn identified as a White, Christian, heterosexual woman in her late 50s. She was married with a college-aged son. She grew up in a middle class family in a Midwestern city. She moved back to the Midwest after working at an institution on the West Coast, and she had been in her current position as vice president for student life for nearly 4 years. Throughout her career, she was active in a national organization for women in higher education.

On the day I observed her, Margaret wore a black cardigan over a cowl-necked shirt and a grey skirt, with black tights and high-heeled boots. She wore two gold rings, a watch, earrings, a necklace, purple glasses, and makeup. Her hair was short and curled. Margaret's office had windows overlooking the campus green space and the wellness complex. Her degrees hung on the wall, and her desk featured some pictures of her family and a "Safe Space" sign. Papers and books covered the working surface, along with her computer and phone. Throughout our interview, Margaret played with a magnetic paperweight. A few "Live Strong" items were present throughout the office, hinting at Margaret's husband's battle with cancer.

Margaret held a Ph.D. in psychology, and her vocational identity as a clinical psychologist remained a central part of her identity. Her professional identity and expertise shaped how she looked at the world and how she solved problems. As a leader, she tended to focus on the structural issues that contributed to or detracted from attaining group goals.

*Maren Peterson*

Maren Peterson identified as a White, heterosexual woman in her late 50s. She was married with two adult children. A lifelong Lutheran of Norwegian descent, she was raised in a middle class family in rural Southeast Minnesota. She had been in her current position as vice president for student life for 19 years and was nearing retirement. She held a doctorate in higher education.

On the day I observed her, Maren wore black pants, a black turtleneck with a poinsettia pattern, a red quilted vest with a black faux fur lining, Christmas earrings and a matching bracelet, a bell-shaped pin, two rings, and a silver watch. She was scheduled to judge an “ugly Christmas sweater” contest on campus that evening. We met in Maren’s office, which had a view of a valley through a large window on one wall. The walls were light colored and the carpet was brown. Maren had a U-shaped desk featuring a laptop, a phone, and piles of papers. Bookshelves held many knick-knacks and few books. Posters and T-shirts from past student programs, as well as notes from colleagues, calendars, and inspirational sayings, cluttered the office.

Maren described herself as a maximizer, always looking to grow and improve people and programs. She described her leadership style as collaborative and a little disorganized. In many ways, she embodied the culture of her institution (Lutheran, Norwegian, politically liberal, from a small town), making her an excellent fit at the liberal arts college where she worked. She had been at the institution longer than any other vice president, so, in her words: “I share some of the history of the college, and I think that gives me maybe a level of expertise or knowledge that other people don’t have.”

*Nimi Craig*

Nimi Craig identified as a White, heterosexual woman around 40 years old. She was married with a young son. She intended to adopt at least one more child, and she described her identity as tightly connected to her roles as wife and mother. A Catholic, she grew up in Southeast Minnesota, and she was greatly impacted as a teenager when her family lost their farm in a financial crisis. She had a master's degree in communication, and she had been in her current leadership position as vice president for enrollment and communication at her alma mater for 4 years.

On the day I met Nimi, she wore a black and brown patterned skirt suit with a black cowl-necked shirt. She wore black tights and fashionable boots, a fashion I saw repeated by other women I met in meetings on campus. Her necklace was chunky with brown stones and sequins, and she also wore hoop earrings, two rings, and a watch. Her hair was short, highlighted, and styled to be spiky. Nimi's office was in a temporary location while the campus built a new Welcome Center. It had brick walls painted light yellow and a small window overlooking the campus green. The minimalist glass desk held a slim computer with a wireless mouse and keyboard. We sat at a glass table with four armless straight-backed leather chairs while I conducted the interview. A bookshelf held campus reports and family pictures, and two magazine racks displayed college publications. Several colorful art pieces made from cut and rolled up pieces of magazines decorated the office. Nimi's degrees hung in a column on one wall.

Before she obtained this leadership role, Nimi worked in public relations for several for-profit corporations. She loved the work but resented having to promote some missions in which she did not believe. She enjoyed her job at the liberal arts college

because she was fully committed to the mission of the college. For her, leadership was “about relationships” so she spent significant time with her staff, getting them excited about her ideas. In her words:

I’m not interested in strong-arming. That’s not my style. I’m interested in trying to figure out how do we take where somebody’s at and get them fired up about an idea to see how it’s going to benefit them and benefit this notion of us moving forward.

Nimi perceived that her identity as an alumna of her institution lent her some insider knowledge to bring to her position, but also caused others to continually question her qualifications to do her job well.

### *Thematic Findings*

Each of the participants represented a unique case with a distinctive combination of identities and experiences that mediated her leadership enactment. I could have presented findings about identity and leadership using each individual as a case study. However, in examining the data, I found interesting themes that cut across multiple cases. These themes illustrate an assumption of positionality: that although there is not a unified women’s style of leadership, women leaders “share certain experiences and parts of their identity” (Kezar & Lester, 2010, p. 169) that may lead to some similar leadership behaviors and experiences. Thus, I chose to concentrate on thematic findings within this chapter because I believe they will be more useful in guiding future higher education research, theory, policy, and practice.

In this section, I highlight themes in five broad areas. First, I consider the women leaders’ understandings of leadership. I summarize the multiple ways they defined

leadership, the various leadership styles they employed, and the leadership theories that informed their work. Second, I consider the multiple and overlapping identities that participants perceived as important to their leadership enactment, including: gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital or partnered status, parenting status, age and experience, spiritual/religious beliefs, geographic background, socioeconomic class, identity as friend, and professional training and experience. I also discuss identities that participants perceived as left out of their leadership enactment. Third, I describe how participants perceived that their identities shaped their interactions with other members of the campus community, and the ways that my observations of their interactions confirmed or contradicted those perceptions. I highlight findings in the following areas: mentoring and affirmation from others, developing and role modeling for others, the exclusionary nature of sports talk, location and authority, effectiveness, legitimacy and credibility, communication styles, presentation of self, and institutional fit. Fourth, I describe how participants perceived their own power, focusing on their understandings of power, their discomfort with the concept of power, and the ways they perceived their power as mediated by their identities. Finally, I share findings about leading in liberal arts college contexts.

### *Understandings of Leadership*

In this section, I summarize the multiple ways that participants defined leadership, the various leadership styles they employed, and the leadership theories that informed their leadership enactment.

*Definitions of leadership.*

The eight participants each defined leadership slightly differently, which is not surprising given the variety of leadership definitions presented in the literature. Still, multiple participants used common words and phrases to describe what leaders are and what they do, including: influence, inspire, motivate, role model, develop people, share a vision, advance an agenda, and think strategically. These conceptions of leadership are consistent with several of the transformational leadership factors on the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1990). This is also not surprising, since past studies have found that women are more likely to employ transformational leadership than transactional or laissez-faire leadership (Trinidad & Normore, 2005).

Study participants Margaret and Nimi noted that a leader must be able to see the “bigger picture” and articulate it to a group of people. Elizabeth described a leader as someone who inspires people to follow her vision, and as someone who develops people to achieve that vision. While several participants talked about the importance of having vision, Lisa’s definition of leadership concentrated on the importance of matching that vision to reality, so that there is a concrete plan to advance the vision. In Lisa’s definition, a leader should be “mission-driven and mission-centered,” embodying the mission for the college, and consistently managing in accordance with that mission. For her, role modeling was also a central responsibility of a leader.

Becky, Elizabeth, and Hannah talked about leading from a particular position within a group. Both Becky and Hannah described a leader as someone who can motivate or inspire people to advance a group agenda. However, Becky believed in “leading from

behind” and her identity as someone who grew up on a farm came through in her vivid description of this behavior:

I think that there’s times when a leader has to get out in front and provide an example, but I think you also have to be able to know when you can be the cattle dog nipping along on somebody’s heels, and when you can be the bell cow and be out in front.

Similarly, Elizabeth said that she “sort of feel[s] like that person who’s at the back pushing or supporting but really letting [her staff] run their show.” On the other hand, Hannah believed in “leading from the middle.” She described a leader as someone who imagines where a group can go and then helps them get there.

Alice, Becky, Maren, and Lisa described leadership as situational and as a task requiring multiple tools. For Alice, leadership was about assessing situations very quickly and bringing the “appropriate” identities to the table. Alice’s use of the word “appropriate” signifies that certain of her identities were not perceived as acceptable (by her or by others) and therefore had to be hidden or subdued in particular situations. For Becky, leadership was about “responding” to various situations. Lisa described herself as “pretty quick on her feet” as she took “stock of the situation, the circumstances” that require leadership. Unlike the other participants, Maren went so far as to claim that women were better at situational leadership. In her words: “I think women have the ability to call on far more of their toolkit because they’re more open to doing that, and men tend to be more, I think, linear.” However, Margaret specifically disagreed that women lead differently, better, or worse than men.



*Leadership styles and tools in use.*

Participants also described their own leadership styles in varying ways, describing leadership styles that I saw as consistent with both task and interpersonal orientations, both democratic and autocratic leadership, and both transformational and transactional leadership. I resisted classifying participants' leadership styles in these ways, even though the characterizations are so prevalent in the literature, because I observed participants use a variety of leadership tools in their roles as leaders at liberal arts colleges. Instead, in this section I use the words of each participant to describe the way she perceived her leadership style, augmented by examples from my observations.

Consistent with traditionally "feminine" styles of leadership, many of the participants relied on collaboration and consensus as leadership tools, and many of them cited relationships as an important part of their leadership. They shared power and information, encouraged group participation in decision-making, and worked to build staff capacity. These leadership styles seemed well-suited to the liberal arts colleges at which the participants worked, as they were small and had relatively flat organizational structures.

Alice and Becky described using meetings to communicate with staff, vetting reports through a group, offering opportunities for feedback, and checking in with various people via e-mail and phone calls to say, in Alice's words, "This is what I'm thinking. Am I on the right track? Tell me if I'm not." After a cabinet meeting, I observed Alice reiterate her point of view in a one-on-one conversation with the president and in separate conversations with three different staff people. She also stated her opinion within the

cabinet setting, but she clearly relied on these informal conversations—and on her positive relationships with other staff members—to exercise power in decision-making.

I observed Becky withhold her opinion on a hiring decision until others on the committee had made their preferences known. Becky said that that she wanted all members of the committee to feel like they had a real say in the decision, rather than a token one. Becky said that her leadership is augmented because she is a good listener and she knows when to share information in an appropriate way. In her words:

People tend to talk to me about things. I often end up knowing things that you probably wouldn't think that I would know otherwise: Personal things about people, but also work things about people. I think that there's some people on campus who understand that I'm a safe place to go to. . . . That puts me in a position to be able to offer helpful insight even sometimes in times when it would seem odd.

According to Becky, her ability to listen well comes from her student affairs background.

Participants such as Elizabeth and Hannah talked about developing staff as an important part of their leadership style. Elizabeth shared her philosophy to develop people holistically, including personally, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. Hannah talked about her intentional and consistent efforts to build staff capacity at her institution. She stressed the importance of “giving people access, giving people information, giving people context, giving people explanations,” so that people can make their own informed decisions. In addition, Hannah noted the importance of providing professional development opportunities and ongoing staff training, setting clear expectations, and providing detailed evaluations. I also observed evidence of Elizabeth

and Hannah developing staff: Elizabeth asked a staff member what additional responsibilities she wanted to take on in order to grow professionally, and Hannah talked through how to better run a meeting with a staff member. Multiple participants' commitments to empowering, developing, and role modeling for staff are discussed further below.

Hannah stated that she was always working to eliminate her own necessity and preparing staff members to succeed without her. Lisa, too, talked about the importance of hiring individuals to fill her weaknesses and hiring people to replace her in the future. She noted that:

In a mission-driven organization . . . sometimes a person at the top can so feel that they embody it that nobody else can. And I would hope that people would have thought that they were able to grasp and feel like they own [the mission here], not just something I owned.

Lisa recognized the responsibility of a leader to help others in the organization fully engage with the mission and to constantly prepare staff members to take on leadership roles. Lisa also talked about the importance of “management by consensus,” hearing “the full discourse and full debate of an issue,” and involving others in management decisions. However, she said that recently her organization had restructured to be more hierarchical. She had realized that “there are really important moments when you have to step in and have to just simply take the lone position, make the decision, and then move on from that.” In one of the cabinet meetings I observed, a woman president exhibited this leadership style quite exactly, relaying her decision about pricing for the institution, asking others on the cabinet to “tee up,” and claiming her positional power through the

phrase, “I’m driving this ship.” In this situation, other cabinet members seemed happy to have someone make a decision about the matter. Continued “full discourse and full debate” of the issue likely would not have been fruitful.

Most of the time the leadership tools that participants employed seemed well-suited to their environments and well-received by colleagues and staff. Still, participants admitted times when their leadership styles had been unsuccessful in their work contexts. Elizabeth described herself as a “decisive” and “hands-off” leader, who sets “a tone of integrity and values and work ethic.” She noted that this style was effective with people who were good self-starters, but that it did not work well with those who were not. Similarly, Maren described herself as a “maximizer” who always wants to make something a little bit better. This leadership style had made it very difficult for her to work with a staff member who did not share this value.

*Leadership theories and models in use.*

Two of the eight participants mentioned particular leadership theories or models that informed their understandings of leadership. Hannah shared the leadership philosophy of David Ambler, which is to “Know as many students as you possibly can and know them well. Nothing is done without this individual relationship.” She also used the “True Colors Personality Test” to assess her personality and the personalities of staff members and to understand how they could work better together. Maren used the “Strengths Quest” to assess her leadership strengths as well as those of her staff, the cabinet at her institution, and student leaders with whom she works. Other participants also borrowed terms from leadership theory (like situational leadership, for example), but they did not cite particular theories as compelling. I did observe, however, a large number

of leadership texts on bookshelves in the offices of all participants, indicating a possible familiarity with a variety of leadership theories.

Texts like *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) and *In a Different Voice* (Gilligan, 1982) were commonly owned by participants, indicating that some of these participants had thought about the ways that gender identity, at least, impacts ways of knowing the world and making decisions within it. Even as their understandings of leadership were shaped by leadership theory, participants articulated that their own identities affected their leadership enactment. Identities that participants perceived as important to their leadership enactment will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section.

#### *Identities and Enacted Leadership*

In this section, I share themes related to the study's first research question: How do women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges perceive that their intersecting identities mediate their enacted leadership? I consider multiple and overlapping identities that participants perceived as important to their leadership enactment, including: gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital or partnered status, parenting status, age and experience, spiritual/religious beliefs, geographic background, socioeconomic class, identity as friend, and professional training and experience. I also discuss those identities that participants perceived as left out of their leadership enactment.

Participants noted that a number of their intersecting identities mediated their enacted leadership, but, as expected, they could not always discern which identities were shaping their leadership in what ways. It was clear that multiple identities interacted to shape the way that these women led in their particular liberal arts contexts. Still, I

observed that most participants were much more comfortable talking about the ways certain identities (e.g., gender, professional training) mediated their leadership than the ways other identities (e.g., sexual orientation, race/ethnicity) did. For that reason, I comment individually on several identity categories that participants deemed important to their leadership enactment, highlighting the ways that these identity categories interacted to create “whole” leaders.

*Gender.*

As noted above, Maren thought that women made better leaders than men, whereas Margaret doubted whether there were any real gender differences in leadership enactment. Most participants agreed, however, that their gender influenced the ways that their leadership was perceived. For example, Becky described gender as “the part of my identity that gets handed to me.” And, others’ perceptions could shape the ways that women participants chose (or found available) to enact leadership.

At the beginning of her career, Alice was described by a graduate school supervisor as an “angry woman.” According to Alice, she spent the subsequent 20 years trying to overcome that stereotype. Alice said that she was characterized as “angry at men” because she thinks quickly and speaks articulately and with conviction, and this can be intimidating for men. As a result, she said, “I think I mute myself sometimes when I feel like I might be coming off as an angry woman.” Alice’s experiences are consistent with reviews of research that concluded that women leaders are often evaluated more negatively than their men peers, especially when women leaders employ an assertive, agentic, or autocratic leadership style (Eagly & Carli, 2007b; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992).

Most of the participants, especially those who had been working in higher education for many years, had experiences where they were the only woman or the first woman on the leadership team and where they felt that they had to prove themselves as capable. Margaret had encountered gender-based assumptions about her understanding of things like building maintenance and budget issues. She characterized those assumptions as a “low level of condescension,” echoing research that found that women are often perceived as less competent than men (Carli & Eagly, 1999; Ridgeway, 2001). Also supporting research findings, Margaret noted that men were more likely to be heard in meetings than women. Hannah added that she often surprises people who are not expecting

a woman to quote the numbers or use the revenue or talk that language or use that kind of power. . . . You’re just supposed to be the nice one. And I’m pragmatic and driven and I get results more than being nice.

I observed that Hannah did lead very differently from the other women on the all-women cabinet on her campus, and that the people she was often surprising with her style were other women. Hannah provided nearly all of the cabinet agenda items for the meeting I observed. For each of her agenda items, she had sent written materials in advance so that cabinet members could prepare themselves for discussion. Within the meeting, she spoke informally but from prepared notes, referencing data in the written materials she had provided. In contrast, the two other leaders introducing agenda items provided no advance materials. They spoke in a more disorganized way, fashioning their comments on the spot. When I asked Hannah about these meeting dynamics, she admitted that she usually supplied most of the agenda items for cabinet meetings, that she

was generally the only one to use data to support her discussion points, and that she was much more likely than other cabinet members to put her thoughts in writing. Because of her tendency toward advance preparation, she was sometimes seen as having undue influence at her institution, even though all meeting attendees had equal opportunity to suggest agenda items and prepare for discussions in advance.

Elizabeth and Lisa stated that they saw their gender as a positive mediator of their leadership. Elizabeth noted that “diversity in general is good” and explained that as the only woman on the cabinet she was able to provide a diversity of experience and point of view, even if she was not always aware of it. Lisa found the experience of being the only woman in the room empowering, relishing being “different, unusual.”

Maren realized within our discussions that she had never worked for a woman, and she said that “it’s probably made me work harder over the years to prove myself.”

Margaret agreed, saying,

I think that women leaders do work very hard. I think sometimes we maybe work too hard and don’t either take care of ourselves as well as we should, or that men are quicker to understand, or just brought up to understand more the value of just kind of that networking, casual networking. So to step out of my office and stand around and talk to someone in the hall for ten minutes is really important. I think sometimes women leaders are a little—this sounds kind of odd, but a little too hardworking.

Consistent with positionality theory, which asserts that multiple identities interact to influence leadership within a particular context, many of the leaders pointed to ways that gender interacted with other identities to mediate their leadership. Becky noted that



her gender identity was intertwined with her identity as a person raised on a farm; she described herself a “farm girl” and told several stories about how her “farm girl” identity impacted her work. For example, she refused to wait for men to do particular jobs around the office like hook up technology and lift heavy water jugs. She said that this was both because she was sensitive to overturning prescribed gender roles and also because on the farm, whoever could did the job, no matter their gender.

Similarly, Alice pointed out that her identities as a woman and a Catholic complicated each other and her leadership at a Catholic women’s college. She described herself as struggling with some of the gendered aspects of the Catholic Church, and noted that “I’m honest about my struggles with the Church which helps with a lot of staff and students” who were also struggling with their own spirituality. She recounted a past conversation with a colleague at her institution. They were talking about programming on Catholicism, and he accused her of having “baggage with the Church” because she was a woman and a feminist. As a leader, struggling with and questioning the teachings of the Catholic Church caused Alice to constantly reevaluate the mission of her Catholic institution and reconsider what that Catholic mission means at a college for women.

Leaders educated in student affairs noted that their gender and professional identities were particularly intertwined because student affairs is a women-dominated field. Two of the four student affairs professionals I interviewed worried that student affairs was not valued as highly as academic affairs at their institution, and that their leadership was not respected as highly because of their field. Both Alice and Becky perceived that their budget requests were passed over in favor of academic affairs requests. With a past president, Becky perceived that her leadership was diminished

because she was a woman, and “discounted a half a step further because I was a student affairs person, not the academician or whatever,” even though she held a Ph.D. in her field. This treatment made Becky angry: “So then my experience of [leadership] becomes frustration and I kind of set my teeth and want to be like ‘Now I’m going to show you buddy.’” Maren agreed that the needs of academic affairs were prioritized over the needs of student affairs at most colleges, but suggested that the effect was less pronounced at most private residential liberal arts colleges than at other kinds of higher education institutions.

The three youngest participants in this study, Alice, Becky, and Nimi, all articulated that gender and age interacted to affect the way their leadership was perceived. They agreed that as younger women, it was more difficult for them to establish authority and prove their competence than it would have been for younger men or older women. Becky described times early in her career when it seemed that “the president was patting my head and [saying], ‘Oh, you young girl.’” Becky also said that gender has become a larger part of her identity as she has gotten older and faced gender equity challenges: “I think I’m more sensitive to gender roles [now.] . . . The older I get, the more sensitivity I have to making opportunities for women.”

Some of the participants shared particular strategies that they employed to combat the negative perceptions of women’s capability as leaders. Nimi and Alice were very conscientious of where they sat at meetings. Nimi sat at the head of the table whenever she was leading a meeting. Alice chose to sit next to the chief financial officer and across from the provost at cabinet meetings, putting her in the triangle of conversation and

decision-making. I observed that most of the women dressed both professionally and femininely, wearing skirt suits with heeled shoes, makeup, and jewelry.

A complex comment on gender and leadership came from Lisa, a 20-year leader at her institution. She said that she believed in her own intelligence and capability, and that she did not “allow [her]self to be marginalized.” On one hand, Lisa was asserting her own empowerment. She served as a role model in learning and using institutional power, and other women may learn from her strong positioning. But, on the other hand, this comment could be interpreted as blaming other women for allowing themselves to be marginalized as leaders and discriminated against in the workplace, rather than pointing to the systems of power that disadvantage women as leaders. This attitude may be harmful to women in leadership particularly because it comes from a woman in power who may be seen as a role model for other women.

*Race/ethnicity.*

All of the participants in this study worked at predominantly White institutions. Seven of the eight participants identified as White, and Alice identified as White and Latina. Alice emotionally pointed out that her race was often invisible in her college environment. She said,

It’s just easier for people to see White. . . . I miss a richly diverse community where I don’t have to explain or justify or even have to overtly express who I am. . . . In the last couple of years, I’ve tried to define myself more openly as a Latina because I want people to understand that this is what a Latina looks like. It’s not your stereotype.

Alice perceived that her own biracial identity affected her leadership by giving her heightened sensitivity to the issues that bicultural, biracial, and multiracial students face.

White participants Hannah and Lisa remarked that they did not perceive their race, or race in general, mattered much at all in leadership. For example, Lisa, when asked about the importance of race to her leadership, told a story about her African friend and staff member. In her words:

We often talk about this, how we feel as connected to each other—and our backgrounds are wholly, decidedly different, and yet we are closer than probably just about anybody I know. I mean, I've got many, many good friends. She's one of many. So that causes you to think about just how difference—how significant a difference does race really make? In the end, it's about what you care about, how you think, your ethics, your values, and granted you bring with it your prior experience. There's no question, there's things that I had, there's things that she had that do make us different. On the other hand, we absolutely resonate, completely, 100%.

Other White participants acknowledged that they were the beneficiaries of White privilege, but they, too, did not articulate how their own racial identities affected their leadership. They talked about the ways that they had worked to increase the number of students of color on their campus, or to improve the experiences of students of color, or to hire people of color in their offices, thus using the term “diversity” to mean only non-White people. None of the participants discussed specific ways that their White racial identities mediated their leadership enactment.

*Sexual orientation.*

As noted above, all of the participants in this study identified as heterosexual. As with racial and ethnic identities, most participants did not articulate how their own sexual orientations mediated their leadership enactment. Participants did acknowledge that being straight helped them to fit traditional expectations and role model for the majority. Participants' views on others' sexual orientations generally were informed by their professional training and their religious views.

Becky and Elizabeth identified as strong allies for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) people. Elizabeth had a personal interest in gay rights because her son was gay. For Becky, being an ally was one of her most important identities. She noted that several relationships with gay men had helped her recognize "how important orientation is in who we are and how we see our worlds and how we experience our worlds." She believed that her work as an ally was particularly important at her conservative college, which had few resources for GLBT students and staff. Her identities as a straight person, as a vice president, and as someone knowledgeable about higher education gave her some power as she worked to support GLBT individuals who may not feel empowered at her institution. Becky's experience illustrated the importance of heterosexual people examining the ways that they benefit from—and likely have a stake in maintaining—systems of privilege and oppression. However, most of the women in this study did not articulate ways that their sexual orientations lent them power in their leadership roles.

*Marital or partnered status.*

Five of the eight participants were married. Becky was single, and Hannah and Lisa had significant others who were men. Hannah had been married and divorced.

Participants who were married described their partners as confidants, advisers, and supporters of their leadership roles. Maren noted that she bounced ideas off her husband, and that he had a very different approach to things, which was helpful. Margaret noted that her husband also had a Ph.D. and they both had worked in higher education. Nimi described that her professional responsibilities took precedence over her husband's. If their son was sick, Nimi's partner was called rather than her. In Nimi's words: "That makes my ability to be here and to be focused so much stronger." Alice said that "having a husband and children gives you a lot to relate to in terms of the majority of the population. . . . It's a connection point in relationships. On the other hand, I'm sensitive to that for people who are not married."

Unmarried participants disagreed about how this identity affected their leadership enactment. Becky said that she only noticed it when the campus had events where people were expected to bring their spouses. She was the only person on the cabinet of her institution who was not married. Becky also noted that "sometimes I forget that people have spouses that they need to accommodate, and children that they need to take care of" since she does not have those responsibilities. Lisa stated, "I think I am not oblivious to the demands of some of my staff who have families . . . [even though] I don't have those same demands." Hannah said that being unmarried "allows me to spend more time with work because I don't have those other obligations."

Unmarried participants agreed that they did not fit expectations about leaders at their institutions. Hannah said that people constantly assumed that her long-term significant other was her husband. When I observed her, she was planning a tropical vacation with her significant other, and several people on campus made jokes about her eloping on her upcoming trip. These jibes are evidence of the expectations people on campus had about Hannah being married. Hannah worried little about her unmarried status now, but said,

I worry about it more as I advance than about how it has influenced me right now. I think someday I'll be a college president and then I wonder what happens when you don't have a spouse to accompany you to the fundraising and social functions? Can you date as a president?

Hannah's worries illuminated the way that presidential roles are currently structured to presume that leaders are married. I add that presidential roles assume a "First Lady" will be available to take on a particular supportive role for her presidential husband. None of the women senior administrators participating in this study had a "First Lady" to support her in her leadership role.

*Parenting status.*

All of the married participants had children: Nimi and Margaret had one child each, and Alice, Elizabeth, and Maren had two children each. Nimi's and Alice's children were still in grade school, and Nimi was intending to adopt another child. Margaret, Elizabeth, and Maren had high school-aged, college-aged, and adult children. Unmarried participants Becky, Hannah, and Lisa did not have children.

All participants who had children considered this a central part of their identities. Perhaps because they had younger children, Alice and Nimi talked about the ways that having children bumped up against their professional responsibilities. Both talked about the necessity of having a partner who was willing to take an equal or slightly larger role in raising the children. Alice talked about “blending” her roles as mother and leader, rather than trying to balance them, because balance implied a separation of the roles that was impossible in her life.

Maren and Nimi described their colleges as family friendly. Nimi saw this as related to the Catholic identity of her institution. Because it was a family friendly place, Nimi was able to maintain a flexible schedule and bring her family with her to college events. She also encouraged her staff members who were parents to do the same.

Participants with children perceived several ways that their identities as parents mediated their leadership enactment. Being a parent gave them credibility and cachet with college students’ parents. Being a parent of young children helped them be understanding and respectful of staff members who were trying to blend work and family responsibilities. They also perceived that being a parent of college-aged children helped them better understand the experiences and development of college students because they had observed their own children go through these experiences and developmental processes. Elizabeth added that her children were open with her and willing to point out her faults, and “that helps in leadership as well, to have somebody who is not scared about telling you what you really are doing.”

Hannah said that she compensated for her lack of first-hand parenting experiences “by the reading and learning and understanding and compiling experiences of other



people.” Although she did not experience having to blend parenting and professional responsibilities, it was something that she “had to become tolerant of” with her staff. Her framing of work/family balance as an issue to be tolerated illustrates the way that not having children mediated the way she thinks about her work time and crafts her expectations for her staff.

*Age and experience.*

Participants ranged in age from 40 to 59 years. All participants except Elizabeth had worked in higher education for most of their careers. Five participants had been in their current job for fewer than 5 years during the study, one had been in her position for 11 years, and two had been in their positions for about 20 years.

No matter their age or years of experience, all participants agreed that both age and years of experience mattered to their leadership enactment and to perceptions of their leadership capability. Most said that their age had mattered less to others as they had grown older and thus grown into expectations about how old a senior administrator at a liberal arts college should be. Margaret said that both age and experience made her a more skillful and focused leader: “I think I have a broader view of leadership in general—that there are different ways to lead, and that you don’t have to be in charge of everything sort of every minute. And you can prioritize things.” Elizabeth said that her experiences in leadership helped her let issues “roll off” more easily, without making a big deal out of everything.

Elizabeth and Margaret both said that there was an expectation that a senior administrator would be quite a bit older than 30. Nimi had started in her current role at age 35, and she said that her age definitely mattered at that time, as did assumptions

about her lack of experience and assumptions based on her gender. Alice agreed that it was hard to establish herself when she first came to her position in her mid 30s:

A lot of people just didn't expect a vice president to look as young as I did. . . . I think that with the faculty in particular. . . . I think to them, experience looks a certain way. And I just didn't look, and to some, still don't look like I have enough experience.

Even though Alice had been in her position for 11 years, some still questioned her experience. On the day I observed her, Alice had a meeting with the provost, an older woman. The provost asked, "Have you ever thought about this?" and Alice was irked, perceiving that the provost was trying to tell her how to do her job because she had more experience in higher education leadership.

At the same time that age and experience was valued, Margaret also said that "people expect you to be youthful to some degree or at least you have to convey a sense of energy." Hannah and Maren added that it was important to remain energetic and enthusiastic even as a leader grows older and wiser. Hannah also noted that use of technology was a key difference between her and her younger staff. While she was not as interested in new technologies as some of her younger staff, she tried to remain knowledgeable about technological advances and open to trying them, so that she could communicate effectively with her staff members.

Lisa and Maren had been in their current positions for nearly 20 years, combining age with experience. Lisa recognized now that, although she was very confident and intelligent at the beginning of her professional career (when she was in her 30s), she was able to effect more change and growth in her last ten years of leadership. In her words:

Now that I look back on it, I think I'm much more able to take risks now, and know what those risks entail, and how I can speak to them and defend them. . . . I feel like my leadership is a lot more purposeful now than maybe it was in the very early stages.

Maren agreed that she had also “gotten smarter about some things. You know, knowing when to give in, knowing when to give up, and knowing when to laugh at myself or laugh at a situation. I think wisdom is what comes with age.” She perceived that nothing could come across her desk now that would truly shock her, and that gave her “a confidence that is truly precious.”

Becky and Margaret noted that their experiences as leaders in several different college environments helped them appreciate that there were many different ways to run a college, and that their current institutions probably were not the best at everything. They noted that there were many people at their institutions who had only worked at one place, and were therefore less knowledgeable about how things were done elsewhere.

*Spiritual/religious beliefs.*

All participants identified as Christian, but participants described a range of spiritual beliefs and a variety of perceptions about how those beliefs mediated their leadership enactment. All of them were working at private Christian liberal arts colleges, so religion was also a part of the context mediating their leadership enactment. Previous research has asserted that Christian institutions may provide complex environments for women's leadership because of the Bible's assignment of gender roles and many denominations' strong patriarchal paradigms (Méndez-Morse, 2003; Wood, 2009).

Both Alice and Nimi identified themselves as Catholics working at Catholic institutions. For Nimi, being a member of the college parish helped her to be more fully integrated into the campus community and to create relationships. She noted that non-Catholic leaders may have a harder time connecting with the Catholic identity of the institution or engaging fully in the community. Contrastingly, Alice noted that her faith involved questioning and struggling with the patriarchal Catholic hierarchy. Alice related her struggles with the Church to her gender identity. While she hoped that her “love of the faith and of the Church as a people is evident in my work, in my language, in my approach to my work, in my gratitude,” she also believed that her honesty about her struggles with the Church helped her relate to others on campus who feel similarly.

Alice was married to a Jewish man, and they were raising their children Jewish. Alice said that this experience made her more sensitive to people on the margins. Living in a world that does not acknowledge her family’s Sabbath day made her more aware of the challenges that Jewish and Muslim students face as they continue to follow their traditions in a Christian environment. As a leader in student affairs, these experiences have prompted her to provide support and advocacy for such students.

Hannah was also raised Catholic, but she did not attend church regularly. As a leader working at a Catholic institution, she noted that it was helpful to understand Catholic rituals, hierarchy, and nuances. Margaret also identified as a Christian in a Christian institution, but she chose not to be prominent about her faith in her leadership role because she did not want to “turn students off” if they had different religious beliefs.

Lisa and Maren described their institutions as ecumenical Lutheran environments. When I observed them, both Lisa and Maren asked me to attend chapel services with

them. Lisa made it clear that she attended services only infrequently, whereas Maren made time to attend each day. Lisa described herself as a Presbyterian guided by Christian ethics and values consistent with her college's mission. These ethics led to high professional standards and an expectation of respectful discourse, which in turn affected her leadership. She added that she was fairly private about her personal religious beliefs, however, compared to some of her colleagues.

Maren was more open about her identification as a lifelong Lutheran and her belief in the mission of her Lutheran college. She described her campus as “open, liberal, challenging, [and] ecumenical,” just like her. She noted that the Lutheran Church encouraged a tension between ideas, conversation, and deep thinking. It challenged her as a leader to work in community with others. She integrated the Lutheran concepts of grace and forgiveness into her daily leadership enactment, recalling that God's grace is there for her, for the student who has made mistakes, and for the student who is marginalized or lonely.

Becky noted that her work within a particularly conservative religious context had reconnected her to the Lutheran Church. Her identification as a Lutheran was a way to separate herself from more conservative religions while still participating in community-building and relationship-building. In many ways, her campus community expected her to have some religious membership, and affiliating with the Lutheran Church allowed her to meet those expectations while staying true to her identities as a social justice advocate and GLBT ally. I observed an acute interest in people's religious identities on her campus. The president made a joke about a staff member being a Baptist in a community meeting. Becky affirmed that people on her campus really want everyone to “wear” a

religious identity. And the religious identity that she “wears” on her campus mediates the way that people perceive her as a “crazy liberal Lutheran” leader.

Elizabeth was an ordained minister in her Christian church, and she had participated in an adult leadership seminar through her church that allowed her to reflect on how her beliefs mediated her leadership. Her personal beliefs were influenced by process theology. As she described, process philosophers posit that there is no divine plan for the world and instead all of creation comes together to create the future. In this view, God does not act outside of nature; instead, God allures humans toward goodness, love, and relationships. Humans, therefore, are responsible for their own futures and for making positive change in the world. Elizabeth’s religious beliefs were evident in her leadership; she saw herself as responsible and she conceived of her job as her contribution to creating the future. However, even as she was candid and articulate with me about her religious beliefs and the way they affected her leadership, she admitted that many of her colleagues did not know that she was an ordained minister or that she went to a particular Christian church.

*Geographic background.*

All of the participants had spent part or all of their childhood years in the Midwestern United States, and all of them said that their geographic background continued to affect their leadership. Hannah noted that being from the Midwest provided her a way to fit in with the culture at her institution, and Margaret added that it provided “a sense of some of the values that some of the people from the Midwest have.”

Alice grew up in a racially diverse urban area very different from the homogeneous rural area in which she now works. She said that her background pushed

her to seek opportunities to experience difference, to hire a diverse staff, to provide travel opportunities to staff, and to challenge her staff to try new things. Conversely, Becky grew up in a small town in rural Minnesota, in a place where everyone knew each other. As a higher education leader, she sought a community that was also small, and where people knew and cared for one another. She identified herself as “small and personal” and as a “relational” leader.

Many of the leaders also had lived in communities outside of the Midwest. Lisa perceived that her early years in Germany and her subsequent travel all over the world increased her capacity for difference and made her think about who she is and how she manages her identities. These experiences also helped her navigate new and challenging leadership experiences. Margaret said that the time she spent working at an institution on the West Coast provided her with a sense of perspective and an opportunity to learn how higher education functions outside of the Midwest.

*Socioeconomic class.*

Participants had grown up in families with varying economic resources, but most of them noted that college had been an expected path for them. All participants appeared to be in the upper middle class now that they had obtained a leadership position in higher education.

Becky, Hannah, and Nimi grew up in families in the lower or lower middle classes. Nimi’s family lost their farm during the economic crisis of the 1980s. She recalled herself as a 12-year-old girl watching her family’s belongings being sold at auction. She worked through high school and college to pay for her education, and she entered beauty pageants as a way of gaining scholarships and entry into the journalism

profession. She identified education as the way to escape poverty and financial anxiety in her own life, and she continued to apply that belief in her leadership. She remained particularly committed to helping students overcome the financial challenges of attending her private liberal arts college and to providing financial education to undergraduates.

Hannah, a first-generation college student herself, focused her time developing prospective students who came to college with hope and promise but not many financial resources or much knowledge about the financial aid process. Each of the colleges where Hannah chose to work had a high proportion of first generation families, and she said that “I don’t think I would personally do well at an elite school or an affluent school or a school where there’s a lot of entitlement.” Hannah perceived that she worked her way through school, and she expected students enrolled at her institution to do the same.

In contrast, Maren and Lisa noted that their parents really “invested” financially in them, and that this affected their leadership enactment. In Lisa’s case, her parents provided her with opportunities to travel abroad and participate in extracurricular activities such as language learning. Lisa noted that growing up in the upper middle class afforded her opportunities that others did not have, and that these experiences continued to affect her outlook on life and her leadership. As a leader who traveled frequently for her job, she felt equipped to travel to other countries, “navigate a different cultural milieu,” and communicate with individuals who are different from her. Her “really big capacity for difference” developed through her travel and language-learning experiences as a young person prompted her to cultivate a multicultural and international donor base for her institution. It drew her into collaborations with faculty with a “significant global view.” She also perceived that her international experiences as a child gave her “a global



perspective” that “comes out a lot” in terms of how she responds to leadership challenges at the local level.

Maren’s parents paid for her entire college education and that affected her leadership outlook. At her previous job at a community college, Maren encountered a number of students who came to college with little or no support. Maren noted that she continued to have a hard time understanding parents who did not financially support their children through college, and that this continued to affect her interactions with students and their parents. As a leader, she was especially sensitive to students who did not have the same financial support from their parents as she did, and perhaps less sensitive toward college-educated parents who did not financially support their children through college. She remained committed to helping these students afford a private liberal arts college education. In her words: “I think being lucky to be in the family I grew up in has translated into wanting to enlarge that opportunity to as many people as possible.”

All participants had normalized their own socioeconomic class and had to stretch themselves to understand the situations of others from higher or lower economic classes. Coming from a middle class background, Margaret said,

It’s been important for me to stretch myself in understanding our students who come from far less privileged backgrounds, or even far more privileged backgrounds, because they really do have different outlooks on the world in terms of their expectations and stability and what they know about higher ed[ucation] or don’t know.

In the case of geographic background and socioeconomic class, I asked participants both about their current situations and those of their childhood. Most

participants were articulate about the ways that their childhood identities and family values continued to affect their leadership as adults.

*Identity as friend.*

While one could argue that being a friend is a role rather than an identity, three participants perceived “friend” as one of their core identities, just like “woman,” “straight person,” or “mother.” Becky, Maren, and Nimi specifically talked about their identities as friends to others, even though my protocol did not directly ask about it. As a leader in student life, Maren often dealt with difficult student situations, including drug or alcohol abuse, mental health issues, and disciplinary actions. Her friendships were a diversion from this hard work, and her friends provided her with empathy which lightened her emotional load and enabled her to continue her work as a leader. Maren noted that most of her friends were professional women from outside the college. She said, “My women friends sustain me on a daily basis, so my identity as a friend, and as an organizer of friends, is part and parcel of what I do.”

Becky talked about friendships with work colleagues as well as friendships with people outside of the campus community. She relayed that work friendships have become more difficult since she became a vice president at her institution. She found that people “manage” their relationships with her and are less likely to share personal information with her. She finds this troubling because

part of my identity is relational and is about being able to be connected with people and ... one of the things that I think helps me with who I am, is I get to have real relationships with people, and then those relationships put me in a position where I can help make pieces fit in people’s work. So if the very title of

my job, or the perception of my job, keeps me from being able to do that, it really keeps me from being myself.

Becky's comments asserted that leadership in higher education may be constructed in such a way that relational individuals cannot be themselves. And, since researchers find that gender norms tend to lead women leaders toward an interpersonally-oriented or relational style of leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007a), women may be disproportionately influenced by this construction of leadership.

Nimi explicitly stated that difficulties in forming friendships at work was a gendered issue, saying, "I think that guys are able to do it in a way that I can't, and I don't know why." She noted that it is difficult to have "girlfriends" on campus because her "position gets in the way of it" and she said developing relationships with colleagues is particularly "messy at a small institution like this." Nimi perceived that women leaders may have a difficult time enacting relational leadership in small liberal arts college environments.

*Professional training and experience.*

All of the women perceived their professional training and experience as key mediators of their leadership enactment. Becky, Hannah, Alice, and Maren studied higher education administration with a student affairs focus. Lisa had a law degree. Nimi studied communication and marketing. Margaret was a clinical psychologist. Elizabeth was a CPA. Hannah, Maren, Lisa, and Margaret were particularly vocal about how their professional training affected their leadership.

Hannah noted that her training in student activities "affects everything. . . . It's so integral to who I am." Her educational program focused on developing students, with

campus activities and events being secondary to the student development occurring in those venues. She applied this same philosophy to her current leadership position: “I’m a VP for enrollment, but that’s secondary really. I’m here to develop the staff and they’ll do great things and it’ll help enrollment.” In line with this philosophy, Hannah said that she valued sharing information with others, involving others in decision-making, providing professional development opportunities and on-going training for staff, setting and communicating high expectations, and giving clear and detailed feedback and staff evaluations.

Hannah also said that her involvement with a national student activities organization allowed her to practice organizational-level strategic planning and budgeting, and helped her see things on a bigger level, outside of the student activities silo: “This was the silo-blaster for me, to see higher ed[ucation] as an enterprise more than just student affairs.” This professional experience had encouraged her to seek a vice presidency and to aspire to a college presidency.

Maren also had a Ph.D. in higher education, and her first job experience out of graduate school was at a community college. She gained experience in that environment that she still integrates into her leadership 20 years later. Working at a community college gave her a “heart for the whole spectrum of students.” She said that while not everybody succeeds at a community college, everyone gets a chance to try to succeed. And, with a lot of help, students are transformed. As a leader now at a liberal arts college, Maren continued to carry a belief in the potential of college to transform lives.

Lisa noted that she used the skills she learned in law school every day in her job in higher education. In law school, she learned how to defend an argument and mediate

conflict. These skills continue to influence her leadership: “I’m less convinced that I often have the right answer, as I want to hear the full discourse and full debate of an issue.” Lisa also noted that law school gave her great advocacy training and experience in making both written and oral arguments. Her ability to effectively make a case has helped her in her fundraising and grant-writing tasks. Finally, Lisa said that she practiced law every day by keeping her institution out of court.

Margaret was trained as a psychologist and explained that she was automatically tracked into clinical work (rather than an academic profession) by her graduate school professors because she was a woman. She was trained as a systems person, and in her leadership position, she tended “to look at systems issues and what contributes to or detracts from the goals that we want to achieve.” She often drew on her knowledge bases about pathology, student behavior, alcohol and drug issues, and community psychology when dealing with students. She believed that her Ph.D. in psychology gave her credibility among students, parents, and faculty. She saw her identity as a psychologist as a central identity of her life; in her words: “My professional identity and expertise and how I look at the world and how I solve problems, and the training that that provided me, is really invaluable.”

*Multiple and intersecting identities.*

Consistent with positionality theory, participants perceived that their multiple identities interacted to mediate their leadership enactment. Identities mediating leadership enactment could not always be separated from one another, and even though I have separated the identities into categories here for the sake of clarity, the effects of individual identities on leadership enactment were rarely clear. Instead, participants

conveyed that their whole range of identities contributed to their leadership, or that they consciously chose to hold back certain identities in certain contexts. Alice, Becky, Nimi, and Elizabeth perceived that their multiple identities made them higher education leaders with unique perspectives. Even as these identities competed, Alice, Becky, and Nimi perceived that they made them better leaders.

Alice spoke about her identities as an adopted, biracial, Catholic, heterosexual, married woman as interconnected. In her words:

I'm so lucky on so many fronts because I could have been a little migrant child. I could have been aborted. I could have been a child of a single mother. I could have been many, many things, but I'm this. And how wonderful and how lucky. I've had a tremendous education; I believe in trying to provide that for everyone, other young women. I want, no matter who that young woman is, I want her to walk across that stage with immense confidence and pride in who she is and what she can do for the world. That's what I try and focus on, that's what I try and bring to the table.

As a leader, Alice was committed to providing education for young women, especially students of color, poor students, and first generation students, because of her own background, identities, and experiences.

Similarly, Becky's identities as a smart and politically and socially liberal young woman were juxtaposed with her powerfully important identity as a farm kid. She perceived that people from rural backgrounds were sometimes not expected to be well-educated or socially and politically liberal. In Becky's life, these identities interacted to make her both a hard worker and an adept intellectual. She was smart, committed to

social change, and humble in her leadership enactment. She did not consider herself above menial tasks, but she was also a competent and thoughtful decision-maker.

Nimi gave a powerful example of her multiple identities becoming evident as she promoted financial education and financial literacy on her campus:

Out comes a bit of mom in me: I want to make sure that those students are doing okay. Out comes the 18-year-old girl who stood in the registration line. But also the administrator that knows that I can influence change and improve policy and practice here. And also to know that this is true to our . . . Catholic traditions at this institution; this is something we owe our students.

As she led campus efforts to promote financial education and literacy, Nimi perceived that she was influenced by her multiple and overlapping identities as a mother, as an alumna of the institution, as a person from a lower socioeconomic status, as an educated administrator, and as a Catholic working at a Catholic institution. Each of these identities layered to make her particularly passionate about students' financial literacy, and motivated her to be a leader in providing financial education to students on her campus.

Elizabeth noted that her sometimes conflicting identities made her a more thoughtful leader. With each financial decision she made for the college, she considered the ways that that decision would affect people's lives. For example, in considering a decision to encourage a staff member to retire, she thought about how it would affect his life, the lives of his family members, the lives of the staff members who would be asked to complete his work in his absence, and the future of the department. Elizabeth perceived that she was thoughtful about this decision because of her identities as a

woman, a family member, and a religious person who saw herself as responsible for her own actions.

*Identities left out of leadership.*

Even as participants noted that they brought multiple identities to their leadership roles each day, they all mentioned identities that they did not bring with them to work or that they downplayed in certain professional situations. When offering feedback on my planned interview questions, the pilot participant in this study used the metaphor of some administrators leaving particular identities “in the parking lot,” and I asked all eight participants which identities they leave in their parking lot when they come to work.

Becky and Nimi noted that they leave their social lives in the parking lot. Because of their leadership positions, they are unable to have close personal relationships with many people on campus. Maren (whose brother was an alcoholic) and Margaret (whose husband had cancer) had only shared these details about their families with a select few on campus. Hannah, Margaret, Lisa, and Elizabeth were all private about their religious beliefs. Elizabeth said she was not very self-revealing in her professional life and that all of the cabinet members at her institution “go through our lives on the surface . . . and we don’t always get down deep into where the person [is] and how they are doing.” Hannah noted that she leaves her “non-VP” self in the parking lot, the “more unguarded or casual” self, the “more sensitive side.”

Unlike the others, Alice resisted the metaphor of leaving identities in the parking lot. Instead, she described her bringing of her identities as situational:

If I’m at a donor dinner, I’m very careful about bringing my inner self out to the table. If I’m the only female in the room, I’m much more cautious about what I



say and how I say it. If there are no males in the room, I think I interact very differently. If I'm with my direct reports, I interact differently, if I'm with my peers at the cabinet level, I think I interact differently. It depends on the situation and what is appropriate and what's not appropriate. I think I have enough experience now where I feel comfortable doing that. I can assess the situation pretty quickly.

What does it mean that some of these women left identities in the parking lot, or that Alice assessed situations to determine whether it was appropriate to bring her whole self? Is this simply politically savvy behavior? Are all people expected to do this in professional situations? As women, were these leaders particularly wary of revealing all of their multiple identities through their leadership enactment? Alice and Nimi, at least, said that women had to be more cautious about revealing their identities than men did because their gender identities did not fit traditional expectations about leaders.

#### *Identities and Interactions with Others*

In this section, I share themes related to the study's second research question: How do women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges perceive that their identities shape their interactions with other members of the campus community? How do their interactions confirm and contradict their perceptions? I highlight findings in the following areas: mentoring and affirmation from others, developing and role modeling for others, the exclusionary nature of sports talk, location and authority, effectiveness, legitimacy and credibility, communication styles, presentation of self, and institutional fit.

*Mentoring and affirmation from others.*

The U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission identified lack of mentoring, management training, and opportunities for career development for women as key barriers to women in leadership (1995, p. 8), and a more recent study in K-12 education found that female superintendents experience less encouragement, mentorship, and sponsorship than do male superintendents (Wallin & Crippen, 2007). Two participants in this study (Elizabeth and Margaret) indicated that affirmation and mentorship were lacking in their experience. Elizabeth said, “I don’t get a lot of affirmation in my job. . . . I would say I get less affirmation today than I have in other jobs.” Elizabeth’s previous jobs were in the corporate sector, outside of higher education.

Margaret noted all but one of her past supervisors have “been male and they have not been particularly mentoring at all. In fact, a couple of them have been really terrible.” She saw mentoring as a gendered activity and added that women were less likely than men to have mentors who eagerly encouraged them to seek leadership positions:

I think that—I have had the experience anyway, and I think this is true of many women in my experience, is that women [must] seek out mentors, whereas oftentimes people will take a male under their wing and mentor them. “Oh, you’re presidential material.” Well, I’ve never had anybody say, “Oh, you’re vice presidential material.” I’ve never had anybody say that, at least not anybody in my immediate work environment, as in a supervisor or anything.

This lack of mentoring may be evident in participants’ goals for the future. Although only one participant (Maren) said that she was going to retire within the next few years, only one woman (Hannah) said that she intended to pursue a college presidency. The other six

planned lateral moves or were unsure of their future plans. And Hannah was able to name more professional mentors than the other participants, including a former colleague, now a college president, who suggested professional development opportunities and consulted with her on what it is like to be a new college president. Another mentor was an enrollment consultant who pushed her to think about being a college president. Hannah noted that she met each of her mentors in a work context:

I think in that setting they could see that I was eager to learn; that I was comfortable admitting what I did not know and asking their assistance/wisdom; that I was smart and competent—and the partnership or mentoring just grew from there. I do know that all of them brought up the idea of me being a college president before I entertained the idea myself—I remember being very surprised to hear it. It was like a seed that they planted; a statement of fact that I could be one, and then our work together just gave us experiences that helped my thinking and my skill base evolve naturally.

Hannah's mentors planted a seed in her mind, that she could become a college president, and they gave her experiences that helped that seed grow. If more participants had met mentors who actively encouraged them to achieve a college presidency, perhaps their professional aspirations also would have been pushed to the next level.

The other participants did find some affirmation in their leadership. Becky noted that her biggest affirmation came from former students who validated that her work was meaningful. Margaret noted that a national group for women in higher education had provided a wonderful and generous support network for her. Hannah said that she felt affirmed whenever she saw evidence that she was building capacity among her staff. She

gave several examples, such as when her framework for organizing her work was taken on by different departments, when staff she had advised found success in their lives, and when she left past institutions in a better place than when she came to them.

*Developing and role modeling for others.*

Even as they experienced limited mentoring themselves, Alice, Elizabeth, and Lisa conveyed a strong belief that role modeling was a central part of their leadership. Alice said that her role as a woman leader at her institution was to demonstrate “to students in particular how an administrator and a mother of young children can manage it.” She especially tried to encourage students of color, first generation college students, students from poor economic backgrounds, and other students who live on the margins; she identified with these students given her own background as an adopted, biracial person.

Elizabeth noted that she was not always aware that she was a role model for others, but because she was often the only woman in a senior management role, she was a default advocate for women staff. When Elizabeth left her last position, some of the women in the company came to her asking “What are we going to do now?” In her words:

They felt like because there was a female in a leadership role, they had an advocate. And I don’t think that I ever saw myself as an advocate, or I don’t feel like they used me in that way, but they felt like that was possible.

With a dearth of women in higher education leadership, this possibility for advocacy may be lacking, and women in lower level roles in higher education may feel unrepresented

by their leaders. And, women in leadership roles may feel a more urgent need to be advocates and role models for women staff members and students.

Lisa articulated that mentoring was important for all of her direct reports, and cut across gender lines. In her words:

I think that it is incumbent on us as leaders in an organization to be continually empowering those around us to strive to reach their full potential, and that my coaching to support their strengths and actively address their weaknesses is a key part of my accountability to the organization.

Lisa noted that she also tried to lead by example. She did not perceive her value of mentoring as related to her identities, but she did think it was especially important to do in a mission-centered organization like a liberal arts college.

Alice, Elizabeth, Hannah, and Margaret also talked about the importance of developing staff, especially at small liberal arts colleges that often were not as intentional about providing professional development opportunities for staff. Their mantras were “challenge and support.” I saw these claims affirmed in the actions of these leaders; as I observed, Alice encouraged a staff member to apply for a professional development trip. Alice noted that she encouraged staff to travel and “to experience culture opportunities” because she wanted to help diversify her campus. Alice attributed this commitment to her own identity as a biracial person and her experiences growing up in a racially and ethnically diverse family and in a diverse community. I also observed Hannah talk through how better to run a meeting with a staff member. Hannah said that she was always trying to build the capacity of her staff to succeed without her. She perceived that this leadership style came from her background in student affairs, where she had worked

with a new group of students each year and she was always trying to prepare them to succeed without her.

*Sports talk: Exclusion from the “boys’ club.”*

Alice, Margaret, Hannah, and Nimi each brought up an unexpected theme that affected their interactions with others on campus. The four participants observed that men staff members on their campuses routinely discussed sports. Alice, Margaret, and Nimi said that they were excluded from those conversations because of their gender and their assumed (and real) lack of knowledge in that area. Men bonded through these conversations and built informal relationships that then yielded them power and knowledge on work-related topics. As Nimi said,

All of a sudden I started to feel that I wasn’t part of the boys’ club. That the people around the table for enrollment decisions or financial aid or registration or what have you, they were all men. And they were buddies. They talked sports—I don’t know a damn thing about sports—and that was like their bonding element. . . . And I found that to be very challenging to be able to have other men share insights and connect with me or feel like it was okay for me to be in their club now. So that was tough.

In Nimi’s department, I observed a “boys’ club” which engaged in small talk and excluded the women in the department. Nimi said that she allowed time at the beginning of each meeting for them to get this small talk out of the way, before she called her entire group to task. Margaret claimed that networking around sports was especially prevalent in the Midwest, and that it was less prevalent on the West Coast where she used to work.

Of course, the issue was not that men talk about sports; it was that women were excluded from these team-building conversations. Hannah agreed that sports were an important bonding topic but disagreed that women were automatically excluded from these discussions. She recounted her own experience in a past leadership position in a city where baseball was very popular. She described herself as a “casual fan” of sports before taking this position, but during her first year there, she took to memorizing players’ batting averages, attending Spring Training, and faithfully reading the scores every morning because she “knew that the game would be a topic of discussion somewhere that day.” In her words:

It was an identity that I could (and willingly did) assume, unlike some of the other identities such as gender or race that are non-changeable. While I may agree with the participants that sports is an important bonding element, I vehemently disagree that they should throw their hands up and say “I don’t know a damn thing about sports.” It was a skill I needed to learn to be successful in that culture, and so I did.

Hannah was willing and able to develop sports knowledge in order to join conversations happening on her campus and build informal relationships. This was an identity she could learn in order to fit the culture of her institution and expectations of leaders at that institution. Alice, Margaret, and Nimi, however, were either unwilling or unable to take on this identity and participate in these conversations.

*Location and authority.*

At many of the meetings I observed, men tended to sit by men and women by women when given the opportunity. At one large cabinet meeting containing mostly

women, the three men sat at the same end of the table, farthest from the (woman) president. At another smaller cabinet meeting, the men all sat on one side of the table and the women on the other. What did it mean that men preferred to sit by men, and women by women? It was not really who sat where that mattered; it was the resulting interactions and flows of conversation that occurred that were significant. People sitting next to one another in meetings were more likely to engage in informal conversation with one another, and often formal decision-making involved players in particular locations at the table (e.g., those nearest to the president).

As noted above, Alice and Nimi, at least, were conscientious of where they sat at meetings. Nimi purposefully sat at the head of the table whenever she was leading a meeting. At cabinet meetings, Alice chose to sit next to two other administrators who held much decision-making power at her institution. And, at all of the cabinet meetings I observed, the president sat at the head of the table, regardless of gender.

*Effectiveness.*

As noted above, many studies have confirmed that women's leadership effectiveness is evaluated differently than men's leadership effectiveness (Eagly & Carli, 2007a; Eagly & Carli, 2007b; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Grogan, 2008; Nogay & Beebe, 2008; Yoder, 2001). I asked women participants in this study to evaluate their own effectiveness in their roles as leaders. Some participants chose to highlight ways in which they were particularly effective, whereas others talked about times when they were less effective in their roles. Becky noted that being a very good listener helped her be really effective within her job, and that sometimes her decisiveness and particularity about the way she wants things



done “gets in [her] way.” Nimi said that she felt more effective when working with her staff than when working with units across campus. Her role as an alumna of the institution at which she worked mediated her effectiveness in two directions: she felt particularly effective in her role because of her knowledge about the experience at that particular liberal arts college, but she sometimes found her credibility questioned by individuals on campus who knew and taught her as an undergraduate student.

Elizabeth was particularly blunt about her ineffectiveness in her current role. In a past job in a corporation, she had been recognized for creating a great amount of change in a very short time span. However, in her current position, which she had held for 2 years, she said that “I just have not connected with these folks in a way that I feel is beneficial for them or beneficial for me. . . . I haven’t gotten into my stride yet with how to move my team forward.” In my observations, I saw ample evidence that Elizabeth was very good at the task aspects of her job, but Elizabeth perceived herself as unable to effectively manage others who were not self-starters, and she was unable to teach her staff members to become self-starters. She saw her ineffectiveness in this context as related to her personal identities and the culture of the institution. In her words:

I left a corporate position where I made significantly more money to work for a not-for-profit where I felt I could make more of a difference in the lives of people. My religious background and my general desire to serve influenced that decision. Having been in a corporate role where commerce happened 24 hours a day and factories ran around the clock, there was no “off” time. Both my intense desire to serve and my past roles where the work was your life sum together to cause me to invest significant amounts of time in the college. Others at the college don’t come

from this same perspective. We recently had a conversation about the use of cell phones and whether we would want people to receive e-mail on their phones. Many of the senior leaders of the college were not excited about having to receive and respond to e-mail outside of work. I have had a smart phone for years and can't imagine not being connected 24 hours a day. I believe the differences in purpose and experience cause me to feel dismayed that people don't invest more in the work of the institution.

Elizabeth articulated that she saw her role at the college not as a job, "but as a lifetime endeavor in which I seek to contribute myself fully to improve the lives of people and create a better world." This perspective was informed by her identities and her experiences, and she perceived that it was not shared by other administrators on her campus.

*Legitimacy and credibility.*

As noted above, researchers have asserted that gender differences in influence and leadership occur because people presume that men are more competent and legitimate as leaders than women are (Carli & Eagly, 1999; Eagly, 2005; Ridgeway, 2001). These presumptions are complicated further by leaders' other identities such as race/ethnicity (Manuel, Shefte, & Swiss, 1999) and women's frequent status as "tokens" in leadership groups (Kanter, 1977). Participants talked about the ways that they have established legitimacy and proven their own credibility as leaders. They were intentional in the ways they presented themselves through language and dress, as will be discussed in the following sections.

Participants also established their credibility through education. Margaret mentioned that on the cabinet at her institution, the two women had Ph.D. degrees while the men did not. Margaret speculated that perhaps the women were more likely to need an advanced degree in order to legitimize their leadership, or perhaps the women were more recently hired, reflecting the changing demographics of higher education leadership and increasing expectations for degree attainment. She perceived that her own Ph.D. in psychology and her teaching experience provided her with a knowledge base and degree that were deemed credible by faculty members. She added that a Ph.D. in higher education administration was not viewed as equally legitimate. Among participants in my study, five had doctorate degrees and three had master's degrees. Four of the women had degrees in educational administration or a similar field, and four were trained in another discipline or profession.

Both Hannah and Elizabeth understood trust and credibility as being closely intertwined. Elizabeth's boss, the president of her institution, told me after a meeting with Elizabeth (that I observed) that she "has engendered a level of trust with the trustees previously unheard of." Elizabeth noted that this was because she was very transparent with information, perhaps because she came from a publicly-traded corporation. She said, "Credibility comes with people being able to trust you—if you can be trusted to do what you say you're going to do." Hannah perceived that her commitment to building trust comes out of her student activities background, where she had to establish credibility with a new group of students each year.

Credibility also was linked to age and experience. Hannah said that she was afforded more credibility as she got older and wiser, "for having been there, done that."

Others said they gained credibility working with parents and students because they had their own families. Hannah lacked that kind of experience, so she said she gained credibility in other ways, through reading and listening to others.

Hannah, Nimi, and Lisa agreed that credible leadership had to be authentic, consistent, and sincere. For example, Nimi said that others respected that she was committed to her institution holistically: “That it is where my life is, that it is where I worship, that I truly have the best intentions for this institution.” In addition, Lisa said that a combination of authority and sincerity helped her to be viewed as a legitimate and successful fundraiser.

*Communication styles.*

Much has already been written about gendered communication styles in the workplace (e.g., Tannen, 1995). While Tannen contends that women and men communicate differently, I observed women participants use a variety of communication styles depending on their other identities, the power relations present around them, and the context in which they were acting. While eight women officially participated in this research, I was able to observe several other women leaders as well in meetings on the eight campuses. I was impressed by the range of successful communication styles enacted by women in power. Most had friendly demeanors and encouraged personal stories and small talk, but some communicated more formally. Some used profanity to punctuate their remarks. All were very articulate, but some appeared nervous in meetings when they were disagreeing with others or standing up to a superior. Some were assertive in meetings, talking quickly and often, whereas others were quite tentative and quiet in meetings, conscientiously listening to others. Several of the participants engaged in side

conversations after formal meetings, (re)expressing their points of view to important stakeholders.

As noted earlier, one president in particular used very assertive language, asking others on campus to “tee up” and claiming her positional power: “I’m driving this ship.” I found this statement interesting both because she exercised her power in an unusually assertive way (compared to the other women I observed) and because she chose to use a sports metaphor to convey her point. Other women had told me that they felt sports talk was a masculine domain.

Most of the women used inclusive language, like “we,” “us,” and “our” when referring to their staff and their colleagues. At times, they indicated ownership of and responsibility for their staff, referring to “my” department or “my” staff. I noticed that two of the leaders I observed used the feminine phrase “I feel” to preface some of their remarks, and others used “I think.” The women I observed seemed to be more active listeners than some of their male colleagues, nodding more and indicating more verbal agreement. Given the range of communication styles I observed, however, I stop short of saying that these women exhibited some kind of unified feminine style of communication. Instead, I will say that the women I observed seemed highly attuned to their surroundings, their positions within groups, and the identity elements that they could bring to each situation. In short, the positionality of participants was fluid, and the women seemed to alter their communications styles to fit their positions.

*Presentation of self.*

Several participants commented that they dressed more formally than their men colleagues in order to assert their authority as leaders. In one meeting I observed, Nimi

sat up straight, wearing a skirt suit with black tights, fashionable boots, and chunky jewelry, in sharp contrast to the president with whom she was meeting. He leaned back on a sofa, drinking soda from a can, hands behind his head, wearing a striped shirt with the sleeves rolled up and khaki pants. The differences in dress and demeanor of the two individuals was striking, and I found myself wondering whether women leaders had to worry more about dress and demeanor than men leaders. Nimi noted that she dresses more formally than her men colleagues in order to assert her authority as a younger woman. She wanted people to be able to recognize the vice president in the room, and she assumed that people may not automatically identify her as a vice president unless she dressed in a particular way.

Most of the women I observed dressed both professionally and femininely. At least four of the participants in this study, and several of the other women leaders I observed in meetings, wore skirts, thus balancing their authority with femininity. In contrast, Becky seemed to downplay her authority in her dress and her presentation of self. She seemed to resist being formal or authoritative in the expected sense for a vice president. On the day I met her, Becky wore a casual long black dress with flat black shoes and a pink scarf. She used a lot of colloquialisms when speaking to me and others on campus. She clearly was smart and capable, but she did not make judgments about what a vice president should and should not do. For example, at a large meeting, Becky connected the projector cords for the president's presentation, bending and kneeling on the floor when necessary. A staff member commented that this was not her job, but that Becky often takes on things beneath her station. Becky also took time to change the water cooler outside her office and have lunch with her staff each Wednesday. She related all of

these activities back to her rural upbringing, where anyone who could do the work did it, even if it was a dirty job. These behaviors may take away from Becky's perceived authority, but in some ways, Becky was comfortable with that because she drew power from knowledge and relationships rather than her position.

*Institutional fit.*

Most often, participants perceived that identities that made them different on their campus were the most important to their interactions with others. And all participants indicated some identities that helped them fit in their particular institutional context. Most of the participants were White, an expected identity within their particular institutional environments, and all were raised in the Midwest. Lisa admitted that institutional fit made it less stressful to be in her community. Alice, however, both used this idea of fit in her interview and interrogated it, saying,

I've noticed from the moment I tried to hire, is everybody says, "They're going to be the right fit." Then I think, well then let's look harder. . . . Maybe that's my leadership style. I don't want people to get too comfortable. I do believe that we have to challenge and support.

Certainly fit helped these leaders embody the mission of their institution. For example, Maren's identification as a lifelong Lutheran allowed her to completely embrace the Lutheran mission of her college, as did Nimi's identification as a Catholic at a Catholic institution. Their participation in on-campus religious events allowed them, in Nimi's words, "an opportunity to engage with people and create relationships in a way that if I was Lutheran I wouldn't have that same engagement on campus."

I was able to observe directly the consequences that lack of fit had in Hannah's case. As an unmarried woman without children in her early 50s, Hannah was an anomaly in her community. Throughout the day, at least two individuals joked that Hannah could choose to marry her significant other on an upcoming vacation. Though Hannah did not intend to marry anytime soon, and she was clear about this with her colleagues, her lack of fit with institutional expectations (and those of the surrounding community) caused her to be the butt of non-malicious but persistent jokes.

Alice described her relationships with her men colleagues on campus in a particularly interesting way, calling them "cordial," "pragmatic," "collegial," "almost friendly, comfortable." These words do not evoke negative reactions, but neither do they describe fully positive and uncomplicated relationships. Similarly, Elizabeth described her campus environment as collegial but not quite friendly, and her relationships with her colleagues (all men) as only "surface"-level. I expect that these distant—or even strained—relationships are the result of Alice and Elizabeth not quite fitting the expectations of leaders on their campuses, Alice as a biracial woman on a predominantly White campus, and Elizabeth as the only woman on her cabinet, representing the traditionally masculine division of finance.

### *Identities and Power*

In this section, I highlight themes related to the study's third research question: How do women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges perceive their own power among other members of the campus community? How do they see their power as mediated by their identities? I focus on participants' understandings of power, their discomfort with the concept of power, and the ways they perceived their power as mediated by identity.



*Understandings of power.*

I asked each of the participants to define power and to describe the ways that they used power in their roles as leaders. Distinctions between power-over, power-from, power-to, and power-with were evident in participant's responses, as in past scholarship (Allen, 1999; Follett, 1995; Hollander & Offermann, 1990). Not surprisingly given past research on gendered definitions of power, women participants distanced themselves from power-over and power-from understandings in favor of power-to and power-with conceptualizations. For example, Maren equated power with struggle and claimed that people do not talk about power much at her "egalitarian" institution. Elizabeth used the example of a torturer in her explanation of power-over, saying that she rejects the idea that power can be successfully enacted from the top down. Alice differentiated influence from power, saying that power is hierarchical, easy to abuse, and coercive (a power-to understanding).

Overwhelmingly (7 of 8 participants), the women chose to define power as influence, or to replace the word "power" entirely with the concept of influence. This is consistent with prior research with women leaders (Trinidad & Normore, 2005). Influence is relational, according to Elizabeth and Margaret, and the followers and the leaders affect each other and persuade each other. Alice noted that influence is a nuanced concept, with no determined outcomes. Hannah said that influence is about forward motion and positive change. Elizabeth and Nimi stressed that it requires credibility and trust.

Only Lisa did not mention influence when describing power. She talked about relational aspects of power, saying that she depends on her peers and colleagues to

support her in her leadership role. But she also backed away from defining power at all, saying that power is mostly a perception that is placed on her by others rather than a real thing. Margaret also spoke about “positional power” as something that “people attribute to me, which may or may not be accurate. I don’t necessarily have certain power that people might wish that I did.” Becky, too, noted that power can be both real and perceived. She recalled when she was promoted from a dean to a vice presidential position on campus, and the “legitimization” of her authority and “empowerment” that occurred. Even though her responsibilities changed little, people finally perceived her as being in a position of power, thus affording her that power.

Leadership and identities are both co-constructed within relationships, and the character of power available also comes from those constructions. Several participants stressed that power is enacted in relationships (as Foucault [1984], Arendt [1970], and Allen [1999] conceptualized) rather than possessed by an individual. Becky noted that she uses power by giving it away and by sharing ownership in decision-making through consensus-building processes. Maren noted that “the power that I have is the power that people give to me, or the respect that they give to me because I think they trust that I know what I’m doing.”

Five participants also stressed that information—more than position—yields power. Becky, for example, said that power was “having information and knowing when to share it.” Becky was empowered by the information she gained by being a good listener; people told Becky things, and she intentionally was able to turn that information into power. Hannah said that her positional authority was “insignificant” compared to the power she was afforded because she is knowledgeable about enrollment management at

an institution that is dependent on tuition revenue. Elizabeth referred to colleagues using her for the information she has, and her using colleagues for the information they have. This concept is related to French and Raven's (1959) expert power, which has been shown to be positively associated with satisfaction and productivity in organizations (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989). In all, five of the eight participants described drawing on expert power.

*Discomfort with power.*

Several of the women seemed uncomfortable talking about power, replacing the word power with influence (like Alice) or saying "That's a hard question" when asked how they personally enact power (like Becky). Lisa and Maren seemed particularly uncomfortable talking about power. As noted above, Lisa declined to define power, though she said that it was something with which to be careful. Maren was unwilling to admit that power existed at her institution, or that she held it. It was evident, however, that her staff deferred to her in meetings, and that she had a nicer office and a reserved parking space. I believe that Maren's barrier in talking about her own power was the word itself. She was much more comfortable talking about her leadership style and the ways that she enacted leadership. This is consistent with earlier research findings with women superintendents (Brunner, 2000).

Hannah, the lone participant who aspired to a college presidency, seemed relatively comfortable talking about power. She equated the word with influence, but continued to refer to power throughout her interview. She articulated that she had power by virtue of her title as a vice president, her knowledge about enrollment management, and her ability to link her leadership role to the college's main source of revenue, tuition.

She perceived that her power at the institution had grown during the 2 years she had been in her leadership position because she had attained success in achieving enrollment goals. With each success, her power at the institution increased because others trusted her competence and relied on the revenue she helped generate. While she acknowledged that her increase in power had led to some jealousy—she said that some other community members perceived her as unduly influential—she did not seem uncomfortable with claiming the power she had earned through success.

*Power mediated by identity.*

Participants' conceptions of power were mediated by their multiple identities, and their enactments of power also were shaped by those identities. Participants described ways that their multiple identities simultaneously enhanced and diminished their ability to enact power. Alice noted that she sometimes muted herself when she thought she might be coming off as an angry woman; thus, in this way, being a woman causes her to limit her own power. However, she also noted that working at a women's college, she held more power as a woman because she fit the gendered expectations of a leader in this context. Alice's identities as a Catholic and biracial woman increased her credibility with religious students and American students of color, but she described the need to downplay her struggles with the Church and her Mexican identity when meeting with donors and college trustees.

Becky described a similar interaction of her identities in mediating her power. She noted that her identities as a good listener and someone trained in the student life area encouraged others to trust her and share personal information with her, thus providing her with the information she turned into power. But, her position as a vice president

sometimes reduced people's willingness to form personal relationships with her, thus limiting her access to the very information that made her most powerful. And, as someone who relied on this information for power, others' perceptions of her position kept Becky from fully enacting power as she defined it.

Margaret perceived that being a woman often had a negative effect on her power. She noted that women often were not heard as readily as men in meetings, and men sometimes got credit for ideas that initially came from women in the room but were ignored. However, she said that being smart, educated, and articulate garnered her more power, as did having a Ph.D. and experience in psychology. She also noted that she was able to leverage being a parent as a power-yielding experience because she was seen as understanding the situations of parents and students.

Hannah and Elizabeth highlighted the identities that allowed them to enact more power. Elizabeth said that her collaborative decision-making style helped her gain power and support for implementing decisions. Hannah said that her knowledge about enrollment and her ability to communicate complicated concepts had led to her success on campus. She believed that she had power because she has had success in her role, building people's confidence in her leadership and her vision.

On the other hand, Nimi focused on her lack of power, particularly with faculty. She perceived that her status as an alumna undermined their trust of her as a credible leader, as did her lack of a Ph.D. and her initial appointment as an interim vice president that was then made permanent without a national search. Even as she repeatedly showed results in her role as vice president of enrollment, Nimi articulated that some on campus continued to attribute her success to luck rather than competence.

Many of the participants noted that context also affected how identities mediate power. In one example, Alice noted that she did not fit neatly into a Latina or White category. In her predominantly White campus community, she was seen as a representative for women of color. But, when she worked with Mexican communities, she was perceived as having “White power” because she did not have the “right” accent. Her individual power, and perceptions of her place within systems of power, changed depending on the context. This suggests that the three aspects of positionality theory used to situate this study both mediate each other and mediate leadership enactment. Multiple identities, power relations, and context do not mediate leadership separately, but instead interact to determine how leadership is defined and enacted, which identities are brought to the forefront, and how power is defined and enacted.

#### *Leading in a Liberal Arts College*

In this final section of the chapter, I share findings related to the liberal arts college context. Many of the participants were committed to leading in a liberal arts college particularly. Six of the eight women had attended small liberal arts colleges for their own undergraduate education. Becky, Hannah, and Margaret had considered only leadership positions at small, private liberal arts colleges. Alice, Becky, Lisa, and Nimi explicitly stated their deep beliefs in mission elements of liberal arts colleges: to help students understand the world more holistically; view the world through multiple lenses; make connections between seemingly disparate pieces of information; and expand their critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills.

Alice, Becky, Elizabeth, and Lisa described how the liberal arts environment impacted their own leadership enactment. Alice noted that her leadership, informed by her multiple identities, was “an analogy for liberal arts,” saying,

Whether it’s me or anybody else, we all have multiple identities [just as] there are multiple disciplines. And so it’s taking a holistic look at the world, and understanding the world from multiple perspectives. So I think it’s the same. I see the world through multiple lenses, not just through a gender lens, not just through—I see the world through a liberal arts lens.

Similarly, Becky said that a small liberal arts college is “who I am; it’s how I understand my work. It’s the place that I love and the theories behind it that I believe in.” Elizabeth equated her own growth as a leader, a professional, and a spiritual person to each student’s “journey of exploration” at a liberal arts college. Lisa pointed out that “the liberal arts mindset” makes one “just so adept and agile at navigating whatever is sort of thrown at you,” an important skill for leaders to have in multiple contexts.

Other leaders were more compelled by aspects of the colleges only indirectly related to their liberal arts identities. Many of the women appreciated the small size and private control of the college at which they worked. Becky valued the fact that the liberal arts colleges at which she had worked (and studied) were communities “where people seemed to know each other.” She noted that this type of community “feels right” to her because she grew up in rural Minnesota where people knew each other for generations. Becky and her staff had lunch together every Wednesday in the campus cafeteria, and I observed them as they talked about their personal lives and their families and swapped

stories from their youths. At several of the other campuses I visited, leaders noted that they took time to eat with colleagues on campus most days.

I observed that all of the colleges I visited for this study had a rather flat leadership hierarchy. At each of the campuses, all of the administrators, staff, faculty, and students I observed were on a first name basis with each other. At Alice's institution, in particular, the cabinet meeting I observed included vice presidents of divisions as well as their seconds-in-command. All sat together at the cabinet table. Alice noted that the seconds were included intentionally as a way to share information across hierarchical boundaries and develop junior staff members for future leadership positions. According to Alice, it was the (woman) president's preference that brought so many participants to the cabinet table.

Maren appreciated the residential nature of liberal arts colleges and their commitments to serving traditional-aged students. When asked what she found compelling about the liberal arts experience, she replied,

First of all, it's the residential nature, the fact that you have [students] all here, and that you have students available for all the kinds of rich learning that's possible in and out of the classroom. . . . Probably there's a bit of having a traditional-aged population that you have at this formative stage of their lives, 18 to 22 year olds. We have a few non-traditional students, but very few. And so you've got this cohort captured. . . . Our students are here 100% of the time. And so I think it makes it easier for people like me to take our kids to basketball games, and to have people—have students over for dinner, and to have this more seamless sort of interaction across all those lines.



While many small, private, residential colleges are not liberal arts colleges, most liberal arts colleges are small, private, and residential, and the women participants in this study seemed to see those aspects of their colleges as linked to the colleges' liberal arts identities. However, both Elizabeth and Hannah were candid about the fact that they were unsure whether or how the liberal arts identity per se was important to their leadership experiences.

Maren also articulated that her college's Lutheran identity was a part of the college context which influenced her enactment of leadership and her identities. She said,

I think the fact that it's a liberal arts college of the Church, and the kind of egalitarian Lutheran kind of place it is, makes it easier to be a whole kind of person. . . . I'm a lifelong Lutheran and this is a very open, liberal, challenging, ecumenical kind of place. And that's me as well.

As discussed above, institutional fit was an important concept at many of the liberal arts colleges at which participants worked. To a large extent, Maren's Lutheran affiliation fit with that of her college environment, as did Alice's and Nimi's Catholic beliefs. Therefore, these identities could be expressed more fully in these college contexts than the identities that did not fit in the institutional environment.

All of the liberal arts contexts considered in this research, though different from each other, could be considered fairly homogenous environments (i.e., predominantly White, politically conservative or liberal, religiously-affiliated). This homogeneity contributed to the comfortable community contexts that most leaders described. For Maren, this fit made it easier for her to be "a whole kind of person" in her leadership role. For others, however, a lack of fit could serve as a boundary to how much of themselves

they could bring to their leadership enactment. For example, Alice, a biracial woman, described her race as sometimes invisible within her predominantly White college environment, and sometimes hyper-scrutinized.

While many of the participants lauded the liberal arts context for developing students' whole persons, it seems that these contexts provided little support for leaders to bring all of their multiple identities fully to their leadership roles, unless those identities exactly fit institutional expectations about who a leader should be. As noted above, many leaders left some of their identities "in the parking lot" when they went to work, especially those identities that did not fit with the expectations of their homogeneous college contexts. I expect that this finding would apply to other types of higher education institutions as well, but it illustrates an inconsistency between one of the aims of liberal arts education—fostering increased understanding of and concern for those who are different from oneself (Zinser, 2004)—and the enacted reality on some liberal arts college campuses.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I reviewed findings from this study of women senior administrators in liberal arts colleges. These findings depict women's leadership as dynamic and mediated by a number of overlapping identities while affirming that leadership is a gendered process. They show both a range of women senior administrators' perceptions of leadership and power in liberal arts contexts and some common themes in those perceptions that may result from the experiences and identities that participants shared.

These findings illustrate complex ways that women's multiple identities, the power relations surrounding them, and the contexts in which they work shape their leadership enactment, as positionality theory posited. In the experiences of participants, the three aspects of positionality—identities, power, and context—are not separate legs of a stool, but are interrelated concepts that mediate and complicate each other. For example, women's identities and the context in which they lead shape the ways they perceive and enact power, which in turn mediates the ways they enact leadership. Further, these findings suggest that women leaders' positionality is intentionally monitored and constantly negotiated by the leaders themselves in the liberal arts college context.

All of the study participants exhibited some intentionality when bringing their identities with them to work and sharing themselves with others. As Becky said, she was “conscientious of positioning [her]self” and she did it “intentionally and politically.” Alice said that she muted certain aspects of herself in different situations, and Lisa and Margaret described ways that they intentionally kept their personal lives separate from their professional roles. Elizabeth spent extensive time journaling about her various identities, considering whether they were all about past experiences or whether she could actively shape them into the future.

Participants also were intentional in their interactions with others. Becky noted a responsibility to remind herself of the privilege that comes with her White identity, and the importance of listening and supporting those who are marginalized even as she could not fully understand their experiences. Similarly, Margaret noted that she was “intentional and symbolically aware” of how she made connections with students who were not members of the majority.

Hannah was particularly intentional about being very organized so that she was always prepared for meetings. Reflecting her respect for staff time, she was “very intentional about getting the most out of that program, that staff [position], this day, this hour, or this meeting.” She continually was setting up better processes for next year and building staff capacity to succeed without her direct supervision. Margaret also was intentional about providing opportunities for staff to develop.

Finally, participants were often intentional in their uses of power. Becky noted that she was intentional about when she spoke in meetings, about when she took the floor and when she remained silent. Hannah described herself as intentional in the ways she accumulated success in order to build her power on campus. Nimi was reflective about the ways that her physical appearance—including her identities as well as the clothing she wears and the quality of her office—affected the way that her power was perceived by others. However, participants were also unintentional at times, such as when Becky performed certain tasks beneath her station as a vice president, or when two leaders prefaced their comments in meetings with the feminine phrase “I feel.” These unintentional behaviors may have detracted from others’ perceptions of their authority.

While all participants were intentional in many ways in their leadership enactment, these findings do not support the idea of a singular or unified “woman’s style of leadership.” Even though the study sample lacked the diversity of race and sexual orientation that I initially sought, it shows that even White, heterosexual women perceive leadership, power, and context in a multitude of ways. At the same time, this research shows that identities, even identities that I did not expect, such as identity as friend and identity as alumna, were perceived as important by participants to their leadership in a

liberal arts college context. This finding is consistent with previous research that suggested that the multiple identities that affect women's leadership are broader than the "usual" categories (Lumby, 2009). The findings minimize the possibility that any leadership experiences could ever be identity-neutral. In the next chapter, I discuss the importance of these findings for higher education research, theory, policy, and practice.

## Chapter Five: Concluding Discussions

In this final chapter, I first review the key findings of the study. Then, I discuss further complexities arising from the study. I focus on complexities related to leaders' gender identities, their racial and ethnic identities, and their intentionality in integrating their multiple identities into their leadership enactment. I end the chapter with a discussion of the implications of the study for future research and theory development, and for future leadership policy and practice.

### *Key Findings*

This study led to findings in five areas, as discussed in detail above. First, it provided insight into women leaders' understandings of leadership. Second, it revealed multiple and overlapping identities that participants perceived as important to their leadership enactment. Third, the study findings demonstrated how participants perceived that their identities shaped their interactions with other members of the campus community. Fourth, the study revealed how women senior administrators at liberal arts colleges perceived their own power. Finally, it provided insight about leading in liberal arts college contexts.

Study participants defined leadership using a variety of words and phrases consistent with transformational leadership. Transformational leaders motivate subordinates to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the organization and raise subordinates' levels of awareness about the importance and value of the group vision and the ways of meeting it (Bass, 1985). Half of the participants described leadership as situational and as a task requiring multiple tools. Participants disagreed

whether women had different, more, or fewer leadership tools than men did, and whether these tools caused women and men to lead differently.

Many of the participants relied on collaboration and consensus as leadership tools, and many of them cited relationships as an important part of their leadership, consistent with traditionally “feminine” styles of leadership. Their leadership styles seemed well-suited to the liberal arts colleges where the participants worked. In describing their own leadership styles, participants borrowed terms from leadership theory, and several of them had engaged with scholarship examining the ways that gender and other identities impact ways of knowing the world and making decisions within it.

Participants perceived that their multiple identities interacted to mediate their leadership enactment and to shape their interactions with other members of the campus community. Most participants agreed that their gender influenced the ways that their leadership was perceived. Most of the participants had had leadership experiences where they were the only women and where they felt that they had to prove their capability. Some of the participants shared particular strategies that they employed to combat the negative perceptions of women’s capability as leaders. Consistent with positionality theory, which asserts that multiple identities interact with power relations to influence leadership within a particular context, many of the leaders pointed to ways that gender interacted with other identities to mediate their leadership.

None of the participants discussed specific ways that their White racial identities or their heterosexual orientations mediated their leadership enactment. Participants did acknowledge that being White and straight conferred certain societal privileges, helped

them to fit traditional expectations, and enabled them to role model for the majority on their campuses.

Participants who were married described their partners as confidants, advisers, and supporters of their leadership roles. Unmarried participants disagreed about how this identity affected their leadership enactment but agreed that leadership roles were currently structured to presume that leaders are married, or at least partnered. Participants with children perceived that their identities as parents gave them credibility and cachet with college students' parents, helped them be understanding and respectful of staff members who were trying to blend work and family responsibilities, and helped them better understand the experiences and development of college students because they had observed their own children go through these experiences and developmental processes. Participants without children consulted scholarship and attended to others' parenting experiences in order to gain an understanding of these experiences.

No matter their age or years of experience, all participants agreed that both age and years of experience mattered to their leadership enactment and to perceptions of their leadership capability. Most said that their age had mattered less to others as they had grown older and thus grown into expectations about how old a senior administrator at a liberal arts college should be.

All participants identified as Christian, but they described a range of spiritual beliefs and a variety of perceptions about how those beliefs mediated their leadership enactment. All of them were working at private Christian liberal arts colleges, so religion was also a part of the context mediating their leadership enactment.



Most participants were articulate about the ways that their childhood identities and family values continued to affect their leadership years later. All of the participants had spent part or all of their childhood years in the Midwestern United States, and all of them said that their geographic background continued to affect their leadership by providing them inside knowledge of Midwestern values and culture. Those who had lived and worked outside the Midwest perceived that it gave them a new set of tools to navigate challenging leadership experiences. Participants had grown up in families with varying economic resources, but most of them noted that college had been an expected path for them. All participants had normalized their own socioeconomic class and had to stretch themselves to understand the situations of others from higher or lower economic classes.

Three participants perceived “friend” as one of their core identities. Each mentioned that they had some difficulty forming friendships at work because of their positional leadership. They asserted that leaders, particularly women, may have a difficult time enacting relational leadership in small liberal arts college environments.

All of the women perceived their professional training and experience as key mediators of their leadership enactment. Their professional identities influenced how they saw the world and how they solved problems, and their training provided them with many of the skills they brought to their leadership.

Several participants in this study indicated that affirmation and mentorship were lacking in their experience. Still, even as they experienced limited mentoring themselves, participants conveyed a strong belief that role modeling was a central part of their

leadership. With a dearth of women in higher education leadership, participants felt a need to be advocates and role models for women staff members and students.

Several participants observed that men staff members on their campuses often discussed sports, and that they were excluded from those conversations because of their gender and their assumed (and real) lack of knowledge in that area. Margaret suggested that this phenomenon was worse in the Midwest than in some other parts of the United States. Hannah asserted that this was an identity that could be learned in order to fit a campus culture better and tap into informal campus networks.

Participants noted that their multiple identities interacted to make them both more and less effective. Participants established legitimacy and credibility as leaders through furthering their education, engendering trust with their colleagues, and communicating and dressing in particular ways. They seemed highly attuned to their surroundings, their positions within groups, and the identity elements that they could bring to each situation. In other words, the positionality of participants was fluid, and the women seemed to alter their communications styles to fit their positions. Several participants commented that they dressed more formally than their men colleagues in order to assert their authority as a leader. They wanted people to be able to recognize the vice president in the room, and they assumed that people may not automatically identify them as a leader unless they dressed in a particular way. Most of the women I observed dressed both professionally and femininely, seeming to believe that this style would bring them power by adhering to traditional expectations for both “work wear” and “women’s wear.” Some participants were also conscientious of where they sat at meetings so that they would be perceived as leaders and included fully in decision-making.

Most often, participants perceived that identities that made them different on their campus were the most important to their interactions with others. All participants identified some identities that helped them fit in their particular institutional context. Fit helped these leaders embody the mission of their institution, and lack of fit led to distant or strained relationships with others on campus.

The study revealed how women senior administrators at liberal arts colleges perceived their own power. Participants distanced themselves from power-over and power-from understandings in favor of power-to and power-with conceptualizations. Several of the women seemed uncomfortable talking about power at all. Most chose to define power as influence, or to replace the word “power” entirely with the concept of influence. Five of the eight participants described drawing on expert power (French & Raven, 1959). Participants described ways that their multiple identities simultaneously enhanced and diminished their ability to enact power as they defined it.

Finally, the study provided insights about leading in liberal arts college contexts. Many of the participants were particularly committed to leading in a liberal arts college. Other leaders were compelled more by aspects of the colleges only indirectly related to their liberal arts identities, such as the small size, residential nature, or private control of the college at which they worked. All of the liberal arts contexts considered in this research, though different from each other, could be considered fairly homogenous environments, and institutional fit seemed to be an important part of the cultures of these places. As at other types of institutions, these liberal arts colleges provided little support for leaders to bring all of their multiple identities fully to their leadership roles unless those identities exactly fit institutional expectations about who a leader should be.

### *Complexities*

Several complexities arose as I compiled findings from this study. In this section, I focus on complexities related to leaders' gender identities, their racial and ethnic identities, and their intentionality in integrating their multiple identities into their leadership enactment.

#### *Gendered Leadership*

As detailed above, most participants agreed that their gender influenced the ways that their leadership was perceived, and they were aware of gender roles which had to be managed in relation to their leadership behaviors. Because of gendered expectations for women leaders, I observed that even highly effective leadership styles held challenges for the women participants who enacted them. The examples of Hannah and Becky are particularly illustrative. Both were single women without children who had been in their current positions for fewer than 5 years. Both had earned doctorates in higher education administration with an emphasis on student life. Yet Hannah and Becky employed different styles of leadership that led them to different successes and challenges in their roles.

Hannah described her leadership as pragmatic and intentional. She held expert power (French & Raven, 1959) because she held knowledge about enrollment management on a campus that historically had not managed enrollment well but was dependent on tuition revenue. She garnered power from past successes; every time her department met an enrollment goal and generated more revenue for the institution, Hannah was afforded a bit more authority on campus.

I observed that Hannah was effective in her role as a leader. She was admirably prepared for on-campus meetings. She was highly organized and rarely stressed about her busy schedule or upcoming tasks. She was reflective about her role at the institution and her goals for the future. She took time to respond to requests for information, agenda items, and input, and she was a good communicator, often putting her thoughts in written form. She was intentional about setting high expectations for staff and continually evaluating their performance, developing staff members for future leadership roles, and building staff capacity to take on future challenges.

Still, Hannah articulated that her successes in leadership did not come without challenges. Because Hannah was often better prepared for campus meetings than her colleagues, she often controlled the agendas of those meetings. Because Hannah took time to put her plans and opinions in written report form, her plans and opinions were often given more credence than those expressed orally. These increases in power led to some jealousy on campus, as some community members perceived Hannah and her division as unduly influential. Staff members agreed that Hannah was the most challenging vice president to report to at this institution. Hannah perceived that her staff members rose to the high expectations she set for them, but I inferred that not all staff members would relish her challenges, and that some staff members in other divisions may resent that they did not receive the same expectations, feedback, and development as staff in Hannah's division.

Hannah articulated that these challenges could be expected in any institutional environment, but I wondered how they related to her identities and specifically people's expectations about women leaders. Hannah was a woman on an all-woman cabinet. As

noted earlier, I observed that Hannah led differently from the other women in leadership positions on her campus. How might expectations about women's leadership on her campus—as formed via gendered assumptions and reinforced via the leadership enactment of other women on campus—have led campus constituents to be surprised or threatened by Hannah's style? How might Hannah's enactment of a non-traditionally feminine style of leadership enhance or detract from her chances of obtaining the presidential position to which she aspired? These complexities were constantly negotiated by Hannah as she enacted leadership.

Unlike Hannah, Becky was a relational leader. She described herself as a good listener, and she garnered power from the information that people shared with her in personal and professional situations. Becky maintained positive relationships with staff members in her division, and they seemed to admire and respect her both as a leader and as a person. Becky met with staff members for lunch on campus every Wednesday, shared personal stories with them, and encouraged them to swap stories of successes and challenges from their own job experiences within student life. I observed that Becky was also an effective leader, albeit in different ways than Hannah. She held expert power via the information that people shared with her, but she also held referent power (French & Raven, 1959) because others identified with her and thus were willing to be influenced by her. Becky's relational style seemed to enhance the ability and willingness of staff members in her division to work as a team.

However, like in Hannah's case, Becky's leadership style also brought challenges. Becky perceived that work friendships had become more difficult since she became a vice president at her institution. Now, people “managed” their relationships with her and

were less likely to share personal information with her. She articulated that people's perceptions of her job kept her from fully enacting her relational identity, and kept her from being herself in her leadership role.

Consequently, Becky enacted leadership by attempting to eliminate markers of her positional authority, since she perceived that those markers got in the way of her ability to gain information through relationships with others. She dressed in a simpler and more casual way than some of the other vice presidents I observed. Her speech was peppered with colloquialisms. She did not hesitate to get on her hands and knees to hook up technology for a campus meeting, or to heft heavy jugs onto the office water cooler. I perceived that these mannerisms, while endearing to me, may diminish others' perceptions of her as a legitimate leader. They are not the expected behaviors of a vice president, and these behaviors may keep Becky from the full authority she could be afforded as a vice president.

At the same time, I wondered how Becky's close and personal relationships with staff members may complicate her official relationships with them. How is it challenging to professionally evaluate one's friend, or the mother of one's Godchild? How does a supervisory relationship with another person preclude the possibility of friendship with that person? Are such challenges endemic to a small liberal arts college in a small rural community where administrators are also likely to be neighbors and friends?

As noted earlier, Becky's comments in her interview asserted that leadership in higher education may be constructed in such a way that relational individuals cannot be themselves. How might Becky's relational leadership mediate her ability to obtain future leadership roles? Are relational leaders welcome within higher education? And, since

researchers find that gender norms tend to lead women leaders toward an interpersonally-oriented or relational style of leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007a), how do women disproportionately face these challenges?

Higher education leadership remains a complex forum for women. Hannah's and Becky's cases reaffirm that leadership is a gendered process, even as women bring multiple other identities to their roles and enact diverse styles of leadership. It is important to acknowledge leadership as gendered in order to understand the particular challenges that women with myriad other identities face when they ascend to higher education leadership roles.

### *Whiteness*

As noted above, I had hoped to include participants representing a diverse range of races/ethnicities when designing the study. However, my final sample was predominantly White. Still, I had hoped that a predominantly White sample may lead to deeper understandings of how Whiteness influences leadership. As such, I questioned all participants about the ways that their racial identities mediated their leadership enactment, interactions with others, and enactment of power. Unfortunately, none of the participants discussed specific ways that her White racial identity mediated her leadership enactment.

Lisa, especially, engaged in "flattening of difference" (Leonardo, 2009) when talking about the ways her racial identity related to her leadership enactment. Flattening of difference occurs when one acknowledges human difference, but ignores the ways that systems of power make identity differences matter. As recounted fully above, Lisa told a story about her African friend and staff member, emphasizing the ways that they



resonated with one another and questioning the premise that race made a significant difference in leadership. I do not doubt that Lisa felt connected with her friend, but she failed to recognize that her own and her friend's daily experiences were mediated by their races and their geographic backgrounds. These identities informed what they cared about, how they thought, their ethics, and their values. And power was implicated in their relationship: after all, Lisa was the supervisor of her friend. But, throughout her interview, Lisa flattened difference in multiple ways, acknowledging "cultural differences" but ignoring the power systems that make identity differences matter.

Elizabeth similarly flattened difference when she said that "diversity in general is good" without fully examining the way she, as a White woman, was positioned on the otherwise White men cabinet. In her words:

I guess my thinking is that diversity in general is good. That people come from very different backgrounds and very different perspectives and will address issues in different ways. So having any type of diversity creates a better environment.

While I agree that diversity is good, calling on a token cabinet member to represent a diverse perspective can heighten the attention and pressure placed on this person (Kanter, 1977), thus making it more difficult for her to succeed. Elizabeth acknowledged that White people are privileged in the United States, but she did not discuss the challenges that people of color may face even after they obtain a leadership position. Further, she did not translate White privilege to her own experience on an all-White leadership team, and she did not articulate how her race and gender mediated the power relations present within the cabinet.

I believe that participants were aware of the discrimination that certain racial and ethnic groups face, but none of them articulated ways that their own White identities afforded them privilege within higher education leadership. They agreed that people of color were harmed by systems of oppression, but they left unexamined the ways they benefited from systems of privilege that normalize ideas of leaders as White people. White participants failed to consider their own experiences in higher education leadership as racialized, making invisible the ways that higher education leadership in general is racialized. Further research is needed to fully understand the complexities associated with Whiteness and leadership.

#### *Intentionality and Institutional Fit*

Findings from this study suggest that women leaders' positionality is intentionally monitored and constantly negotiated in the liberal arts college context. All of the study participants exhibited some intentionality when bringing their identities with them to work and sharing themselves with others. Participants also were intentional in their uses of power. Other recent research at a community college similarly found that women faculty intentionally managed impressions of their identities in the workplace by aligning their behaviors with gender roles (Lester, 2011). Lester found that these women expressed conflict between their identities and gender roles, and that the constant managing of impressions in order to fit expectations was both frustrating and exhausting. I observed that the intentionally monitored positionality of participants in my study was complicated and required a constant negotiation of identities, power, and context.

I am left wondering who, exactly, must be intentional about the identities they bring to leadership and who is free from having to constantly monitor their identities. I

also wonder which identities leaders have to be most intentional about, and which identities leaders can give less attention. These questions link back to the issue of fit. Leaders whose identities do not fit institutional expectations about who a leader should be must be more intentional about how they enact those identities in their work. Those leaders whose identities more closely fit institutional expectations can be less guarded about enacting those identities in their leadership role. Similarly, leaders must be more attentive to the way they enact those identities that separate them from norms about leaders in a particular institutional context, and less attentive to those identities that fit those norms.

To some extent, expectations about leaders cross organizational boundaries. Therefore, White, heterosexual, married men may have to be less intentional about enacting those identities within most leadership positions at United States liberal arts colleges because those identities match traditional expectations about who a leader should be. It is important to note, however, that expectations about leadership are contextual: leaders at Becky's college were also expected to be Christian, leaders at Hannah's college were more likely to be women than men, and leaders in student affairs were more often expected to be women. And, no one perfectly fits all of the norms surrounding leaders at all institutions.

Participants in this study perceived that identities that made them different on their campuses were the most important to their interactions with others, and all identified some identities that helped them fit in their particular institutional contexts. The importance of institutional fit is partially what makes it so hard to increase diversity among higher education leaders because leaders who are different from the norm are not

seen as good fits for the campus. Leaders who do not fit institutional norms must constantly monitor their identities and perhaps leave certain aspects of themselves out of their job in order to succeed (such as a relational identity). Or, they may be pressured to take on new (and perhaps ill-fitting) identities in order to meet others' expectations, thus contributing to future norms about who leaders are or should be. These pressures create a difficult situation for leaders who must intentionally manage their positionality.

Again, the examples of Becky and Hannah are illustrative here. Both Becky and Hannah described ways in which they took on identities—Becky as a Lutheran and Hannah as a sports fan—in order to better fit expectations about leadership in their organizational environments. What are the implications of this? Are all leaders called to change themselves in order to serve better as leaders within particular organizational cultures? Or do some leaders with particular unchangeable identities (like gender or race) that do not fit leadership norms in higher education feel more intense pressure to fit institutional norms in other ways by manipulating or morphing their identities that are changeable? How did Becky's and Hannah's choices to take on identities contribute to future expectations about who leaders are or should be?

Leadership research in higher education suggests that current expectations of leaders are aligned with socialized expectations of male behavior (Eddy, 2009; Nidiffer, 2001; Schmuck, Hollingsworth, & Lock, 2002). Therefore, gender remains an area where women leaders do not fit institutional expectations about leaders. Leadership research also questions whether women can successfully engage certain leadership styles that are perceived as masculine, even if the women leaders are willing and able. Women leaders are expected to exhibit both feminine and masculine behaviors in a contradictory blend

(Grogan, 2008). Gender norms guide women toward a relational and democratic leadership style, and women may experience negative relations and evaluations when they use a more assertive, directive, or autocratic leadership style associated with masculinity (Astin & Leland, 1991; Eagly & Carli, 2007a; Eagly & Carli, 2007b; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). All of this evidence asserts that even when gendered norms surrounding leadership are intentionally monitored and gendered leadership behavior is conscientiously enacted, women may be unable to fit institutional expectations of leaders.

Finally, I am left wondering whether fit plays an especially important role at liberal arts colleges. These are generally small, residential environments where students live, work, and learn. Many are homogeneous communities. These institutions, in particular, may rely on institutional fit (or conformance to institutional culture) to build a sense of community within a tight-knit living and learning community. More research is needed to understand how the concept of fit affects the experiences of students, faculty, staff, and administrators in these unique environments.

### *Implications*

This study has implications for higher education research, theory, policy, and practice. Several of those implications are discussed in this final section of the chapter.

### *Research*

Findings from this study illuminate rich areas for future research. Participants in this study were intentional about the ways that they brought their identities to their leadership. More research is needed to understand the ways that women leaders intentionally monitor and constantly negotiate their positionality. Future research could

examine who must be intentional about the identities they bring to leadership and about which identities leaders have to be most intentional. More research is also needed to understand the ramifications of constantly negotiating positionality. Studies could consider the ways that leaders' mental and physical health, job satisfaction, or effectiveness is mediated by the work of intentionally managing impressions of identities in the workplace. Such research must be attentive to context, since certain identities may be more or less important in particular settings.

Future research also could dissect institutional fit and the ways that this concept helps some feel membership in a community, excludes others from full participation, and forces others to constantly monitor how they bring their identities to their leadership. The idea of fit runs counter to the diversity efforts present on many college campuses within the United States because it encourages institutions to hire (and enroll) individuals that fit traditional expectations and that look and act just like their predecessors and colleagues. Researchers must consider the ways that fit serves as a barrier to achieving diversity goals within higher education. Such research could also examine how fit privileges certain groups in higher education and oppresses others.

This study used data collected from interviews with and observations of eight women leaders at liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwest in order to illuminate the ways multiple identities mediate women's leadership enactment. More research is needed that maintains an "awareness of multiple dimensions of identity and their intersections" (Dean, Bracken, & Allen, 2009, p. 6). Researchers must consider the multiple identities that leaders bring to their leadership roles, beyond the traditional categories of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Such research is needed within a variety of understudied

institutional types, including liberal arts colleges in other parts of the country, historically Black colleges and universities, or women's colleges.

This study included a sample that was predominately White and entirely heterosexual. More research is needed with lesbian leaders and women leaders of color, and with other leaders with non-majority identities, particularly in liberal arts college contexts where they have not been studied previously. Additionally, critical research on how majority identities, such as Whiteness and heterosexuality, yield privilege in leadership roles would help illuminate the ways that leaders who fit traditional expectations benefit from—and likely have a stake in maintaining—systems of privilege and oppression.

This study examined the leadership experiences of women administrators who served at the vice presidential level at their institution. While there have been many studies of presidential leadership within higher education (e.g., Bornstein, 2003; DiCroce, 2000; Lawrence, 2006; Nelson, 2007; Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2009), fewer studies have investigated the experiences of other college and university leaders. Further research on other leadership positions will enrich understandings of the full range of leadership practice in higher education. Research with individuals who hold tremendous power within educational organizations, but are not recognizable as leaders by virtue of their job title, also would expand understandings of what leadership is and who enacts it.

Finally, future research must account for multiple conceptions of power present within the literature and leaders' understandings. Studies could consider how power is understood and how it is enacted by people with various identities. Such studies must consider how conceptions of power are shaped by leaders' identities, and how

conceptions of power are limited by the expectations of others. Individuals may be forced to enact power in particular ways because other ways are unavailable to them. Future research must take care not to impose traditional definitions of power within research with individuals who understand and enact power differently. Allen's (1999) feminist conceptions of power may be particularly useful as scholars attempt to understand the multiple ways that leaders enact power.

### *Theory*

Future research using positionality theory may be especially enlightening as we seek to understand how women express the connections between their identities and their leadership. However, while findings from this research support the idea that positionality theory is applicable at liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States, I am left wondering what evidence could have proven that it was not applicable. Is positionality really a testable theory, or is it merely a construct for guiding researchers' thinking about identity and leadership? How could this theory be tested? I believe that positionality is a useful construct for guiding future research on identity and leadership, but this study illustrates the complexities of using positionality theory to inform research.

Similar challenges face scholars using positionality theory and intersectionality theory. The multiplicities of identity are very difficult to represent in writing, and they make comparisons among leaders and generalizations about leadership nearly impossible. How can future researchers present the holistic positionality of leaders in higher education? What possibilities do these theories really have for guiding future research? Future researchers must continue to grapple with these questions as they investigate the



importance of intersecting identities, power relations, and context to leadership enactment.

Findings from this study suggest that identities mediating leadership enactment go beyond the usual categories of gender, race, and sexual orientation. This has implications for applications of feminist theory, which often privileges gender over other identities, or couples gender with only one or two other categories of identity. This study also suggests that women leaders enact leadership in a variety of ways. Feminist theory, while positing that experiences are gendered, must avoid universalizing and essentializing the category of woman within studies of leadership.

#### *Policy and Practice*

This research also has implications for higher education policy and practice. Most participants reported that mentors were not readily available to them. In only one case did mentors encourage a participant to aspire to a college presidency. These findings suggest that higher education institutions must provide more intentional mentoring for women in senior leadership positions in order to encourage them to aspire to the highest level of leadership. National networks for women in higher education leadership may also play an important role in supporting future women leaders, connecting them to mentors, and teaching them to network effectively. These networks must acknowledge that women bring a range of other identities to their leadership and are not a single group with unified needs. Additionally, leadership preparation programs attentive to the ways multiple identities affect leadership enactment may help prepare women for the challenges they will face in leadership at liberal arts colleges.

Institutions themselves can hire more women, women of color, lesbians, etc., in leadership roles, to minimize tokenism. While many institutions have such diversity goals, in addition, institutions must interrogate the concept of fit and how it can undermine diversity efforts among students, faculty, staff, and administrators. This process will involve discussions of organizational culture and values, examination of expectations that community members hold for their leaders, and interrogation of the ways that higher education institutions continue to discriminate against those who challenge their cultures and values and attempt to expand their expectations for leaders.

Most importantly, policymakers must recognize that all people—students, faculty, staff, and senior administrators—bring multiple identities with them to higher education, and those identities affect their educational experiences. People should not be forced to hide or change their identities in order to fit in higher education institutions; instead, higher education institutions must change in order to ensure that people with a variety of identities feel welcome to bring their whole selves to their daily experiences. I believe that women leaders with a variety of identities and experiences can help bring about that change.

### *Conclusion*

As Ropers-Huilman (2010) articulated:

It is important to recognize that leadership is inherently shaped by the context in which leaders are acting. . . . Therefore it is impossible to offer generalized or absolute statements about the nature of women's or men's leadership. At the same time, scholars who have studied leadership have posited that gender plays a part

in decisions that women and men make about their leadership efforts. . . .

[G]ender is present in myriad ways in leadership experiences. (p. 175)

This research study adds to understandings of the confluence of women's identities and women's leadership, specifically in liberal arts colleges. I used positionality theory to inform my study, centering the importance of intersecting identities, power relations, and context. To my knowledge, this theory had not been applied previously to women leaders at liberal arts colleges. This research moves beyond studies of women's leadership that essentialize and universalize women, to illuminate the ways that women leaders with multiple and fluid identities within liberal arts college contexts, influenced by positions of power, construct leadership. I believe it makes valuable contributions to higher education leadership research, theory, policy, and practice.

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## Appendix A: Identities and Leadership Questionnaire

Welcome! This questionnaire is designed to help me learn more about you and your leadership position at a liberal arts college. Please answer the questions as completely and honestly as possible.

1. What is your professional title?
2. How long (in years) have you served in your current role at your current institution?  
*Only numbers may be entered in this field*
3. Do you consider yourself to be:  
*Choose one of the following answers*
  - a. A woman
  - b. A man
  - c. Transgender
4. Do you consider yourself to be:  
*Check any that apply*
  - a. Hispanic or Latino
  - b. American Indian or Alaska Native
  - c. Asian
  - d. Black or African American
  - e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - f. White
  - g. Prefer not to answer
5. Do you consider yourself to be:  
*Choose one of the following answers*
  - a. Heterosexual or straight
  - b. Gay or lesbian
  - c. Bisexual
  - d. No answer
6. Are you:  
*Choose one of the following answers*
  - a. Single, never married
  - b. Married
  - c. Living with a partner
  - d. Divorced
  - e. Separated
  - f. Widowed
  - g. No answer
7. Are you or have you been a primary caregiver for:  
*Check any that apply*

- a. A child or children (including biological children, adopted children, foster children, and stepchildren)
- b. Parent(s) or elder(s)
- c. Another adult(s)
- d. None of these

*If you indicated that you are or have been a primary caregiver for a child or children:*

8. How many children (including biological children, adopted children, foster children, and stepchildren) do you have?  
*Only numbers may be entered in this field*
9. How old are you, in years?  
*Only numbers may be entered in this field*
10. How would you describe your spiritual or religious beliefs?
11. Where did you grow up?
12. What was your socioeconomic status while you were growing up?
13. Throughout my research, I posit that our multiple identities overlap and intertwine to make up who we are. This questionnaire asked about your gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital/partnered status, parenting/caretaking status, age, religious/spiritual beliefs, geographic background, and socioeconomic class background. What other aspects of your identity are particularly important to who you are?
14. How do your multiple identities interact to shape how you lead?
15. How does the liberal arts context in which you work shape how you enact your identities?
16. How do your identities shape the power you have as a leader at your institution?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Your responses have been successfully submitted. I will be in contact with you via e-mail if you are selected to participate in further phases of this research.

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

As you know, for my dissertation, I am conducting research with women senior leaders at liberal arts colleges in the Upper Midwestern United States. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. Please review the informed consent statement. If you decide at any point in the process that you no longer wish to participate, there is no penalty for that decision. Do you have any questions before we get started?

I ask that you select a pseudonym so that I can refer to you in that way throughout the research process. In this way, I can keep your identity completely confidential in all of my notes, in my final dissertation, and in any subsequent presentations or publications. What would you like your pseudonym to be? (Please provide a first and last name.)

1. What brought you to your leadership position at this liberal arts college? Does it matter to you that this is a liberal arts college?
2. What is your definition of a leader? How would you describe your leadership style?
3. What is your definition of power? Tell me about the ways in which you enact power as a leader. *Note stress level.*
4. What are your favorite parts of your job? What are your least favorite parts?
5. Tell me about you. What identities are salient to who you are? How do those identities play a part in your leadership? How do those identities play a part in your interactions with others on campus? How do these identities matter in a liberal arts context? Specifically probe for:
  - a. How does your gender play a part in your identity? In your leadership? In your interactions with others on campus? How does it matter in a liberal arts context?
  - b. How does your race/ethnicity play a part in your identity? In your leadership? In your interactions with others on campus? How does it matter in a liberal arts context?
  - c. How does your sexual orientation play a part in your identity? In your leadership? In your interactions with others on campus? How does it matter in a liberal arts context?
  - d. How does your married/partnered status play a part in your identity? In your leadership? In your interactions with others on campus? How does it matter in a liberal arts context?
  - e. How does being a parent/not having children/being a caregiver for your parent/etc. play a part in your identity? In your leadership? In your interactions with others on campus? How does it matter in a liberal arts context?
  - f. How does your age play a part in your identity? In your leadership? In your interactions with others on campus? How does it matter in a liberal arts context?
  - g. How do your spiritual/religious beliefs play a part in your identity? In your leadership? In your interactions with others on campus? How does it matter in a liberal arts context?

- h. How does your geographic background play a part in your identity? In your leadership? In your interactions with others on campus? How does it matter in a liberal arts context?
  - i. How does your socioeconomic class background play a part in your identity? In your leadership? In your interactions with others on campus? How does it matter in a liberal arts context?
6. How do your multiple identities interact to mediate your leadership enactment? How do they interact to play a part in your interactions with others on campus? How do they interact to make you an “effective” leader, in your own mind? How do they interact to make you a less “effective” leader, in your own mind?
  7. Tell me about your educational and occupational history. How do your past educational and occupational experiences shape your leadership enactment? *How about other life experiences?*
  8. How does the context in which you work shape how you enact your identities? How does the fact that this is a liberal arts college shape how you enact your identities? How you lead? *What aspects of yourself do you leave in the parking lot?*
  9. Given your definition of power, tell me about how your power is mediated by your identities.
  10. What do you think it means to be a legitimate leader on this campus? How is your legitimacy as a leader mediated by your identities? (Prompt: “Legitimate” leaders may be accepted as spokespersons for their communities, exert influence in groups, and be perceived as competent by others.)
  11. What are your professional goals for the future?  
*Do you wait for permission to attain the top position?*
  12. Who are your mentors? Who gives you affirmation?
  13. Project into the future. You’re at your retirement celebration. What do you want people to say about you and your work as a leader?
  14. I am especially interested in the ways in which your multiple and overlapping identities have shaped your leadership enactment at this liberal arts college. Given this purpose, is there anything else you’d like to tell me?

Thank you for participating in this study. I will share a copy of this interview with you once I have transcribed it, so that you can check that the record of this interview matches your intent, and so that you can add to or clarify your remarks if you like. Where would you like me to send the transcript?

## Appendix C: Institutional Review Board Approval

From: irb@umn.edu  
To: enger011@umn.edu  
Date: Tue, Sep 14, 2010 at 8:53 AM

The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2 SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS; STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS; OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

Study Number: 1009E89135

Principal Investigator: Kathryn Enke

Title(s): Positionality and Enacted Leadership: Women in Senior Level Administrative Positions at Liberal Arts Colleges

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This e-mail confirmation is your official University of Minnesota RSPP notification of exemption from full committee review. You will not receive a hard copy or letter. This secure electronic notification between password protected authentications has been deemed by the University of Minnesota to constitute a legal signature.

The study number above is assigned to your research. That number and the title of your study must be used in all communication with the IRB office.

Research that involves observation can be approved under this category without obtaining consent.

**SURVEY OR INTERVIEW RESEARCH APPROVED AS EXEMPT UNDER THIS CATEGORY IS LIMITED TO ADULT SUBJECTS.**

This exemption is valid for five years from the date of this correspondence and will be filed inactive at that time. You will receive a notification prior to inactivation. If this research will extend beyond five years, you must submit a new application to the IRB before the study's expiration date.

Upon receipt of this e-mail, you may begin your research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at (612) 626-5654.

You may go to the View Completed section of eResearch Central at <http://eresearch.umn.edu/> to view further details on your study.

The IRB wishes you success with this research.