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Support from Above the Glass Ceiling: Narratives of Women as University Student Leaders

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Support from Above the Glass Ceiling:

Narratives of Women as University Student Leaders

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BY

Rebecca Schwartz

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Narratives of Women as University Student Leaders

Rebecca S. Schwartz

Eastern Illinois University

Abstract

Using qualitative methodology, the researcher examined motivations, social support networks, and challenges college women face in student leadership positions. Four semi-structured interviews were conducted at a midsized university in the Midwest with college women in various positions of organizational leadership. The researcher identified motivational factors for women to apply for leadership positions as well as described the social support network that exists for college women in positions of leadership. Challenges college women face in achieving higher leadership positions were also identified. Lastly, recommendations were made for student affairs professionals and women in leadership based on the research findings.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the hard-working, passionate, and inspiring women who are trying to make their world a better place, including the individuals who participated in this study. To the young girls who are finding their passions and figuring themselves out, and learning how to pursue them despite all odds. To the women who continue to persist and resist. To the women who show up, every day, for the people they love. I see you, and I am grateful for you.

I'd also like to dedicate my thesis to the wonderful advisors, parents, and mentors who are supporting these women as they make their way through challenges and celebrations. To the individuals who advocate for these multi-faceted, unique, complex women. The work you do is important. (But you probably don't need me to tell you that. You see it every day when you work with these bright individuals.) I feel fortunate to have been surrounded by such role models in my life.

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To all of my housing supervisors. You all introduced me into the world of residence life and student affairs, and I wouldn't be writing this without your encouragement to step into the field. Thank you to my UWL supervisors, Colin, Allyson, Megan, and Sam for teaching me to 'embrace the awkward,' that there is immense strength in softness, and to always trust myself. Thank you Kelsey for seeing the potential in me and guiding me through my first year of graduate school. Pat, thank you for your encouragement and helping me grow as a professional, especially as I get ready for my job search. Four years ago I never thought I would be getting my master's degree, and I am so grateful for having all of you in my corner. Thanks to all my Pem-Triad pals for their endless support and trips for cheese sticks, and to the amazing grads and cohort members I've gotten to know along the way. We did it!

Thank you to my family, who put up with me being away from home far much longer than anyone ever intended. Thank you Mom for the video calls at all hours of the night, just to check up on me. Thank you Dad, for believing in me and saying so much in just a few words. I'm so grateful for how hard you work so Jen and I could go to college

and pursue our goals. Jen, I'm so proud of you, and I hope that I do you justice by being

your big sister. Thank you for always having my back and providing me with a reason to

laugh just when I need it.

Lastly, thank you to all of the amazing women who have influenced my life. Deb,

you especially taught me to find my independence, and I'm forever grateful.

Nevertheless, we persist.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Despite accounting for a majority of the undergraduate population, a significant gender gap appears in university leadership positions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). According to statistics prepared by Johnson (2017) for the American Council on Education (ACE), women accounted for only 30% of presidential positions at degree-granting institutions in 2016. This percentage is present not only at the administrative level, but also in student leadership positions (Miller and Kraus, 2004). The number of women enrolling in higher education has been on the rise, with many universities seeing more women enrolling than men (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017).

However, this ratio is not necessarily reflective of college student leader demographics. One possible explanation for this gap is that women and girls are not receiving the credibility or support that is beneficial when pursuing a leadership position. Understanding the relationship of social support and leadership identity may be a key factor in understanding how women are seen as leaders. This study aims to explore how college women in leadership build their social support networks and how they identify as leaders on their campus.

Personal Statement

As a future student affairs professional, I have taken some time to reflect on my experiences that have led me to my career path and passion areas. My values of servant leadership and experiential learning that I found in my graduate program and housing assistantship echo back to my involvement in the 4-H youth organization. 4-H is similar

to the scout's programs but differs in having governmental support through research and educational foundations for youth ages 6-19. I became a 4-H member when I was 8 years old and was painfully shy and unsure of myself. However, that changed as I progressed in my involvement and found mentors who supported me and challenged me to progress as a leader of my club. I became a camp counselor and eventually a junior camp director, president of my club, and involved on the county programming board of the dog training project. I owe these leadership experiences to a handful of female leaders, whom I saw as role models. I even started my undergraduate career thinking I would become a 4-H youth development educator upon finishing my bachelor's degree because I loved the idea of giving back to the community that has given me so much. My leadership involvement led me to leadership opportunities within my residence hall community when I came to college. Eventually, this passion for leadership development translated to my undergraduate job as a resident assistant and getting my master's degree in student affairs.

Now looking back, I recognize that not only was 4-H an important part of my life, but the women I met in that organization served as a huge network of support for me to become a leader in student affairs. In a time when women are still being challenged as leaders and gender norms permeate our culture, it is important to recognize that I am fortunate to have found women to lift me up. Through this research, I wanted to see if my experiences were similar to other women student leaders, and what changes can be made so women feel supported and encouraged to become leaders on their campus.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

While strides have been made for gender equity, many obstacles still exist for women entering college. Gender roles determine fields of study and how women are perceived as leaders (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, and Woehr, 2014). These experiences as student leaders can set students up for success later in their careers (Burkinshaw and White, 2017). The purpose of this study is to explore what motivates women to become student leaders on campus and what systems of support exist for women achieving leadership roles in college and after graduation.

Thus, the following research questions are posed:

1. What motivates college women to seek leadership positions?

2. What systems of support exist for women as college student leaders?

3. What challenges do college women in leadership face in relation to their roles?

Significance of the Study

As more women are becoming college-educated each year, a bottle-neck effect is occurring in the number of women holding leadership positions throughout universities (Ibarra, Ely, and Kohl, 2013). This study can identify gaps in support networks, policies that would deter women from seeking student leadership positions, or other challenges that factor into a woman's leadership experience. Understanding what factors influence a woman's drive to become a student leader can be beneficial when promoting these positions. Universities will be able to find action plans that are working to generate woman leaders, as well as evaluate how those leadership positions prepare students toward their future leadership opportunities.

Limitations of the Study

While this study aimed to understand collegiate women's leadership, the scope of this research is limited to the number of participants and their experiences. Understanding my biases as a researcher, it is important to note that I have a lens of a white, cisgender, educated woman and the privileges and challenges that come with those identities. Because of my privileged scope, I attempted to interview a diverse population of women and recognized that my experiences may be different than a woman of color or queer woman. While the university from which participants were recruited from was racially diverse, the participants who volunteered were more homogenous and not fully representative of the campus population. Some women who were interviewed for this study did not find their gender identity to entirely be a factor in how they perceived their leadership abilities or propensity towards higher-level careers.

The findings from this study may not translate to other universities with different demographics. This university is considered a midsized public institution in the Midwest, and the sample could reflect what is unique to this specific university rather than universities that are more varied in size or geographic location.

Definition of Terms

Leadership position. Holding an executive officer position in a registered student organization (RSO) recognized by a university.

Woman. Following research conducted by Domingue (2014), the term woman "refers to persons who identify as having a collective sexualized or gendered experience as a woman" (p. 9). This can be defined as any cisgender, trans, or nonbinary femme person. There is some intentionality with using the term woman instead of female, as

female refers solely to biological sex. Previous research may use the term female instead of woman, and will be reflected in the literature review.

Summary

As noted in works of Domingue (2014, 2015) and Cousineau and Chambers (2015), women in positions of leadership or employment at universities face certain challenges. This study aims to understand what motivates women to face these challenges and what systems of support exist to overcome them. The scope of this study will be narrowed to the specific campus. In order to understand how this study will fit into the surrounding literature, a review of literature will be conducted next.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

There is a great body of work surrounding leadership theory and practice for developing leadership. Rosch and Anthony (2012) and Owen (2012) highlighted different leadership and student development theories that work well on college campuses. Other researchers have identified gender differences and challenges faced by women in leadership (O'Dell, Smith, and Born, 2016). Self-esteem and support for women's leadership has also been beneficial for learning about student leadership (Domingue, 2014, 2015).

Leadership Theory

Leadership pedagogy is important for student affairs practitioners to know so that they may best support their students and the leadership potential of each student. Rosch and Anthony (2012) stated, "educators who apply this knowledge [of leadership theory] while building a powerful learning environment for students create powerful opportunities for students to grow as emerging leaders" (p. 37). Throughout the last century leadership theory has evolved from an industrial model to a postindustrial, more relational focus on leadership, and lastly, modern practices and theories that provide a combination of the two. Popular leadership theories student affairs professionals use today include Relational Leadership Model (Komives, Lucas, and McMahon, 2007) the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (Higher Education Research Institute, 2007), and the Leadership Challenge (Kouzes and Posner, 1997).

Industrial leadership theory. Some conventional/industrial leadership theories cited by Rosch and Anthony (2012) include the trait-based approach, style approach, and

the situational/contingency approach. These theories are typified by the description of a

successful leader within an industry setting and used more commonly in the late 19th

century into the early 20th century (Rosch and Anthony, 2012).

The trait-based approach was one of the first theories to understand leadership.

Northouse (2013) explained, "they focused on identifying innate qualities and

characteristics possessed by great social, political, and military leaders ...It was believed

that people were born with these traits, and only the 'great' people possessed them" (p.

19). According to Northouse, some traits include intelligence, self-confidence,

determination, integrity, and sociability. Strengths of this approach include its century of

study, clear benchmarks, and focus on the individual leader. Weaknesses include a lack

of definitive traits, disregard for certain situations out of the control of the leader's

personality, and inability for people to easily or quickly change their traits (Northouse,

2013).

The style approach showcases the actions and behavior of a leader (Northouse,

2013). According to Northouse, "...the styles approach is to explain how leaders combine

these two kinds of behaviors [task and relationship] to influence subordinates in their

efforts to reach a goal" (p.75). It is believed that certain levels of orientation towards

relationship goals and task goals require certain corresponding behavior from a leader

(Northouse, 2013). Strengths of this approach include some flexibility in how a leader

can change their style, whereas the traits approach is more fixed and based on

personality. However, there were limitations as well. According to Northouse, research is

inconclusive in determining what orientation is universally best in every situation.

Northouse also claims that this approach incorrectly implies that a high task-orientation and high relationship-orientation is the most effective leadership style.

Last of the industrial theories, is the situational approach. Northouse explains that leaders must adapt and change approaches based on the situation, motivation, and other people involved. Other styles based on situation are placed on a spectrum of low to high supportive behavior and low to high directive behavior. These styles include delegating, supporting, coaching, and directing (Northouse, 2013, p. 100). Strengths of this approach include its practicality, its ability to allow leaders to change approaches, and focus on followers and situation. Some criticisms include its lack of research and justification.

These theories are helpful in understanding leadership from a historical lens. However, they are also criticized in their explanation of the "Great Man" theory and disregard for the experiences of women and/or people of color. As with trait-based approach, industrial theories put specific people of historical significance as the ideal leader, many of which are wealthy, white men.

Postindustrial leadership theory. Postindustrial leadership theories serve as a more humanistic and relationship-based approach to theory (Rosch and Anthony, 2012). Postindustrial theories include transformational leadership and servant leadership (Rosch and Anthony, 2012). These kinds of theories are exemplified by a focus on followership and serving the members of a group as much as a singular leadership. Postindustrial leaders also take into account what the members need in relation to their social identity. Per Rosch and Anthony (2012), "social justice should be an explicit goal of an effective postindustrial leader" (p. 42).

Transformational leadership is typified as inspiring others to lead and think creatively (Kouzes and Posner, 1997). The focus of transformational leadership is on the relationship between leaders and followers. These leaders consider ethical concerns and are held to a higher moral standard. Rosch and Anthony (2012) describe transformational leadership as "mutually beneficial processes with ethical ends" (p. 42). Northouse (2013) defines this type of leader as one who "sets out to empower followers and nurture them to change" (p.199). Other strengths include its emphasis on the followership and expands leadership to be less transactional (Northouse, 2013). However, Northouse also finds that this style lacks clarity and validity, as well as focusing on a more trait-based approach.

Servant leadership requires the leader to focus on doing what is best for the organization and those involved. Characteristics of servant leaders include: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and community building (Northouse, 2013, p. 222-223). Instead of focusing on the leader directing the group, servant leadership shifts its focus on the leader taking direction from the group and seeing how to best empower others. Strengths of this theory include its addition of altruism and altered power dynamic, as well as the realization that it is not fitting in all settings. Northouse also cites criticisms to this theory, such as the paradoxical nature in that emphasis on serving others is usually viewed as a tenet of followership. Additionally, this theory is more prescriptive than descriptive, idolizing a utopian ideal (Northouse, 2013). This theory, while good on paper is difficult to achieve in practice.

Current leadership models in higher education. Rosch and Anthony (2012) cite three popular models of leadership used in higher education. The Relational

Leadership Model (Komives, et al., 2007) the Social Change Model of Leadership

Development (Higher Education Research Institute, 2007), and the Leadership Challenge

(Kouzes and Posner, 1997) combine aspects of industrial and postindustrial leadership

theories and have become more widely used in higher education. These theories provide

insight as to how student affairs practitioners can use leadership theory and apply models

to practice.

Komives, et al. (2007) developed the Relational Leadership Model, which

describes leadership as "a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to

accomplish positive change" (p. 74). This model focuses on building a sense of

community to include and empower others to creatively and effectively find solutions to

issues. Pillars of leadership in this model include finding purpose, establishing an

inclusive environment, empowering followers, and making ethical and process-oriented

decisions to invoke positive change (Komives, et al., 2007). Relational leadership is a

process-based model, and values cooperation over competition, making meaning and

understanding shared experiences, and reflection after a task has been accomplished

(Komives, et al., 2007). Some criticism to this model is that it is an 'aspirational' model,

therefore too idealistic and does not incorporate previous leadership practices (Rosch and

Anthony, 2012). This model is widely effective for university campuses, and residential

spaces especially, because it puts inclusive community building at the center of its work,

and students are able to learn interpersonal skills and ethical decision-making (Rosch and

Anthony, 2012).

The Social Change Model is set up in three different perspectives: the individual

domain, the group domain, and the community domain (Higher Education Research

Institute, 2007). Each domain has certain skills associated with it, dubbed the "seven

C's." As an individual, students should be conscious of themselves, congruent in actions,

and committed to their values (Rosch and Anthony, 2012). In the group perspective,

students focus on collaboration, finding a common purpose, and approach controversy

with civility. Lastly, communities are to be focused on change as the end-goal and value

citizenship among individuals (Higher Education Research Institute, 2007). This model

focuses on creating positive change, but unlike the relational model, incorporates both the

individual and societal levels as well as the interaction between the three to understand

how change is to be implemented. Assessment models such as the Socially Responsible

Leadership Scale (SRLS) can be used to find benchmarks in current university leadership

(Rosch and Anthony, 2012).

Lastly, the Leadership Challenge from Kouzes and Posner (1997) has evolved

from its previous form to fit with student leadership. According to Rosch and Anthony

(2007), "this model describes five overall behaviors that successful leaders should display

when working within contemporary organizations: Modeling the Way, Inspiring a Shared

Vision, Challenging the Process, Enabling Others to Act, and Encouraging the Heart" (p.

43). This model focuses on finding leadership qualities in everyone, and empowering

simple, everyday leadership. Per Kouzes and Posner (1997),

> contrary to the myth that only a lucky few can ever decipher the mystery of
>
> leadership, our research has shown us that leadership is an observable, learnable
>
> set of practices…if there's one singular lesson about leadership that can be drawn
>
> from all of the cases we've gathered, it's this: leadership is everyone's business
>
> (p. 16).

In broadening their research, Kouzes and Posner have created the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI), an assessment instrument for universities, to encompass and test their students' leadership behaviors (Rosch and Anthony, 2012).

While many of the previous leadership theories have been helpful in understanding leadership throughout the last century, few have fit comfortably in the evolving culture of university campuses. Student affairs practitioners may benefit from understanding more modern approaches to leadership or adapting student development theory specifically for leadership practices.

Student Leadership Development and Theoretical Perspectives

Guiding student leaders through their growth of personal identities and behaviors impacts their leadership development. After completing their investigation of the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), a quantitative analysis of over 50,000 students at 52 colleges and universities, Dugan and Komives (2007) used the social change model of leadership to understand outcomes of institutional impact. The researchers found that factors such as gender, pre-college experience, racial and ethnic identity, and mentorship are indicative of higher leadership capacity (Dugan and Komives, 2007). Ten recommendations were created by Dugan and Komives (2007) for campus leadership programs including, "discuss socio-cultural issues… get students involved in at least one organization…focus on members, not just positional leaders, and develop mentoring relationships" (p. 17-18). These practices are helpful in continuing to build student leadership capacity, as well as using the social change model as a framework for understanding leadership capacity.

As student affairs practitioners, connecting student development theory to leadership helps us conceptualize how we develop student leaders. Owen (2012) stated, "theories of student learning and development are particularly important in leadership education because they make prescriptions about how people can adopt increasingly complex ways of being, knowing, and doing-essential forms of development for leadership learning (p. 17). The leadership identity development (LID) theory and model creates a framework in which student affairs professionals can "conceptualize leadership as a developing social identity" (Owen, 2012, p. 25).

This theory is comprised of six stages: awareness, exploration, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration (Owen, 2012). Each stage is paired with a stage of self-development and is influenced by group factors and perceptions. These stages can be also compared to other student development theories, such as Baxter Magolda's ways of knowing and Josselson's identity development (Owen, 2012 and Josselson, 2005). Josselson's (2005) theory on women's identity development is split into four groups where there is either exploration or no exploration, and either commitment or no commitment. Women in the 'drifters' group have a lack of both exploration and commitment and would rarely be considered leaders in this stage (Josselson, 2005).

It is thought that the first two stages of leadership development occur before a student enters college (Owen, 2012). This stage connects with Baxter Magolda's first stage of self-authorship, following formulas, as well as Josselson's (2005) group, guardians (Owen, 2012). Both of these theories describe students who rely on an authority figure to direct them and set expectations. Leaders in these stages would rely heavily on their advisor, and potentially would avoid leadership positions.

Owen (2012) identified that in stage three, leader identified, leadership is considered hierarchical: either a student identifies as a leader or a follower. As women enter college they may not be interested in leading a group but will explore different opportunities and may join as a member. This coincides with Baxter Magolda's (2004) second step in self-authorship of meeting a crossroads and Josselson's (2005) group of searchers. Students in this stage of leader identified are beginning to identify as a leader or understand what it means to be a leader. They are beginning to question the formulas their parents or another authority figure has given them but may not see themselves as ready for formal leadership and choose to be a member of an organization instead.

The fourth stage, leadership differentiated, views leadership as anyone who contributes to a group, which opens up the way for informal leaders to develop a more prominent leadership identity (Owen, 2012). In comparison to the other student development theories, students in this stage have explored their options and views of leadership, and feel committed to their decisions, as Josselson (2005) describes path makers, the fourth and final group of her identity theory. Additionally, students are becoming the author of their own life (Baxter Magolda and King, 2004). In this case, a woman may join a sorority and begin to get involved with various programs the organization promotes and coordinates, over time she may see herself as developing as a leader within the organization. She is finding her independence and building relationships with her peers in the sorority as well.

Next, is generativity, in which students consider being a leader as a salient part of their identity, rather than concerned by whether or not they hold a leadership position (Owen, 2012). Here, the female leader builds internal foundations, as Baxter Magolda

and King (2004) explain, does not need the formal leadership position to feel that she is a leader. This is the student who joins a group and does not hesitate to get involved and take ownership of projects or activities the group is working on, and the student finds this very natural.

Finally, Owen, (2012) identified integration/synthesis, where leadership is concerned more with participating as a process and interdependence of the group is realized. Overlapping with the other student development theories, this student has built internal foundations and continues to grow in her identity as a leader, as in self-authorship theory (Baxter Magolda and King, 2004). She is also developing integrity as a leader, the seventh and final vector of Chickering and Reisser (1993). This student sees herself as a leader and recognizes group influences. She may continue to challenge herself by reaching out to others and serve as a role model in her organization.

Owen (2012) cited some limitations to using student development theories in leadership education, such as being grounded in the experiences of historically privileged populations. Per Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010),

> existing developmental theories are for the most part based on the values of Euro-American, middle-class, educated people, predominately men. Such values may contribute to a limited sense of what is important in the lives of students, especially from other traditions or cultural heritages. (p.362)

Another limitation Owen recognized was how these theories are typically heavily weighted in psychology research. While developmental theory provides understanding of the individual, it does not permit itself to understanding the interaction of individuals. Owen, states "this results in an overemphasis on internal processes and less of a focus on

sociological or environmental forces" (p. 25). Although these internal processes are important to understanding individual leaders and their thinking, studying leadership also requires approaches that involve collaborative and group-oriented processes.

Leadership identity development theory however incorporates external forces and group identities into this theory, making it a better option than traditional leadership or student development theories. Due to its ability to translate across other student development theories and focus on social identity, LID theory proves to be a holistic model for understanding leadership in college students. This theory will be used as a framework for examining the participants in this study. The LID model is useful in understanding developmental stages students pass through in their leadership engagement. Recognizing women as student leaders is helpful in understanding their identities both as women and as leaders.

Women as Leaders

A great deal of research has been conducted on leadership theory, as emphasized above. More specifically, a growing body of work surrounding leadership and women is becoming more prominent in higher education, such as works of Walker and Aritz (2015) and Gipson, Pfaff, Mendelsohn, Catenaccil, and Burke (2017). These researchers identify connections between gender and leadership, as well as relate other works that highlight gender role-congruence and challenges women face as leaders.

In general, women have been the subject of many leadership studies. These studies show how women lead, what techniques and styles women use, and how they are treated as a result of being a woman in a leadership position. Walker and Aritz (2015) created an analysis of interactions and discourse between female and male participants to

determine if there were any gender differences in group leadership and decision-making. They cite that "like leadership, gender is a social construct," and "discourse studies have thus focused on how features of talk are coded as feminine or masculine" (Walker and Artiz, 2015, p. 454). The researchers observed 110 participants divided up into 22 mixed-gender groups as they navigated a simulation. Participants were told to imagine that they were survivors of a plane crash and asked to rank items salvaged from the plane in terms of usefulness for their survival. The researchers watched for turn-taking behaviors and interaction analysis via a video monitor and transcribed the conversations from the video footage. Walker and Artiz (2015) found "no women emerged as the unanimously chosen leader. However, in two teams, women were selected by group members as showing leader attributes" (p. 460). Despite not being recognized by their peers as leaders, the researchers found that more women exhibited the turn-taking behavior and discourse associated with leadership. Walker and Artiz (2015) explain:

> In the few groups in which some women were recognized as demonstrating leadership characteristics, the females either used a collaborative or assertive style of leadership talk. These results also suggest that regardless of whether women know how to demonstrate expected leadership behaviors, they may still be ignored or not recognized by others as a leader. (p. 473).

This result explains that there are little differences in whether women or men outperform in terms of leadership, but in order for a woman to be recognized for those traits she must project more 'masculine' leadership traits.

Sometimes, there are gender power imbalances at play as women take on leadership opportunities. Yoder, Schleicher, and McDonald (1998), identified how

women will be perceived more effective as leaders if they are legitimized by a male with higher status in the organization. In careers where women are considered a token population, such as firefighters, more effort is needed for women to be taken seriously. Thirty women and 169 men participated in a group task where women were either appointed to the position by a trusted male superior, received additional training, or a combination of added credibility and training to lead the group. These three scenarios were studied within each group to determine which women were perceived to be more effective (Yoder, et. al, 1998). The research concluded, "for token women to be most effective as leaders of male-dominated masculine-task groups, they must not only be empowered with positions and expertise, but also be legitimated by high-status others" (Yoder, et. al, 1998 p. 220). What this means is that unless the women were presented as legitimate leaders by men, they were perceived to be less effective group leaders. This highlights a power dynamic in gendered communication, where in order for women to be seen as leaders, another man needed to give her credibility.

Gipson, et. al (2017) created a meta-analytic review of 30 years' worth of leadership and gender data and constructed their research into four frameworks of viewing leadership, including: selection, development, leadership style, and performance. The researchers found clear differences in the selection and development of leaders, and that men were most often chosen to be placed in positions of power. Due to this placement, men also receive more developmental leadership experiences. However, when women's leadership styles and performance were compared to men's, there are slight differences that appear to be inconclusive and unclear in terms of performance outcomes. The researchers' analysis "indicate that women leaders tend to be more likely to manifest

a democratic style and elements of transformational leadership than their male peers"

(Gipson, et. al, 2017, p. 48). This difference in style may be in part a result of ascribed

gender roles that men and women are socialized into.

Ascribed gender roles. Gendered realities can affect how women in college

leadership positions see their jobs, as described earlier in Walker and Artiz (2015).

Cousineau and Chambers (2015) conducted a mixed-method analysis of female resident

assistants and how they perceive the expectations of their job and their actual

experiences. The researchers found "a measured difference exists in the way that

individual female RA's view and understand their role and how gender affects their

ability to do their job effectively (p. 38). RA's expectations of their position were

perceived differently depending on gender, and female RA's believed there was an

expectation for them to be more motherly and found themselves enacting deeply

entrenched gender roles (Cousineau and Chambers, 2015).

Burkinshaw and White (2017) studied two generations of women in higher

education in the UK and Australia to identify exclusionary structures, gender dynamics,

and how a funneling effect is the result for women in higher leadership positions at these

universities. The researchers found that women in the higher-level leadership

environment are very cognizant of male aggression and the space/air-time men take up in

meetings (Burkinshaw and White, 2017). A survey sent out to women in higher education

found similar notes, that "women face stronger challenges than men" and did not

perceive themselves to be insiders, or connected in the higher education career field

(Burkinshaw and White, 2017). Leadership traits were found to be associated with

maleness, and leadership communities created practices that instilled this gender-bias.

Burkinshaw and White (2017) argued that in order for women in higher education to achieve lasting, equal success to their masculine counterparts, structural changes must be made by the university rather than the university trying to change women.

Glass cliffs and glass ceilings. Gender perceptions have created some stagnation for women's upward leadership mobility, per Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2013). Burkinshaw and White (2017), Walker and Aritz (2015), and Johnson (2017) discuss the gender roles and challenges women face when attempting to achieve leadership positions. Johnson (2017) compiled data from the American Council on Education that found despite having a great majority of entry-level positions, women are not as well represented in higher-level leadership roles. According to Johnson (2017), "this is true for all women when looking across degree-granting postsecondary institutions; this trend is exacerbated for women of color" (p. 4).

In the small instances when women are achieving leadership positions, such as the studies listed above, other challenges exist such as evolving organizational environments and leaving women on a 'glass cliff.' This phenomenon is described by Peterson (2016) as "when women are appointed to management positions under circumstances different from those of men – in times of organizational crisis when a company faces dramatic reduction in financial and/or reputational well-being" (p. 114). For example, a woman may be appointed to student body president after a tumultuous series of turnover on the student government board. This woman may feel obligated to help because of gendered expectations. She may be expected to fix the issues that arose in the previous board's term, and if she is unable to find support from her constituents, it may be construed to her gender rather than because of the circumstances. Other

researchers, such as Ryan, Haslam, Morgenroth, Rink, Stoker, and Peters (2016), found

opinions on the legitimacy of the glass cliff to differ by gender as well. After creating a

meta-analytic review, the researchers found:

> ...clear gender differences in the types of explanations that respondents
>
> generated. Women tended to explain the phenomenon in terms of malign
>
> processes such as a lack of alternative opportunities, sexism, or ingroup
>
> favoritism. In this way, they tended to acknowledge the existence of the glass cliff
>
> and to recognize its danger, unfairness, and prevalence. In contrast, men were
>
> more likely to generate benign explanations, such as women's suitability for
>
> difficult leadership tasks, the need for strategic decision making, or company
>
> factors unrelated to gender. Furthermore, men were much more likely to question
>
> the existence of the phenomenon (over 50% queried the research) and to
>
> downplay its significance and potential risks (Ryan, et al, 2016, p. 452).

It's clear that context and identity play a role in understanding the glass cliff

phenomenon, however, understanding 'why' the phenomenon exists rather than 'if' it

exists is an important step to creating inclusive and equitable environments for women's

progression in leadership. Ryan, et al, (2016) encourage people in positions of power to

understand the glass cliff as not only a women's issue, but also one that men need to take

ownership of as well.

Peterson (2016) explain how in higher education, upper-level leadership has been

traditionally a male-dominated career. Gradually over the last twenty years, more women

have been hired to take over these positions such as university presidents and department

chairs. Some researchers have attributed this to a shift in the gendered perception of the

position. Peterson (2016) explored the shift in perception of male-associated tasks to

female-associated tasks in student affairs and higher education. The purpose of this study

was to understand the context of women achieving these higher-level positions and the

nature of the positions themselves as more women are elected to them. The participants

included qualitative interviews with 22 senior-level management positions from 10

Swedish higher education institutions. The researcher found that while more women were

achieving these higher-level positions, the work became more administrative,

undervalued, and lowered-status, (Peterson, 2016).

Self-Esteem. Self-esteem and self-efficacy are important parts in leadership

development. Without them, leaders do not develop the confidence to carry out tasks and

lead groups. The works of Moran (2015), O'Dell, et. al, (2016), and Domingue (2015)

highlight the impact of self-esteem on leadership abilities as well as gender differences in

self-esteem.

Moran (2015) focused on self-esteem's impact on leadership behaviors of female

students. Six semi-structured interviews took place on a small university in the Midwest.

All six participants were considered leaders through their involvement in a student

organization, sorority, or collegiate sport. The researcher found that students reported

varying levels of self-esteem, and related to confidence-building and leadership ability.

Moran (2015) explained that lower self-esteem in female student leaders may relate to

their process in moral development. The researcher described Gilligan's moral

development theory in women as "three levels that female leaders will fall into:

orientation to individual survival, goodness of self-sacrifice, and morality of non-

violence" (as cited in Moran, 2015, p. 54). This study identified that student leaders who

indicate low self-esteem were also in the early stages of their moral development and leaders gradually increased their self-esteem as they progressed through their development (Moran, 2015).

A lack of self-esteem can increase self-doubt, and with it, a phenomenon called imposter syndrome. Dahlvig (2013) studied this phenomenon within the context of Christian, female college and university leaders. Five narrative interviews were conducted with female leaders from the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, and among the prevalent themes was imposter syndrome. According to Dahlvig (2013), "for Christian women who have been socialized to value humility (a modest view of one's importance), the impostor syndrome can be especially difficult to accurately recognize" (p. 100). The researcher also found that women who do not report low self-esteem or are perceived to have low self-esteem also experience imposter syndrome. Dahlvig (2013) had two of the five women explicitly share feeling like an imposter, and attributes this to certain factors. According to Dahlvig (2013), "the prevailing stereotype that women cannot be leaders, layered with Christian culture's emphasis on humility manifested by deflecting credit, may exacerbate limiting internalized beliefs resulting in impostor syndrome (p. 101). Research from Dahlvig (2013) indicated that both external culture and internal thought process impact this feeling of imposter's syndrome.

Other scholars have looked at self-efficacy as it impacts other parts of personality and leadership. Baker, Larsen, and Surapaneni (2016) examined social potency as a predictor of leadership in female students. A survey was administered to the 124 female participants taking an introductory psychology class at a large Midwest university, where a social potency primary scale and a leadership scale was used to measure the self-

reported data of the students (Baker, et. al, 2016). In this sample, social potency as a personality trait had a direct effect on leadership self-efficacy and was a predictor of leadership interest. Baker, et. al, (2016) found that leadership self-efficacy had a direct effect on leadership intention. The researchers concluded that social potency is a strong predictor of leadership intentions, and therefore useful for women to understand their own social dominance and interpersonal effectiveness (Baker, et. al, 2016).

Factors such as personality may affect leadership self-efficacy, as does previous leadership involvement. O'Dell, et. al, (2016) researched the effect previous involvement has on Millennial college students' leadership self-efficacy, and found that more involvement led to a greater awareness of one's leadership skills. O'Dell et al. recognized a difference in self-efficacy between men and women, stating,

> Keeping in mind that leadership efficacy is developed through experience, traditional gender roles can inhibit females from seeking out opportunities that would provide them the experiences needed for establishing efficacy or to attribute successful leadership efficacy-building tasks to others or situational factors (p. 75).

Other scholars have reinforced this lower level of self-efficacy. (Dugan and Komives 2007, McCormick, Tanguma, and Lopez-Forment, 2002). Moran (2015) examined the effects of self-esteem on leadership behaviors of female undergraduate students. Moran (2015) concluded that student affairs professionals can have an impact on the leadership behavior and self-esteem of students by creating spaces for women to foster their leadership ability and gain confidence.

Double Jeopardy. Women in society experience various forms of discrimination and oppression. We see this manifest in their perceptions of leadership, wages, and increased risk for relationship violence (Crenshaw, et. al, 1995 and Rosette and Livingston, 2011). However, these forms of oppression can be multiplied when considering various minority statuses like women of color and women in the LGBT community. This heightened difficulty is known as 'double jeopardy' or 'multiple jeopardy' (King, 1988). Crenshaw et. al (1995) explained that "black women are presented with the double burden of race and gender domination but have no discourse responsive to their specific position in the social landscape" (p. 354). The researchers also identify that it is difficult to separate pieces of one's identity, and rather the individual experience lies at the intersection of each of their own identities (Crenshaw et. al, 1995). Understanding intersectionality of individuals' social identities is helpful in understanding their lived experiences as a leader.

As found in the works of Rosette and Livingston (2011), women of color in leadership face disproportionate levels of penalties when making a mistake. The researchers recruited 228 participants of varied race and gender identities to read one of eight possible news articles about the earnings of a large company and fill out a questionnaire on leadership effectiveness. Changes were made to the article to manipulate for the gender and race of the company's executives, as well as a positive or negative earning percentage of the company. After conducting an ANOVA test, Rosette and Livingston (2011) found:

> White women and Black men benefited from at least one predominant identity
>
> that is congruent with the leader role (i.e., being White or male) and therefore

were not evaluated as harshly as Black women whose race and gender aligned

succinctly with failure (p. 1165).

This finding suggests that Black women in positions of leadership must work extremely

hard to minimize their mistakes, as they face larger consequences in their ability to lead,

as perceived by their peers. Conclusions like this may also translate on college campus

with student leaders.

Domingue (2014, 2015) recognized that the intersection of race and gender can

influence student leaders, and sought a greater understanding of the experiences of Black

women, specifically on a predominantly white university. According to Domingue

(2015), after conducting 12 semi-structured interviews participants reported difficulty

challenging stereotypes and microaggressions, which led to internalized self-deprecation

among participants. The researcher found that interviewees reported interpersonal

oppression and difficulty challenging stereotypes and microaggressions, and can foster

marginalization and self-deprecation (Domingue, 2015). This study concludes that

advisors and privileged populations need to develop a self-awareness of privilege and

marginalization to better manage and make space for black women as leaders.

Systems of Support

While there are many challenges women face in positions of leadership, scholars

offer information on resources and ideas that could help support woman as leaders. For

example, Ryan et. al (2016) suggest that "the perceived availability of support and

resources play an important part in the emergence of glass cliffs" (p. 452). This support

can manifest in a few different ways. Some scholars have researched the effects of

intentional programs or departments universities offer to encourage women to be

involved in student leadership. Support has also been researched along the lens of social and interpersonal interactions, such as mentorship or cultural understandings. Theoretical perspectives on social support will also be analyzed to better understand the ways women receive motivation and support to become student leaders.

Campus or organizational services. From young girls to women in the workforce, researchers have examined the effects of organized efforts to encourage women to become leaders. Bonebright, Cottledge, and Lonnquist (2012) evaluated the outcomes of implementing leadership development programs through a university women's center. The researchers found that partnering with the Office of Human Resources on campus was particularly successful in creating programs that satisfied the women who participated (Bonebright, et. al, 2012). Four guiding principles emerged in including "overcoming bias…honoring women's leadership styles, building collaborations…and leading for equity" (p. 84, Bonebright, et. al, 2012). The researchers resolve that successful partnerships such as the one researched stand out because they change and evolve to meet women's needs and focus on breaking institutional barriers for women to achieve leadership positions. Bonebright et. al also cite a need to keep assessing the outcomes of their programs in order to remain relevant and support women who have multiple marginalized identities (2012).

Other works, such as Taylor (2016) and Martin, Jahani, and Rosenblatt (2016) explored organizations and programs that support young girls to be leaders. Communities in Scotland had been placing more emphasis on sports and physical activity; however, the country was seeing a decline of girls participating in sports after the age of 10. This purpose of Taylor's (2016) study was to understand the impact of the 'Girls on the Move'

leadership program for young female athletes. The researcher conducted a survey before the program, and again six months after. The participants consisting of 119 Scottish young women ranging from 14-29 years old completing the surveys. The researcher indicated 59% of women found themselves being more active in leadership after completion of the program, as well as open to other community opportunities and positively impact their career goals (Taylor, 2016). This study concluded that although the program did not significantly impact the physical activity of young women and girls, however programs like it are positive predictors of leadership and success. Similarly, the works of Martin, et. al (2016) researched the value of an academy program for young girls. The researchers found 88% of girls who participated in the World Academy for the Future of Women believed they had the character traits that would help them become strong global leaders (Martin, et. al. 2016). These studies indicate that when women are prepared and encouraged to engage in leadership activities they gain the confidence they need.

Mentorship. An important process of leadership development is the presence and relationship of a mentor. Campbell, Smith, Dugan, and Komives (2012) studied the effects mentorship has on college students' leadership capacity using the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), consisting of data collected from 115,632 students from 101 institutions across the United States. According to the responses, "students who scored higher on the scale indicating that their mentor had helped them to develop personally tended to have higher socially responsible leadership capacities (Campbell, et. al., 2012, p. 614). Emphasis on the process of mentoring was found to

have a more significant impact as well, finding that mentors who take time to build a relationship with the student will result in higher leadership capacity.

Representation and mentorship are also cited as areas to develop in the works of Miller and Kraus (2004). When analyzing 21 Midwest universities, the researchers found women held 48% of student government positions at colleges and universities, but only about 29% of president or vice president positions (Miller and Kraus, 2004). The researchers offer explanations for this gap, stating

> because they did not have female mentors that served as role models of leadership or that encouraged them to run. This hypothesis was tangentially supported by the fact that having a female faculty advisor was correlated with a higher likelihood of having a current female vice president. It is possible that the female advisors were positive role models or were more likely to encourage women to run for leadership positions" (Miller and Kraus, 2004, p. 425).

It is clear that mentorship and support have an effect on quantitative outcomes when studying college women in leadership positions. The proposed study aims to identify themes in leadership and areas of social support that women rely on when achieving leadership positions, as well as identify gaps where universities can create opportunities for equity in student leadership and representation.

Social Support Theory

As works of Domingue (2015), Miller and Kraus (2004) and others have explained, student leaders rely on support networks and mentors to continue leading, build self-esteem, and grow into successful leaders in the workforce. Researchers from various disciplines studied social support through lenses of communication, psychology,

sociology, and physical health. According to MacGeorge, Feng, and Burleson, (2011) social support is defined as "buffering the individual against stress and its health-damaging effects, as well as enhancing the individual's coping" (p. 320). From a communicative perspective, social support describes how messages and interactions between two people are interpreted and contextualized as it relates to their relationship with one another (MacGeorge, et. al, 2011).

Distinct features in the communicative perspective of social support theory exist apart from the sociological or psychological perspectives. The first feature, rather than existing as a hidden component of a relationship, the verbal and nonverbal communication of social support is an outstanding key feature in a relationship (MacGeorge, et. al, 2011). The next feature adds the assumption that there exists "direct connection between communication and well-being" (MacGeorge, et. al, 2011). This assumption has been supported through various works in health communication. According to Compton and Hoffman (2013)

> Social support has been associated with positive health outcomes such as greater resistance to disease, lower rates of coronary heart disease, faster recovery from heart disease and heart surgery, and lower mortality...Social support can help increase compliance with medical treatments, reduce the levels of medication, speed up recovery, and help with adoption of health-promoting behaviors (p. 131).

The third distinct feature of supportive communication is that it focuses on "helpers' intentional responses to targets' perceived needs" (MacGeorge et. al, 2011, p. 232). The fourth feature is the normative focus in which social support is perceived, as opposed to

the social or psychological perspective that stresses quantity of interactions. Lastly, a communicative focus of social support emphasizes various forms of wellness. MacGeorge et. al, (2011) describe this as "the extent to which specific features of supportive messages and interactions have an immediate (or relatively immediate) impact on emotional distress, problem-solving capacity, and other proximal coping outcomes" (p.324).

As previously stated, positive social support has indicated to have substantial benefits to physical health. Social support has also been shown to have positive impacts on self-efficacy, as shown in Saltzman and Holahan (2002). A longitudinal study on 300 college students hypothesized that supportive communication would decrease depressive symptoms and increase self-efficacy (Saltzman and Holahan, 2002). Exploring women student leaders and how they perceive their mentorships could be indicative of the social support messages they receive.

This support can be enacted in various ways, including emotional support, informational support, and instrumental or tangible support (Cutrona and Russell, 1990). Emotional support can be described as comforting verbal and nonverbal messages, such as physical touch or words of affirmation. Informational support is defined as advice-giving or guidance. Examples of tangible support comprise of gift-giving, monetary donations, or labor and material assistance (Cutrona and Russell, 1990). A student leader-mentor relationship may have examples of all three off these types of support. For example, an advisor of an executive board may assist the president by training her on parliamentary procedure (informational) or offer additional support through kind words of encouragement after a particularly difficult decision was made (emotional). The

advisor may also volunteer their own time or equipment to help set up for an event the organization is hosting (tangible).

Summary

Leadership has been studied from various lenses throughout history. Older perspectives have been modernized and adapted to understand changing environments, and student development theory has been combined for a theory that can integrate psychosocial and group orientations. Leadership identity development theory provides a framework for student affairs practitioners to understand student leaders' needs. Additionally, women have historically been marginalized in leadership capacities, which can be due to both internal and external forces. Understanding how women grow as student leaders at universities is important for their development into the workforce. Support networks and mentorship for these women have been studied for impact and effectiveness at raising self-efficacy and leadership engagement. Lastly, theories of social support have been examined to understand the importance of relationship-building for women as student leaders.

CHAPTER III

Methods

This study used qualitative methods to develop a better understanding of what motivates college women in to leadership positions. It also aimed to get a sense of how college women in leadership positions are affected by support and what kinds of support women receive when achieving student leader roles.

Design of the Study

This research is grounded in qualitative methodology via the use of interviews. A narrative analysis was used to understand the specific participants in the study. The purpose of this methodological framework is intended to develop a deeper, intentional sense of how women in college leadership positions see themselves and their rise into leadership. As with qualitative research, social support theory and leadership identity theory was used as guiding frameworks to view the data, rather than to prove or disprove a hypothesis.

Women student leaders were identified from a midsized, Midwestern university and asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. The interviews with participants took place in a mutually agreed upon space on campus and each lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. These were private spaces where participants had the space to share openly without others overhearing the conversation, most often in the researcher's office. Questions during this process revolved around their involvement with student leadership and their experiences with mentorship and organizational support. The interview consisted of open-ended questions so the researcher could further ask probing questions that stem from the student's responses. Semi-structured interviews offered a way for the

interviewer to have some prompts for the interviewee and still leave room for free-flowing conversation and storytelling (Keyton, 2011).

Research Site

Participants were gathered from a mid-sized university located in the rural Midwest. This university hosts over seven thousand full time students, and about 60% identify as female. In terms of student involvement, there are approximately 170 registered student organizations (RSOs) recognized by the university. These RSOs are broken down into categories including: academic, religious, multicultural, Greek, governing, social, and political.

Participants

Participants included four undergraduate students who identify as women. These women served in a campus leadership position for at least one full semester at the time of data collection. The rationale for requiring at least one semester in a campus leadership position was so that the participants had enough experiences to speak on in regards to obtaining the position and executing tasks involved in their leadership position. Participants were identified through advisors of student organizations on the college campus.

To gather an intentional pool of participants that reflected the demographics of the university, advisors from various multicultural, religious, academic, governing, and Greek student organizations were contacted. Advisors were asked to suggest names of potential participants, which included a list of 26 of women. Nine of these students fit the leadership qualifications for this study, and those students received an email (Appendix A) with a description of the study and the contact information of the researcher inviting

them to participate in an interview. The first four women to respond to the request and schedule an interview were included in the study. In order to protect the identity of the participants, each was assigned a pseudonym: Andrea, Erin, Rachel, and Jennifer. Following are descriptions of each participant.

Andrea was a senior business management major, and involved in Greek life. She has been in an officer position for two years. She grew up in a small, primarily white town and was very involved in basketball and various clubs in high school.

Erin was involved in the university's campus activities board and the homecoming committee chair for a year and a half. She grew up in a tight-knit, African-American family just south of Chicago. Erin was a second-semester senior kinesiology major and graduated upon completion of her internship experience the following semester.

Rachel was the student body president and involved in Greek life. She was a public relations major, sports media relations minor and in her senior year of college at the time of the interview. Rachel came from a small, primarily white town in the Midwest, and was a three-sport athlete in high school.

Jennifer was involved on the cross country and track teams, and was a senior biology major. She was from the North side of Chicago, and had two younger siblings. Jennifer also identifies as Hispanic.

Instrument

Interviews, as described by Keyton (2011), are a "semi-directed form of discourse or conversation with the goal of uncovering the participants' point of view" (p. 284). Semi-structured interviews were used, guided by a protocol (Appendix B) to gather data.

Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2015) stated that these interviews "consist of a series of questions designed to elicit specific answers from respondents," (p. 345). Semi-structured interviews are intended to produce certain answers, and the researcher asked other questions for the participants to elaborate on concerning their answer.

Data Collection

Participants received an informed consent statement (Appendix B) with the knowledge that they could voluntarily exit the interview at any time. Participants were knowingly recorded on a digital recorder to ensure accurate transcription following completion of the interview. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews. The interviews took place in a quiet space of the participants' choosing, as to provide more comfort for the participants. Interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Interviews were recorded via a digital recorder and a recording device on the researcher's laptop as a backup.

Treatment of Data

After the interviews were recorded, the recordings were transcribed. Names have been changed during the transcription process in maintaining the participant's privacy. Transcription data were kept on a USB drive and stored in a place where only the researcher has access. Data will be kept on this USB drive for three years after completion of the study, per the university's IRB process.

Data Analysis

After interviews were transcribed and nonverbal communication and vocal inflection was coded, the data was analyzed using a thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that a thematic analysis lends itself more flexibility for broader theoretical

frameworks, such as social support theory. In relation to qualitative research, Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend gathering initial codes and finding themes or patterns when grouping the codes. The final step included defining and naming the themes and creating the report. A thematic analysis allowed the organization of scattered patterns into cleaner, more streamlined groupings. Saldaña (2013) states "the researcher looks for how various themes are similar, how they are different, and what kinds of relationships may exist between them (p. 178). This kind of analysis was especially useful considering the open-ended nature of the research questions posed earlier. Additionally, these themes were looked at through the lens of social support theory, providing a summary of how college women in leadership positions perceive their place in their organization and how they receive validation or care.

Summary

The use of semi-structured interviews was helpful in gathering data from college women in leadership positions. After data collection was completed, each line of text was coded and looked at through the theoretical lens of social support theory and leadership identity theory. After themes were gathered and organized, a proposal of feedback for universities in how they understand and support their student leaders follows. Future directions and limitations of the current research will also be reported for further avenues of study.

Chapter IV

Narratives

The purpose of this chapter is to give a more detailed description of the participants. This description is necessary in order to gain a better understanding of both the participants themselves and how their experiences shape the narrative. These narratives provide insight in to how the participants see themselves as leaders, the support they receive, and the challenges they face based on their unique identities and experiences. Next, each of the four participants' stories will be told in terms of their family and hometown influence, high school leadership experiences, their path to college leadership, and how they view leadership in their own words.

Andrea

Andrea, a business major in her senior year described herself as a very involved high school student. In college she has been involved in a sorority where she now serves as an executive board officer. Andrea identifies as a White female.

Family and hometown influence. Andrea has a younger sister who attends the same college. Her parents were high school sweethearts, and are still together. Andrea feels that both her parents were very supportive of her endeavors starting from a young age. Andrea lived in Indiana for the first portion of her life, and moved to another state when she was about seven years old. What she now considers her hometown is a small, predominantly white, farming community. Because Andrea moved at a young age, her parents wanted to make sure that she was making friends at school, so they enrolled her in gymnastics to bond with the other girls. Growing up, Andrea's family encouraged her

to participate in sports such as basketball and gymnastics. Her parents were involved in her life growing up,

> [my mom] was my gymnastics coach growing up for a little while. And then when I switched to soccer, she became a soccer coach. My dad had coached me through the little leagues too for softball, but yeah, my parents are a big influence.

Her parents' influence and encouragement led to Andrea's participation in high school extracurricular activities.

High school experience. This participation as an adolescent emerged into Andrea being a three-sport student athlete in high school. Andrea spoke about playing volleyball, basketball, and soccer. When asked about her relationship with the other girls in her high school, she stated that she could only be friends with her teammates in the capacity of going to practice and games. Andrea described an instance of her volleyball teammates making fun of another girl, which caused her to distance herself from them when she spoke up for the other girl. However, Andrea had a coach and teacher that encouraged her to be involved in other ways outside of sports after she became concussed and injury-prone. Of telling her coach about her injuries, Andrea said,

> We had a lot of good team members, they were seniors that were graduating, and I was upset that I couldn't play with them. But [my coach] was so supportive, and when I couldn't lift and stuff he would sit with me and talk about life. He just would say 'you're hurt. There's nothing you can do about it. Do other things'…That's when I joined yearbook. And did other things instead of just playing sports.

Andrea took this advice and got involved in other things, saying "I was in student government and FBLA, future business leaders of America. I was involved in a lot of like, little clubs. And then I played sports." Andrea enjoyed being busy and hanging out with her friends. She described her friend group by saying, "[we were a] close knit friend group of guys because the girls in my high school were so catty. It was me and my guy friends in high school. They would probably describe me as outgoing." The negative relationships with a lot of the girls in high school paired with her sports injuries impacted how she chose to be involved in college.

Choosing college and continued leadership. Andrea's decision to attend her university was based largely on fit. Coming from a small town, she spoke about not wanting to go to a place that was too big in size and outside of her comfort zone. She shared that the university she selected offered more diversity than what she was used to in her hometown, and she spoke of learning about other cultures in this new environment.

Andrea's decision to join sorority life was a big surprise to her parents, as she did not get along with the women from her high school. Initially, she was nervous about coming to college:

Originally I was going to walk on and play soccer here. But I had a really rough summer transitioning into college. And so I ended up not playing but I still came here. And I think sorority, life was my way out of not playing soccer. Having that family-away-from-home feeling that I was used to in high school with all my teams.

Some of this apprehension stemmed from her ex-boyfriend being the only person she knew coming to campus, so Andrea described how she was determined to build new relationships with others.

Andrea spoke about making some friends on her residence hall floor who were going through sorority recruitment, and they had convinced her to get involved because their mothers were also in sororities during college. When she had become an active member, the upper-class women in her sorority convinced her to get involved further in greek life, saying:

> I got initiated that November and then elections were that January after break. Some of the older members were like, 'come on Andrea, you'd be so good at finance' and it was an executive position so I'd get a room to myself in the chapter house which was nice since the bedrooms were small, so I went for it.

Eventually, Andrea would become a recruitment counselor as well as serve on other greek life executive boards.

Andrea also became involved outside of greek life so that she could get good experience on her resume as well as speak positively to the sorority. Andrea said that she enjoys having her time filled during college, and that she feels restless if she doesn't have a lot to do. Through her sorority and outside involvement, Andrea decided to move up into leadership positions when older students graduated or left. She believes that these experiences are important, because she enjoys the relationships with her peers and the potential for her job search.

Defining leadership. When asked to define what a leader is, Andrea stated, "Someone who takes charge, but has the best interest of the group. Someone who helps

guide…someone who listens more than they give out commands and talks, because it's important to understand how people are feeling underneath you." She spoke about how she grew a lot as a leader throughout high school and college. She said that when she was in high school, she would tell people what to do much more directly. Andrea identified how she has learned to build connections and lets members of her sorority know that if they have a question or comment they feel uncomfortable addressing in public, that they can email or text her as well. Andrea finds her most important takeaway from her leadership experiences is "that not everyone is the same kind of thing and there's so many different kinds of personalities that you just have to find like a management method for them." She believes that trust is an important part to being a leader, and that making people feel comfortable is a great way to build that trust.

Erin

Erin is a senior kinesiology major. She got engaged in leadership and involved in organizations from a young age, as she had support from her mom and dad and large extended family. Her involvement included working student activities and she is the Homecoming committee chair. She identifies as a Black woman, and later will describe how that identity shapes her experiences as a leader on campus.

Family and hometown influence. Erin was born and raised in Eastern Ohio, and later moved to a south suburb of Chicago. According to Erin, "I really call home wherever my mom is. So she's in Chicago." She states that she is very close to her family, even though most of them are still in Ohio. Because her family was large and so close, she was friends with a lot of her cousins. Erin explains:

> We all grew up together. I didn't have many friends but I had cousins. So we were
>
> all close, all of us. It wasn't just a mom, dad, sister, brother. It was like my aunties
>
> and my uncles, my grandmas and you know everybody. I have a huge family.
>
> We're all close for us to be as huge as we are. Me and my mom talk like four or
>
> five times a day sometimes; with me being here and her being there. So we're all a
>
> very close tight knit family, and I really love them.

Erin's family was a big influence for her to get involved. She described a running joke in

her family that the women usually have a child at age 20, and her mom would encourage

her to break that curse. Erin also explained that she is the first person in her family to go

to college since the early 1990's, so among her older cousins, she felt like there was a lot

of pressure to succeed and be a leader. She made a considerable effort to be a good

student and was involved in cheerleading from a young age. Her involvement grew more

as she entered high school.

High school experience. Erin described herself as very involved in high school.

She became captain of the cheerleading team and vice president of her school's

community service organization. Of getting involved in high school, Erin says,

> I was involved a little bit with our mentor program, they tried to get it off the
>
> ground. But you know, really didn't happen like that. Same thing with we tried to
>
> start a majorette team for band at my high school, and I was a part of that as
>
> well... But I was very involved. I was editor in chief of the newspaper.

Erin's involvement stemmed from her family's support and insistence that she do well in

school. However, she also had advisors who pushed her and supported her through her

involvement. Erin said most of her involvement and community service in high school

was "because my chemistry teacher, he was in charge of the community service club.
And even though I hated chemistry, I loved him as a teacher. And he really got us
involved in doing a lot of stuff." She also credits her journalism teacher for getting her
involved in the school newspaper, and eventually pushing her to be editor-in-chief.

When asked to describe herself in high school, Erin said,

I definitely was. I was a crybaby in high school just for the simple fact that I

thought so much of myself, and being in these leadership roles that I put the

pressure on myself. So much stuff wouldn't happen the way I expected it to, and I

would get overwhelmed.

Erin also had the unique responsibility in high school to supervise her peers. As editor of
the newspaper, she would have to hold her friends accountable for turning in the
assignments by the deadline. She also wanted to do well for her family, which put a lot of
pressure on her. Of the experience, Erin explained,

I was always told that can't fail in life. So it was like, you have a plan you're

supposed to do this, you do this. You stick to that. I really didn't have the crazy

high schools experience. I wasn't rebellious. I wasn't like going out, doing crazy

things that all my friends were doing because I was on this strictness of, you go to

high school for grades, you become a leader you go to college.

This pressure did not dissipate when Erin got to college; however, her involvement
diminished into her first year.

Choosing college and continued leadership. Erin was not as involved her first
year of college. Her intention was to focus on her grades that would get her a good job in
the future. However, Erin experienced some difficulty, explaining,

My freshman year got cut short because I got sick. So I had to do a medical

withdrawal from the University... I never really got the chance to, even if I

wanted, to get involved... That experience alone changed my whole outlook on

college, because I begged my parents to let me come back here. They were not

going to let me come back. And then as soon as I got back, I got involved

because, not to be dramatic, but I literally could have died my freshman year.

When I was in the hospital, I was reflecting back on those first couple months of

college. I didn't do anything that I'm proud of. I got so-so grades and that's not

like me. I stayed in my room, didn't hang out with people. And I was disappointed

in myself for becoming that person.

This experience jumpstarted Erin's college involvement. She looked for jobs and got an

opportunity to work with the student activities board. Erin also volunteered for a

philanthropy pageant for one of the greek organizations on campus. Through this

pageant, she was introduced to her role model, an older student who came to teach the

women to walk on a runway. Erin and this student began to spend a lot of time together,

and she wrote Erin a thoughtful letter that gave Erin the confidence to pursue other

leadership opportunities. This led her to applying for her current chair position on the

Homecoming committee. While Erin has experienced some challenges in this new

position, she talked about many of them stemming from her identities as a Black woman.

She has enjoyed staying busy and supporting others in her community. Erin feels she has

been treated differently because of her race, and she does her best to prove her worth as a

leader. Of the experience, Erin said,

The first couple of months [of being the committee chair] was hard because I felt

like they were looking at me as the black girl with the attitude. It's just hard being

black in white spaces sometimes. And so I'm being me, unapologetically black, in

these white spaces.

To overcome this initial hardship, Erin looked to her mom and her advisor as resources.

And she said, 'baby girl, you gotta prove them wrong. Make them lucky that you

decided to go to that school.' Ever since that moment, I've been trying to prove

that. Nobody's going to stop me from being the black person that I am.

Erin's leadership is a balance of listening to other voices, and making sure her own voice

does not get diminished.

Defining leadership. Erin had a few thoughts on leadership and what it means to

be a leader. She describes a leader as:

someone who can listen as well as speak. Listening is one of the biggest things a

leader has to do, because even though you're in this little leadership position you

have to go out and make sure everybody is okay.

Erin does her best to make sure her group members feel heard, especially as a woman of

color. This has been a challenge and a point of pride for Erin as she continues to develop

as a leader going into her senior year of college. She wants to make sure she listens to her

group members and feel connected, but she does not want to overdo it at the expense of

her identity as a Black woman.

Rachel

Rachel is a senior public relations major and sports management minor. She has

been an active member of her sorority since her freshman year of college, and expanded

her involvement into Student Government. Rachel is currently the Student Body President at her college, and has served on the executive board for the last year and a half. She is currently looking into graduate programs in public relations or marketing and hopes to work for a sports team in the future. Rachel identifies as a white woman.

Family and hometown influence. Rachel is grateful for her family and the support they've given her, because she had some trouble making friends and feeling accepted by her peers in high school. Her hometown is very homogenous in terms of race and religion, and it was a small, mostly farming community in the rural Midwest. Her family owned a painting store, but it went out of business when she was in 7th grade. When explaining her family, Rachel said, "I have an older sister 13 months older than I am and then a brother two years younger. I've always shared a bedroom with my sister. I finally have my own room in college. I have some pets too." Her parents' house is on a lake, and they would frequently host parties and events after they remodeled the house. Neither of Rachel's parents went to college, and both of them recently finished their GED. This influenced how they raised Rachel and her siblings. Rachel said, "they were both like, we want a better life for you than what we have for ourselves." Her parents encouraged her to be involved and go to college as a first generation student.

High school experience. Talking about her high school experiences living in a small community, Rachel described,

> it's small and most people, they go to school there and they have their kids there. They established the last name. I didn't have the last name, so I was the outsider. High School was whatever. Like, I don't ever plan on going back.

Growing up Rachel found support from her parents and teachers, and became involved in a lot of activities:

> I was very involved in high school. It was is pretty easy in my graduating class there were 146 students. I was the president of my senior class there. I was vice president of our varsity club, so that was for all varsity athletes.

Rachel felt like she had a small but close group of friends in high school. She did not always feel like her peers would listen to her, despite being voted as president her senior year. When talking about her athletic experience, Rachel also faced difficulty bonding with her basketball teammates, as she sometimes felt bullied or ignored by them:

> I remember we just won our back to back conference championship in basketball. It was awesome. I was a starter both years and later on I found out that night of the game that all the other starters had a sleepover at one of the girls' house. They invited the person who they thought should have started over me instead.

This led Rachel to feel fed up with most of her classmates, and she looked to her coaches, teachers, and parents for support. By the end of her senior year, Rachel was looking forward to going off to college to find a new environment in which to get involved.

Choosing college and continued leadership. Rachel's start in college was a little rocky as a first generation college student she was unsure how to apply, but she had older friends who would help her with applications and studying for entrance exams. She wanted a school that was far enough away from her hometown, but still reasonably close to her parents. Right away, Rachel knew she wanted to be involved: "I went through sorority recruitment in September my freshman year, so I joined a sorority right away with my roommate. It just seems like you're having so much more fun than everyone

else." She enjoyed her experiences, and learned how to manage her time with extra-curriculars and class. After her sophomore year, she ran for the Panhellenic executive board, and became the vice president of the council. During her junior year, she tried to further her involvement in greek life, saying

> My junior year, I ran for PCH president, and I lost to the girl I went to high school with. She was one of the mean girls. When I lost to her, I wasn't depressed, but I was pretty close. I would cry and cry. And then I ran for [sorority] president and I lost. I thought 'Wow, this really sucks.' I remember thinking,' I'm back in high school. I'm getting beat out by popular girls.'

After feeling dejected by her sorority leadership, Rachel chose to try running for student government executive board. Her junior year she became a vice president for academic affairs. Rachel said, "typically people are student senators first. And then they move up. Every one of the Executive Board has been. I was the first non-senator to run and win, so that shook up everything." She liked working with student government, and ran unopposed for the presidency at the end of her junior year. This year, as president her goal is to lay a lot of ground work and provide structure so that the next president can succeed.

> I want someone to be the next success story, and I want them to do it better than I can. Some days it's a lot of work. So I can only imagine what this year's going to be like. More pressure more responsibility to make a difference.

Rachel believes her biggest growth as a leader was her willingness and ability to speak in public. She's also felt a lot more confident in her abilities.

Defining leadership. Rachel shared that being a leader means acting professionally. One big way that she tries to define herself as a leader and president is through how she dresses, saying, "I started thinking like I need to start looking nicer." She believes it's important to listen to others with different viewpoints, describing one of her vice presidents by saying:

> I look for people who are like me, but then I also need people who I can butt
>
> heads with. That's how me and my VP are now. He thinks this. I think that. It ends
>
> up working great right now.

Another big part of being a leader for her is being heard. When she meets with upper-level administration, Rachel said,

> I just feel like I've got too much going on to worry about what they think of me.
>
> As long as they listened to what I have to say, and put it into consideration that's
>
> all I can ask for. And if they don't they'll just be hearing a lot more from me.

Ultimately, Rachel wants to make a difference on her campus and hopes that she sets up the presidency well for the people who will follow in her place.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a biology major in her senior year. She has been involved on the cross country team at her university, and expanded her leadership by becoming a co-captain and running for the president position of the student athletic committee. Jennifer plans to stay for a fifth year on the cross country team and complete a one-year graduate program at her university. Jennifer identifies as a Hispanic woman and grew up in an outer suburb north of Chicago.

Family and hometown influence. Jennifer identified her family as playing an important part of growing up. She has a younger sister and brother, all born within about four years of each other. Each of her siblings attended the same schools in a northwestern, middle-class Chicago neighborhood. A big turning point in Jennifer's life was her parents' divorce, which happened while she was in high school and into her first year of college. Of the experience, Jennifer said:

> So I think it was just kind of understanding that I was always in charge of my brother and sister that was kind of like to make sure that they're okay, that they're walking in that we're all together when we walk home and things like that. And I've always been very protective of them.

This protective behavior following the divorce of her parents affected her relationship with both of her parents and her siblings. Before the divorce, her dad encouraged her to be active and was a skilled runner. Jennifer said:

> dad was pretty athletic growing up, and I was always just okay, at running. I wasn't great, but I noticed I could last a little bit longer than a lot of others. So I did cross country and it was a lot of fun.

Her dad's encouragement paired with one of her friends shaped her athletic experience in high school, and subsequent leadership.

High school experience. When asked about Jennifer's high school experience, a large majority of it surrounded her athletic experiences. She had a best friend that she spent a lot of her time with when she wasn't at practice. They would work out together, and build off of each other's successes. She found enjoyment in her science classes, saying:

> I think I just had a really good time, as fun as physics can be but, I thought it was
>
> like, okay, like, this is finally something I'm actually really interested about. And I
>
> wasn't that great at it. But I really I enjoyed doing the homework. And I enjoyed
>
> actually going to class, but other than that, no, not too many things. I mean, I
>
> remember sometimes thinking that it was weird, not having something else to be
>
> passionate about rather than running. But I didn't really find a lot of things like
>
> that until I got to [my university].

Jennifer focused most of her time outside of classes in high school on running. She described herself as rather competitive and joined the team as soon as she could her freshman year. Of that moment, Jennifer said:

> Well, I think when I was in grade school, I never really did sports, but I enjoyed
>
> participating in them. And my freshman year in high school, when I got to high
>
> school, I wanted to do something after school. When I got really close to my best
>
> friend Caroline, she was already in a sport, and she was just trying to, like,
>
> persuade me to do a sport as well. So, I kind of just randomly picked cross
>
> country.

A large part of Jennifer's leadership experiences in high school stemmed from growing the cross country and track programs.

> When she started her freshman year, there was about four or five students on the

girls' team. She was one of the few that consistently went to practices and was sure to make the girls on the team feel comfortable. The program grew each year, and by her senior year, the team had about seventy students. Jennifer attributed that success to both her coaches gaining experiences, and her and her co-captain's work to "make every girl

coming in and feel as comfortable as possible. We really wanted to have that happy and positive team spirit." Her nurturing personality would help her in the transition from the high school team to the collegiate level.

Choosing college and continued leadership. Jennifer did not look far for colleges. Much of her search focused on athletics and finding a school with a biology program. However, when Jennifer joined the cross country team in college, she noticed a larger learning curve than she expected:

> Being the leader of a team from high school and then moving on to a collegiate level when they're already set juniors and seniors who naturally take the team was a little bit tough. I almost didn't know how to take orders or would get defensive and things like that. But that was also kind of a humbling moment, because there wasn't a captain when I was on the team [in high school] it was just four girls who ran together. So then coming into college, and already having a system where the team is set, I'm the one who's gonna have to change coming into the program.

Jennifer also did not feel that her captains in her first year at the collegiate level were very supportive of her and her growth as an athlete. This was a change from her high school team where she cultivated a lot of support and nurtured the younger athletes. "Now I understand that even though I'm a little bit competitive, and I obviously do get upset when they pass me. It's like they're talented. Them passing me has nothing to do with my inability to run," Jennifer explains.

Jennifer spoke about growing in her experiences through athletics, and how this led her to expand her involvement as a leader.

I've kind of noticed myself just kind of climbing a way up there and the little

things that I get involved in. I'm the president of SAC club here on campus, which

is student athlete advisory committee… I'm the treasurer for like a molecular

biochemistry club. So I've started becoming a little bit more involved in like the

biology department. I used to work in the biology office… it's getting easier with

every year just I think, because with every year comes a little bit of confidence.

She now identifies herself as having much more confidence in her abilities as an athlete, a

student, and a leader through her growth and involvement.

Defining leadership. When asked to define leadership, Jennifer said:

Being willing to listen is definitely the biggest thing and knowing that there are

times when some people may have better ideas than you as a leader. You have to

be open minded. And you have to respect that it's a lot of wanting to put the best

example forward and setting the stage for future followers to come. I think it's just

trying to be the best version of yourself.

A lot of this definition are seen through Jennifer's experiences as a co-captain on the

cross country team. She worked as a leader with two other women on the team and they

would use each other's strengths to make sure the team stayed successful and connected.

Jennifer said, "we're putting ourselves as much as we can into our community to make

sure that we make a difference. So just making sure that you really care about your role,

care about other people." Jennifer's ability to nurture and connect with her teammates

and board members individually has helped her team be more successful.

Summary

College women in leadership have unique positions on their campuses. Each woman has their own upbringing and experiences that shape how they lead. These experiences include their family and hometown, involvement in high school, and how they translate that involvement into their college experience and future goals. By understanding the nuances of each interviewee, we can better understand commonalities and themes that exists.

Chapter V

Analysis

This study aimed to understand what factors influence a woman's motivation to seek student leadership positions as well as the challenges and support that exist for university woman in positions of leadership. Research questions guiding the interviews and analysis were:

1. What motivates college women to seek leadership positions?

2. What systems of support exist for women as college student leaders?

3. What challenges do college women in leadership face in relation to their roles?

Four women in college leadership positions were asked about their path from high school to college, support seeking, and challenges with their identity in relation to their leadership. Data from the findings were analyzed thematically from the participants' responses to questions in semi-structured interviews.

Motivations for Women to Seek Student Leadership Positions

When talking about what motivates them to seek leadership positions the women had similar responses. The people they are surrounded by provided support that motivated the women to continue developing their leadership. These women overcame adversities in their positions and felt motivated to assist their fellow women and predecessors through those adversities. Using these positions as building blocks for future jobs or experiences created another strong motivator for the participants.

Family. Half the participants explained how their parents or extended family were motivating them to be involved. They spoke about how their parents demonstrated resiliency and hard work through their actions. Rachel expands, saying

> My dad's a painter. He still paints now, but we had an actual store. We sold paint and wall decorations, and within two years it failed. So my parents said, we don't want you to be like that. You have to work hard for everything that you do. And that was 6th or 7th grade… My parents were hundred percent team Rachel.
>
> Without my parents, there was no way that I would be [in college].

The initial struggle and imbalance in Rachel's early life motivated her to become a leader and be diligent so that she could achieve her dreams of working in sports management and public relations. Erin's struggles with her racial identity and being involved led to conversations with her mother, saying "you've got to prove them wrong, baby girl." She felt her family put a lot of pressure on her to succeed in high school and college because much of her extended family had not successfully completed their college degrees. When asked about her family, Erin said,

> It's always just been me and my cousins. We're all around the same age, and we're all female. We had pressure on us growing up to go to school, get a good job, don't have kids before you're ready, get married. My cousins and I just took that differently. Some of my cousins went down the wrong path because of all that pressure. They were older than me, so I saw that and didn't want to disappoint my family. So I just put this pressure on me like okay, I'm a third oldest cousin. My two older ones, they didn't do what they were supposed to do. I have to do this for my younger one. That pressure was always there.

Parents and family were also identified as helpful sounding boards for the participants. The support they received motivated them to continue developing their leadership. This motivation stemmed from support they received early on.

All four participants described how their parents encouraged them to be involved in extracurricular activities from a young age, mostly in athletic organizations. Andrea's parents signed her up for gymnastics when she was in first grade, and her father would help coach little league softball. Erin's mother was influential for her to stay involved in cheerleading, saying "I've been a cheerleader since I was five. So continuing my cheering career, that is something I always wanted to do." When Jennifer was looking at trying out for the cross country team, she reflected on the time she would spend with her dad, "my dad was pretty athletic growing up, and I enjoyed participating in [sports]."

This motivation grounded in support received from family helped the participants' become involved during high school. As they became more involved in extracurriculars, their social circles grew and motivations changed.

Coaches, Teachers, and Advisors. When the participants entered high school, they began to deepen their involvement in extracurricular activities ranging from sports to student government, yearbook committee to community service clubs. As they became involved they were influenced by those coaches, teachers, and advisors they interacted with in these organizations. For example, Erin explains her involvement in her journalism class,

> When I was editor in chief, it was because of my journalism teacher. I took the
>
> class, and then he was like. 'well, you could take, the newspaper class.' And so I
>
> took the class for a second semester and he appointed me as editor in chief.

Jennifer said of her high school coaches in cross country and track,

> But it wasn't until the coach actually saw me standing there in my PE uniform and assumed, this must be someone who's interested, and he came over and talked to me. And he has been one of like, the greatest people in my life still to this day…McElroy and Brown come hand in hand. But yeah, those two have been probably the most influential in my life… my coaches pushed me to be a better captain as well, especially McElroy would say, 'you need to take charge a little bit here. You need to be setting this example.' And I listened to him as much as possible. So he has definitely helped me grow a lot. We have gotten so close over running and like, like the divorce and my parents was kind of tough throughout high school and he was still very supportive throughout that.

With greater involvement in the high school organizations the participants were able to gain access to people who would intentionally influence their lives. Some made them better athletes, others better leaders, and all worked to help make them better humans. As they knew these women were going to college they also encouraged them to become involved once they got there.

Because the participants were involved in high school and were encouraged by advisors during that time, they sought out opportunities to become involved in college. As they spoke about their involvement in college they also were then connected to advisors in these organizations. These advisors and coaches in college supported the participants with their leadership involvement, which motivated them to continue being leaders on campus. An example of this is Andrea when she first joined her sorority. She was elected into the vice president of finance position after her first semester, and she

was nervous about being one of the youngest members on the board. However, she describes her financial advisor as a nurturing presence in college, saying

> I would always go meet with her at her house for an hour each week to get caught up on everything and write checks and whatnot. We talked about [sorority] things and finance but she was that mom- figure. And she was always kind and she would make food for me. She's very laid back.

Erin described a graduate student who was an advisor to her and helped her get her first job on campus:

> And that's where we first met. And then it just seems like ever since that moment I was always talking to her. She ended up helping with the pageant I was in. So she was always around. She was at one point, the office manager of the dining hall, and she really kept me uplifted and motivated to continue. Because she was one of those strong women that when she walked into room, she demanded respect.

Another example of an advisor providing support was in Rachel's story. Being in student government, she found motivation to continue her involvement, saying, "my graduate advisor last year was fantastic. I was so sad she had to graduate. She would do anything. She would always have my back, but also would tell me when I was doing something wrong." Having that candid relationship where her advisor would support and challenge motivated Rachel to keep trying new things and run for different leadership positions.

The relationships participants had with their coaches and advisors led them to gain access to new avenues for support and motivation, and especially as participants reached college-age. While parents, coaches, and advisors may have convinced the

participants to join the organizations, peers were another motivator for the participants to

deepen their involvement in the organizational leadership.

   Peers. Another area of motivation and influence for the participants included the

peers with whom they surrounded themselves. All four participants went into an

organization with a friend who was also interested. When the participants arrived on

campus, the people they met in the residence halls encouraged them to get involved.

Andrea and Rachel were encouraged to join a sorority by their roommates and neighbors.

Andrea, in talking about pledging said,

> before I moved down here, I told my mom 'it's not gonna happen.' And the girls
>
> on my floor were like, 'really come on Andrea, it's the last day to sign up.' They
>
> were all so excited. The girl that really got me to do it wanted to go Greek, and
>
> her mom was in Greek life. And then I remember the night I told my parents, it
>
> was the first night of recruitment, saying 'guys I'm going in a sorority.' They were
>
> not supportive whatsoever, because before coming here, I thought it was like the
>
> movies where it's just parties and stuff. But it's totally different. And they now
>
> understand that.

Andrea relied on the community in her potential sorority and the women on her floor

when her parents were initially hesitant to support her with her decision to go through

sorority recruitment. With some of the participants, this peer support would initially

motivate them to join, but was an unreliable source for motivation. The participants had

friends who backed out of joining their organizations, and the participants decided to

continue their involvement after meeting and connecting with other peers in the group.

Jennifer, says of deciding to join cross country,

> I remember actually talking to somebody else. They said, 'Okay, why don't we both go to cross country practice and see if we make the team?' Then I met the cross country team where they usually meet up, but my friend didn't show up. So I was there by myself, so that was kind of nerve wracking, because I didn't really know what to do. I didn't really know how to introduce myself.

When faced with this dilemma, the participants relied on the motivation and support from their parents and coaches to stay involved. Eventually, the relationships they built with their new peers led them to continue developing their leadership and involvement in the organization.

As with most organizational structures, older members are gradually replaced with newer ones after they graduate or move on. Many participants were shoulder-tapped by older members and encouraged to join leadership positions within their organization. This is the case for Andrea, who explained:

> Every group that I'm involved in there is some older people in my sorority pushing me or recommending me, I'm also a student ambassador for the School of Business. And it was a woman in my sorority that said, 'look at her she wants to be involved.' So it's just those older members saying 'hey, give it a shot.' And now that's what I want to be, encouraging the new members.

Many of the participants found a source of motivation and support among the community they built in their organizations.

An additional source for peer support and motivation that was universally talked about existed in romantic partners. Jennifer's partner was on the men's cross country team and would provide advice and motivation for her to become co-captain. Andrea and

Rachel would talk on the phone with their partners to vent their frustrations. Erin talked

about her partner, saying,

> We've been together since high school. He's still like, 'you know what you need
>
> to do?' Because sometimes I have long days, he'll do a lot of stuff for me that I
>
> need to get done at our apartment. Or like, he'll be strict on me. Like, 'okay, Erin
>
> it's 10 o'clock at night. Do your homework.'

Having that support outside of the organization helped the participants receive some

perspective, and would motivate them, especially when they faced challenges in their

leadership positions. These challenges were important for the participants to grow as

leaders, and they worked through those challenges to make the organization better.

Agents of Change. After the participants had felt motivated enough to become

involved in their organizations, they had found opportunities that kept them motivated.

Part of this motivation stemmed from their want to better the organization for future

students. For example, Rachel talked about her passing on her position in student

government to the next student. She hoped new students would say,

> "Oh, my gosh, Rachel, she's like a celebrity, I want to be like her. I want to do the
>
> things that she can do.' And I want them to do it better than I can. And I want
>
> someone to be the next success story.

Andrea made a point to talk about how she provides opportunities for younger members

to reach out if they had questions, saying

> I'm trying to make people feel as comfortable as they can. If you don't want to
>
> speak up during the meeting, here's my phone number, my email, feel free to

reach out. I'm always here. And I just want people to feel like they mean

something.

The participants each spoke about how they wanted to make sure the support they

received starting out was reciprocated to new members. However, this initial support was

not always the case.

When asked about challenges they faced in their leadership, each of the four

participants cited something that previous leaders in their positions did that they found

discouraging. Protecting new members of organization from having a similar negative

experience served as motivation for the participants. Jennifer cites her introduction to the

college cross country team as an example of this.

> I think it was coming in my freshman year I think I was pretty good. I was already
>
> in the top eight for the running and I did pretty well my freshman year and I was
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> advancing pretty well; I just I guess I meshed into the into the training time really
>
> well. And I think some seniors, it being their senior or junior year already, and
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> then having a freshman come in behind them, a lot of them didn't really like that.
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> Well, it was mostly just like these two, three girls that were kind of like that. And
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> now, I'm a senior, and there are sophomores and freshmen who are as fast and
>
> faster than I am sure. And so now I understand that even though I'm a little bit
>
> competitive, and I obviously do get upset when they pass me. It's like they're
>
> talented. Them passing me has nothing to do with my inability to run. It's just, it's
>
> just how it goes. And you have to really work as a team. So it was kind of just
>
> like, okay, I did not like how the seniors were treating me when I was a freshman.
>
> I'm not going to do that to this freshman.

Other participants had experiences that motivated them to join other organizations. Andrea had an experience with having an advisor who micromanaged and did not get the experience she wanted because her advisor would do everything. This initially discouraged her from wanting to run for another executive board position in her sorority, and instead, ran for a different a Panhellenic position. She felt she could be more help in that position as a recruitment counselor and get younger women involved in sorority life. Similarly, Erin faced discrimination and microaggressions throughout her involvement on campus. This motivated her to pursue other opportunities, saying "I want to get on the African American heritage month committee. That would be my next step in a leadership role. I want to make sure we have that, and we can celebrate our heritage."

Each of these four leaders were motivated to make their organizations and the community around them better. Sometimes that was born out of the positive experiences in their leadership, whereas other times they wanted to lead and change a structure that gave them a negative experience. Regardless of the source, these women chose to be agents of change for the betterment of not only the people they impacted, but also to continue growing themselves.

Stepping Stones. When asked why they wanted to join an organization on campus, all of the women said that they enjoyed the interactions they had with other people. However, there was some motivation to better themselves through their leadership process. Andrea wanted to make sure that when she left college, she was getting more than just a degree to put on her resume: "I realized that these four years you're building your resume, you're not just building it down [at the bars]. And I knew going through recruitment if I was going to be there, I wanted to stay." She wanted to get

the most out of her involvement in her sorority, and combat the stereotype and drinking culture that she felt was commonly associated with her sorority.

Other women, like Jennifer, used their leadership experiences to gain confidence. Jennifer explained,

> It's getting easier with every year just I think, because with every year comes a little bit of confidence. And, okay, I've done this leadership thing a couple times, I think I have something I can give to this new organization. It's definitely hard, but it's probably one of the best things that I'm enjoying about college so far. It's given me a lot of confidence to do a lot of things, knowing I can work well with people getting better at it, and just constantly getting the opportunity to have this chance to prove yourself. That can get really rewarding.

Similarly, Erin's time in the hospital after her first semester in college and changes to her body from medication wrecked her confidence. She was diagnosed with an autoimmune disease and took time away before returning to college. Of the experience, Erin said,

> My body was changing. I wasn't able to do things that I used to do with, you know, with just breathing correctly, I was just feeling like, nothing is right. And this is just too much… I was able to be in the pageant, and being in that pageant opened so many doors for me, because I met so many people. There was a girl there coaching us, and she really helped me out with that.

Rachel also had noticed herself grow more as a leader, which motivated her to continue deepening her involvement. She noticed changes especially with public speaking, saying

> My face would get all red, I would get flustered and now I can just laugh it off. There were times when I had to go in front of people and I would just trip over

my own feet. I'd say I'm more confident in myself and my ability to do things. I

don't second guess myself as much, and my advisor has noticed. She's told me just

from last year to this year she's like, 'you're almost like a completely different

person.' I'm not afraid to say what I think. I have opinions, and they're wrong

sometimes, but I say them. Just that balance. I'm not scared anymore.

The sense of empowerment these women have had in their leadership experiences are

strong motivators to stay involved. The participants recognized the changes in their own

confidence and self-worth. Additionally, they feel more qualified for future leadership

positions, especially when they relate their leadership experiences to their resume

building.

Motivation can come from many places for the participants in this study. There

were more intrinsic motivations, such as the feeling of making the community they lead

better, and the confidence they gained through their leadership. People such as family,

coaches, and peers are primary motivators, as they provided support and challenged them

to keep going. However, there were a variety of ways in which the participants' social

groups provided motivation and support.

Social Support for Women as Student Leaders

The support women receive from various social groups are beneficial to them

staying in their positions and growing in their leadership development. This support

looks slightly different for each woman, but there are similarities in where the support

comes from. Previous examples of people who provided social support for our

participants included family members, advisors and coaches, and peers such as friends,

older members, and romantic partners. The participants described examples of emotional, informational, and tangible support.

Emotional. When asked about the type of support the participants received and where it came from the participants had different answers related to trust, love, and empathy. The participants described their emotional support in a variety of ways, from touching hand-written letters to providing a space for expressing frustration. More specifically, when Erin was beginning her college involvement with the pageant, she received a letter of encouragement. Erin explained:

> I will never forget, she wrote me a letter and I have it framed in my room. And I
> read it all the time. And she brought me the letter talking about how strong
> women are involved and, you're beautiful, you're confident. It's something that I
> really cherish because she didn't know me that well at the time. And so for her to
> sit there and take the time to get to know me and get to know my process and
> what I've been through, to write me this beautiful letter of just the most
> encouraging words- I will never get over that.

Other displays of emotional support included conversations with their parents or romantic partners. Andrea says of her boyfriend:

> He has been so supportive during all of this, I've been with him the last two years.
> But he's definitely motivated me to be the best I can. We've been doing long
> distance, but he's always been that extra push. He's been great, there for
> everything, even on bad days, we'll FaceTime and he'll talk through it.

The other three participants described similar experiences of people in their social groups providing support by calling and sending words of encouragement. Another way this

support was enacted was through advisors providing space in one-on-one meetings to get

to know each other as people. Rachel described this with one of her advisors in student

government, saying

> She always starts meetings with, 'how are you? How are you doing personally?'
>
> and we move into the business always. She would ask, 'what can I do for you?'
>
> She knew that we were still students, that we had other stuff going on. I could talk
>
> to her about 'this sucked today' or 'I was fighting with my mom' or 'I got an A on
>
> my test.' She actually seemed to care. A lot of times I thought of her as a friend,
>
> instead of just an advisor. I still knew we always had a line and never crossed it,
>
> but we could goof around.

This support was defined as integral to the participants keeping motivated and building

their leadership skills.

Informational. Informational support is described as the processes, advice, or

guides people are given to achieve a goal, (Cutrona and Russell, 1990). The participants

felt the information and processes they learned from others was helpful in their success.

Jennifer described her coaches' influence on her, saying,

> It was my coaches who really pushed me to be like a better Captain as well,
>
> especially [coach] McElroy was like 'okay, like you need to take charge a little bit
>
> here. You need to be better at this setting this example.' And I listened to him as
>
> much as possible. So he has definitely helped me grow a lot.

Other types of informational support included advice for the participants to navigate the

world around them. This was evident in Erin's story of facing challenges as a Black

woman on a predominantly white campus. She would call her mom and receive a frank talk, saying,

> My mom told me when I called her after [that incident] I said that she's like Erin look in the eyes of this country you're a fourth class citizen. But you are not a fourth class citizen. At first I was confused, like 'what do you mean?' And she's said, 'you're a women and you're black. It goes White men, White women, Black men, Black women.' It goes down and you're fourth class. But don't let them treat you like that.

This conversation empowered Erin to embrace her Blackness as a leader. Other participants described asking parents or advisors for advice as well. Andrea would ask her sorority advisor for advice on more technical things:

> But working with him has been great. He's such a great human being and always positive. If I need help writing an email, like 'how do I say this and not come across the wrong way?' He'd be there for me. He's made my experience in college.

Each of the participants were able to express ways in which their social groups provided informational support that helped them succeed in their leadership positions. This support was beneficial so that the newly inducted leaders could learn certain processes or traditions that would help the participants in their role.

Tangible. Each of the participants had instances where someone they were close with offered tangible support. This ranged from Andrea's parents helping her pay for sorority dues, to Rachel's parents throwing an annual end-of-the-year party when she was

in high school. Rachel describes this party as a way for her classmates to get to know

each other better.

> My mom always wanted us to throw parties. That's when I started seeing people
>
> talk to other people. We even got some wrestlers to volunteer to be backup
>
> dancers for the school musical. It was kind of kind of was like *High School*
>
> *Musical*. Everyone just started to blend together.

Another example of tangible support a participant received was when Erin's boyfriend

would buy her little gifts. Erin said,

> The first time, he was just like, 'I got you frappe.' Next thing you know, I'm like,
>
> 'you going to buy me another frappe? Because that was good.' He'll be strict on
>
> me. Like, okay, get your homework done. Classes are first, then we'll get frappes.

These small items that Erin's boyfriend would buy would motivate her to complete all of

her school assignments and tasks. Parents and advisors would do things for the

participants that would help them achieve their goals. Tangible support was a small, but

meaningful factor in the motivation and success for the participants. Despite the variety

of support and people who were influential for the participants, there was no lack of

challenges these women faced as leaders on campus.

Challenges Women Face as Student Leaders

The third research question asks what challenges college women perceive as

student leaders. Historically, women are perceived differently than men when in a

position of leadership, (Ibarra et. al, 2016). There were challenges that the participants

faced in their leadership position that was unique to their identity as women. These

challenges stemmed from the relationships they had with other women and their other

social identities. When the participants did not experience overt marginalization as women, they described an awareness that this might not be universal for all women, and they might face greater challenges as women in leadership after they left college.

Competition. The participants provided examples of having a bad relationship with other women in the past that either lead them to seek a leadership position, or caused them to turn away from that group. For some going to college was a turning point for creating new friendships with women. Other times, participants felt intimidation from older women in their organizations.

Andrea and Rachel both described hostility toward or felt attacked by their peers in high school. Both described themselves as struggling to be close friends with women or any social group in particular. Andrea and Rachel felt that they tried to be friends with all types of people in high school, from band and theatre kids to the wrestling and basketball teams. Andrea surprised her parents by joining a sorority in college because she did not feel comfortable hanging out with the girls in her high school, describing them as catty and mean. When talking about her sorority sisters, Andrea said, "they're that kind of support system because I had lost faith in women, honestly. So I joined and it really helped, learning there are nice girls out here. They're not all girls from high school." Rachel had a similar experience in high school, not fitting in with peers, and especially feeling excluded by other women. Especially when she was excluded from the basketball team's sleepovers and bonding activities. Rachel said,

> I really didn't like high school. I was an outsider there. The city where I went to
> school was small and most people go to school there, they have their kids there,

they established the last name. I didn't have the last name so I was the outsider…

It's kind of hard because I don't think I was really respected by the students.

When Rachel was trying to get more involved in her sorority in college, she lost elections

and that impacted her greatly.

> And my junior year, I ran for Panhellenic president, and I lost to the girl I went to
>
> high school with. And she was one of the mean girls. Like physically and
>
> mentally she was mean. She was not a nice girl, and she was on student
>
> government. And when I lost to her, I wasn't depressed, but I was pretty close. I
>
> would cry and cry. And then I ran for my sorority's president position and I lost. I
>
> remember thinking, I'm back in high school. I'm getting beat out by popular girls.

Rachel relied on the support of her boyfriend and parents to continue running for

elections. The losses she had during her junior year led her to applying more of her

efforts into student government, where she was more successful. Both Rachel and Andrea

felt like out-group members in their high school. This caused them to look elsewhere for

support and motivation to be leaders.

Another challenge the participants faced was direct competition with other

women in their organizations. When Jennifer first joined the collegiate cross-country

team, she felt unsupported by some of the older women on the team. She described her

freshman year team, saying

> I think some seniors, it being their senior or junior year already, and then having a
>
> freshman come in behind them, a lot of them didn't really like that. Well, it was
>
> mostly these two, three girls that were kind of like that… so that was kind of
>
> difficult, because it's just that competitive edge between us.

Jennifer was frustrated when the older members would be upset with her success. She made sure that as she grew and became captain that she would not do that to her younger teammates.

Double jeopardy. One participant felt her identity as a woman of color affected the perception of her ability as a leader. Erin described multiple instances where she felt like she was being treated differently than her peers not only because she is a woman, but because she is a Black woman in leadership. One example she described,

> One time in the dining hall, I was having a conversation with an employee who's a white male about affirmative action. I don't know how he got on this topic. And he looked at me and to my face said, 'well you should be lucky to be a black student, a black girl in college anyway.' And at first I was so hurt like I called my mom, and I asked my manager if I could leave, because she was standing right there. I called my mom crying. I couldn't believe he just said that to me.

She also felt some initial discomfort being on her homecoming committee. She explained,

> The first couple of months was hard because I felt like they were looking at me as the black girl with the attitude. They will come up with an idea and I would add, 'well what about this idea?' And things would just feel a little bit, off. I would see my board members on campus just walking out, and they wouldn't speak to me, they will look directly at me and not acknowledge my presence. I had to go to my advisor and tell her 'this is not okay. I'm uncomfortable on my own board that I sit on.' It's already uncomfortable being a black person on a predominant white campus where organizations are predominately white.

Being on a predominantly white campus, instilling grit and resiliency from family

members helped her get through microaggressions and racism she described. Erin turned

to her advisor, her parents, and her boyfriend for support.

Another participant had not felt her identity being affected as saliently, but

recalled instances of bias affecting other members on her team. Because of the identity

that Jennifer holds as a woman and as Hispanic, she would spend time wondering if

people were treating her differently. Jennifer explained,

> I think rather than it being one situation, sometimes I think of it, as 'are you
>
> treating me this way because I'm a woman or like, because I'm Hispanic?' Never
>
> fortunately have I ran into one situation where that was the reason. I knew that it
>
> happened to other people on the team. There was roommate that I used to have,
>
> and she actually transferred because she was being made fun of just because of
>
> the whole Trump thing going on, and her being of color. She didn't like something
>
> that somebody said, and they retaliated.

Jennifer's solution to avoiding these situations was to avoid people who she knew would

cause her distress. She chose to pick and choose her battles, and stayed away from people

who have said offensive things in the past.

Entering "the real world" Two of the four women did not feel like the

challenges they faced as leaders stemmed from sexism, however, they saw glimpses

outside of campus. Andrea had felt much more comfortable in college than she had in

high school and remembers first feeling marginalized at a career fair her junior year of

college.

It was a networking event. I had talked to two guys, and I had my resume with

me. One asked, 'are you thinking about getting your MBA?' I said, 'I'm ready to

be done with school.' He replied with 'well it might be hard for you to get

respected.' I asked, 'is it just because I'm a woman?' He tried to cover up what he

just said...I don't know if there's still that stigma in the workforce that women

can't get it done, but I think they can. I hope there's not a stigma. That situation

was the first time I'd ever thought about it.

Andrea's experience was one of her first that she could remember about her time in

college. Although she could not recount a time where she felt treated differently based on

her gender in student leadership, she raised some concerns about how it might be after

graduation and 'in the real world.'

Jennifer had similar thoughts as the cross country team captain. While she did not

feel that she was being treated differently, she believed that her leadership style was

much more nurturing as a woman.

The other two participants felt very strongly that they are perceived differently in

their student leader positions because they are women. This in part, could be because they

interact with adults out of college more regularly, or society guides them into acting older

than they are. Erin felt her Blackness was the first thing her peers saw and would

discount her or invalidate her ideas. Rachel works with faculty and administrators in her

position in student government and had detailed accounts of adults who have treated her

differently. She explained,

In faculty senate, it was mostly males. I think there were two women. We all sat

right by each other. I had a person in faculty senate, a professor here, tenured

professor, tell me that me and my friends are not educated enough, and I probably

shouldn't be in the position that I'm in. Another time, I don't remember who, but a

male came up to me he's like, 'don't you think you shouldn't be wearing that for

this event?' Even just based on my position, I remember someone always thought

I was a male. They would ask, 'who's the guy to do this?' Like that's actually

me...And [when I make decisions] I talk to guys and girls, and people would say,

'I think you need a male's opinion,' and like, no I don't.

For Rachel, it was difficult to adjust in her position, because she always felt like she was

being compared to her male predecessor.

All last year, the entire exec board except for myself were men. So even when we

would have meetings with [University President], he would listen to them more,

and ask more questions. That could have just been me in my head, but when I sit

there and I'd give my report, it felt like a quick, 'okay, moving on.' Then [male

predecessor] could say one thing, and the president would ask him four or five

questions.

Despite some not having concrete examples of being treated differently, each of

the participants felt that being a woman in their leadership position offered unique

challenges while in college and prepared them somewhat for what they would have to

face after college.

Summary

College women in leadership positions have a network of support consisting of

family, advisors and coaches, and peers. This social network provides support in ways

that motivate these women to continue developing their leadership and involvement in

their organizations. The supportive behaviors can be categorized by emotional, informational, and tangible actions. Despite the strong network and supportive behaviors that exist for these college women in leadership positions, they still face obstacles unique to women as leaders. This can range from navigating conflict with other women, to facing marginalization as a woman of color. Even while some women did not feel that their ability to lead and be perceived as a leader was not affected as a result of their gender currently, all four participants felt an understanding that these challenges existed and will be magnified upon leaving college. The participants in this study offer a small glimpse into the motivation, support, and challenges women face as student leaders, and the next chapter will examine what this means for student affairs professionals and further research.

Chapter VI

Discussion

This chapter will summarize the experiences of the four participants as women in college leadership positions at a university in the Midwest. Participants were asked to be a part of a qualitative study where semi-structured interview questions were posed in relation to their experiences as women and as leaders. The purpose of this study was to gain a greater understanding of the motivations, systems of support, and challenges that exist when women are in positions of student leadership in college. Implications and recommendations for student affairs professionals and women in leadership will be presented based on the research from this study. These results can help student affairs professionals better understand the experiences of college women in leadership positions and how to best support them in their journey through college.

All the participants went to a midsized, primarily white institution in the Midwest. Two of the participants grew up in close proximity to each other, which could limit the variety of experiences that were presented in this study. Two others grew up in much larger cities, which could also impact their experiences and how they perceive themselves. It is important to keep the individuals and their experiences in mind when reflecting on the results of this study.

Discussion

Motivations for Women in Student Leadership. The women in this study had multiple avenues for motivation to continue their leadership development throughout college. A large motivator is the network of support they construct through family, advisors, and peers. All four participants cited their parents as motivators and key players

to their network of support. At a very young age these women were being put in to group

situations like athletics and community-based programs, requiring the women to be

involved and interact, but also rise in to leadership positions early in life. Andrea's

mother would coach her softball games, and Erin's mom got her involved in cheer when

she was five years old. Parents encouraged these women to pursue involvement outside

of school at a young age, which then led the participants to staying involved, looking for

opportunities to serve, and growing as leaders through these experiences. These findings

are reflective of findings from Taylor (2016) which showed that young girls participating

in a sports leadership program were more likely to go on to be leaders in their

communities. Conclusions from O'Dell, et al., (2016), explained that previous

involvement can lead to greater self-efficacy and being more likely to identify as a leader.

Advisors and coaches the participants met through this involvement were integral

in keeping them involved and focused on growing as a leader in their organizations.

Rachel, Andrea, and Erin explained how their academic advisors and student affairs

professionals would help them through encouraging, empathizing, and providing

instruction. Jennifer reflected on her coaches from high school with fondness, and

appreciated the help her collegiate coaches gave. This is consistent with research from

Moran (2015) and Campbell, et al., (2012), both of which concluded that positive

relationships with advisors were linked to higher self-esteem and leadership capacity.

They each had been in leadership positions prior to entering college, and felt that

being involved in college would be a natural stepping stone. This was reflected in Andrea

and Rachel's stories, wanting to continue developing as leaders so they could prepare

themselves for the job search after graduation. These experiences will help set women

apart from other qualified applicants as they begin looking for full-time work. Dugan and Komives (2007) reported a large increase in leadership efficacy scores from pre-college students to seniors. This increase in efficacy stems from increased involvement and leadership, and could provide an advantage for women as they enter the workforce.

Some personal motivation came from wanting to nurture and help other students, similar to how peers have encouraged them. Jennifer wanted to give the first year students a better experience than she had on the team. Erin's health scare her first semester of college forced her to reflect and make some changes in her involvement after she returned to school. Other than Erin's health scare, few of the participants stated a personal motivation unless prompted. This could be a result of how women are socialized to lead. Gipson (2017) found that women are more likely to use a democratic approach to leadership, meaning that they collect information and opinions from others before making a decision for the group. These women may intrinsically feel that being a leader means helping others and making their organization better, rather than doing it because they get a personal, external value in leadership.

Support for Women in Student Leadership. Building a network of people who provide support was beneficial to the participants' success and continued leadership. Interestingly, while there were people in the participants' support networks who were looked upon for guidance, no specific mention of having a mentor was made unless prompted. The women in this study however did speak about the support they received from advisors, parents, and peers. The participants identified these people as providing support in relation to their personal life or their student organization, depending on the relationship. There was no explicit statement of these people providing support about

professional or career goals. This could indicate that these college women perceive mentorship differently than what was previously thought, or that women think of professional goals as separate from their leadership experiences in college.

Social support theory provides a framework for viewing the types of care people can give and receive. Using Cutrona and Russell's (1990) explanation of social support provided a framework for understanding how the participants' viewed support and mentorship. The authors divide types of support into three categories: emotional, informational, and tangible (Cutrona and Russell, 1990).

Emotional. Using Cutrona and Russell's (1990) description of emotional support, the data collected confirmed that this kind of support is prominent in the participants' experiences as leaders. Emotional support consists of words of affirmation and nonverbal messages of approval, such as physical touch (Cutrona and Russell, 1990). The participants in this study spoke about how they received emotional support from family, friends, and romantic partners. This kind of support was also prevalent in most of the relationships with advisors and coaches, and the participants identified feeling most supported in their positions when they described instances where advisors or coaches got to know them personally and gave words of affirmation. This is consistent with conclusions from Miller and Krause (2004) and Campbell, et. al., (2012) whose research emphasized the importance of a supportive advisor-mentee relationship in relation to a student's success.

Informational. Informational support is described by Cutrona and Russell (1990) as support expressed through advice-giving and providing structure or context that would help the recipient be successful. Each of the participants stated a way informational

support was given to them through an organizational advisor or coach. Andrea relied on her sorority's financial advisor to learn about budgeting and collecting membership dues. Rachel would look to her graduate advisor for help with parliamentary procedure or how to handle challenging relationships in student government. The coaches Jennifer met both in high school and in college would give her information on techniques, as well as NCAA regulations when she began to expand her leadership into being a conference representative.

The information and practical guidance the participants receive helps them avoid situations such as the glass cliff, described by Peterson (2016). For example, Rachel described a time when she was in a faculty senate meeting, and she had an advisor prepare her for what to expect in the meeting so that she could be successful. Had this not occurred, Rachel could have been unprepared and appear disorganized or unprofessional in front of higher university officials. Support networks, such as advisors, peers, and parents, need to give college women in leadership the 'blueprints' they need to be successful in their position, lest their failings could be attributed to the student's gender.

Tangible. The physical acts of service, money, or gifts given to the participants is described by Cutrona and Russell (1990) as tangible support. This type of support was talked about least with the participants, but assisted in building the relationships in their social support networks. An example of this is Erin's relationship with her boyfriend being supported by buying each other coffee to motivate them to finish their tasks. Andrea would go to fraternity and sorority life conferences with her executive board and graduate advisors. Jennifer was also able to expand her leadership when her coaches let her be the university's representative at athletic conference meetings.

Not only is it important for women in college leadership to have a network of support for them to feel secure, they need the emotional, informational, and tangible support for them to succeed in their organization. Cutrona and Russell (1990) described each of these types of social supports as integral to building the self-esteem and well-being of an individual. We see through other research that a lack of support in certain areas can increase the challenges a woman will have in succeeding in their role, resulting in a continuation of glass cliffs and glass ceilings within university student organizations.

Challenges. Despite enjoying their experiences in leadership positions, feeling successful in their accomplishments, and having strong networks of support, challenges still existed for the participants in their leadership positions. Many of these were connected to their gender identity. Andrea and Rachel had a hard time connecting with other women in high school, and continue to feel as though they are being compared to male peers. Erin identified her experiences as a Black woman as doubly challenging; she wanted to be prideful of her skin color, despite feeling isolated by peers in her organization because of their prejudice and stereotyping. This is consistent with King's (1988) and Crenshaw's (1995) explanations on black identity and double jeopardy. Jennifer, although not feeling currently like she is looked at differently as a leader, felt strongly compelled to be nurturing to her younger siblings and teammates. These challenges are concurrent with previous research of women in workforce leadership positions (Peterson, 2016).

Women in leadership face challenges of not being taken seriously in their position, or not having as much credibility as men (Burkinshaw and White, 2017, Walker and Artiz, 2011, and Yoder, et. al, 1998). This was reflected in Rachel's position in

student government, as she felt she is routinely compared to her male predecessor. Andrea also felt that fraternity men that she worked with in her organization would underestimate her abilities based on her gender. Other challenges uncovered in the research included the competition with other women, experiences as a woman of color, and transitioning into the workforce after graduating college.

Competition with other women. The participants in this study described how they felt they were in more competition with other women than with men. This competition created challenges with being successful in getting their leadership position, or led to issues with working as a team. Andrea and Rachel were in high school when they discovered they had poor relationships with other women in their class. The two felt isolated and purposely excluded from organization activities by other women. Jennifer also identified that in college her older cross country teammates would be upset at her success as a freshman and treat her with disdain. The glass ceiling and funneling of fewer women in higher administrative leadership could explain why women see other women as more of a threat when seeking leadership. Ibarra et. al (2016) and Johnson (2017) state that women are significantly less likely to be in workforce leadership positions with each higher level. Because people only see a handful of women at the top, they assume that there is only room for a small amount of women in leadership and compete with each other to get them. Instead of creating more positions for women, or hiring women when men leave a position, women are pitted against each other for the few positions that are available.

Leaders in this study had created connections and a strong social support network that helped them be more effective leaders. A woman's self-esteem is a strong predictor

of success for women in leadership positions (Baker, et. al, 2016). The women

participating in the study understood that in order to be successful in their roles, they

needed to build strong relationships with other women in the groups. Jennifer did this by

comforting younger members on the team, and Andrea would go to 'fireside' activities in

her sorority and have bonding experiences. This helped break some of those barriers and

competitive pieces explained earlier because the women were able to connect personally

and build relationships.

　　　　When examining this challenge of competing with other women under a lens of

Owen's (2012) leadership identity theory, the women participating in the study were

facing a crossroads. Some participants were unsure of how to proceed when older

students and other peers disrupt the authority they have set up, such as Jennifer her first

year on the cross country team, or Rachel when she was isolated from her basketball team

in high school. These women had to decide if they should retaliate, let the incidents go, or

find another solution. This relates to stage three of Owen's (2012) leadership identity

theory: seeing leadership as hierarchical. Rachel and Jennifer relied on coaches and

captains to tell them what to do. When the women felt unheard or mistreated, their

perception of leadership changed as they started deviating from the formulas previously

followed. This is also similar to stage three of Baxter Magolda's (2004) theory of self-

authorship as the women began exploring their own identity and how to lead. The

participants felt injustice within certain organizations and peer groups from the previous

authority structures in place, which became the catalyst for them becoming leaders in

collegiate organizations. By building from their experiences in high school and earlier

leadership positions, the women in this study attempted to develop connections with

other women in overcoming these former patterns, both for themselves and for the
women that will be their predecessors.

    Double jeopardy for women of color. The challenges women of color face have
an added layer of complications. Crenshaw (1995) and King (1988) described this
intersection of gender and race as inseparable and doubly challenging. Erin conveyed that
she knew she did not have the respect from her peers in her leadership position. Although
Jennifer did not feel that she was treated differently by her peers, she had dealt with
situations where other Hispanic members on her team experienced discrimination.
Despite not feeling personally marginalized, she would be left to question the intentions
of others and wonder whether or not a comment was directed at her. Domingue (2014,
2015) found that this experience of marginalization and oppression to be detrimental to
Black women as student leaders and their self-esteem. The stakes for these student
leaders of color are also greater, as discussed in Rosette and Livingston (2011). If these
women do not succeed, they are perceived differently. Erin discusses this pressure to do
well, and how she had support from her advisors and family. Domingue (2015)
highlighted the importance of the relationship between student leaders of color and the
student affairs professionals who advise them. Specifically, Domingue (2015) cites a
need for more student affairs professionals of color who can support and understand what
these student leaders of color need.

    Transition from college to workforce. Women in this study felt apprehensive
about their transition after graduating from college. While the women had student
leadership experiences unique to their gender during college, each of the participants
anticipated more struggles as they entered the workforce. Andrea expressed this concern

after encountering two men at a job fair, telling her she would not be ready for a graduate program. Rachel was nervous about going into the sports marketing field, as her colleagues would be predominantly men. Jennifer, also going into STEM was excited, but expressed some nervousness and uncertainty. This concern for post-graduation experiences as a woman is not unfounded. Walker and Artiz (2015) and Yoder, et. al (1998) found women facing added challenges of being perceived as a leader as they entered the workforce. When women achieved these leadership positions, the roles were less valued (Peterson, 2016). Rachel described this concern with following her male predecessor. Gipson (2017) described that women in leadership typically use more democratic, nurturing styles. Jennifer felt she had to be a peacemaker both with her siblings and as captain on her team. The women in this study will continue to take their leadership styles and experiences they learn from college into the workforce with them. While they felt mostly prepared, the participants expressed concerns for facing the sexism that may befall them in their fields.

Implications

The themes of this study center around gendered experiences, social support, and student leadership. One implication from this study indicates that while the social support networks women build assist in their leadership development and success, women are also challenged and scrutinized by other women. Key stakeholders in this research include student affairs professionals, and other women in leadership. Both of these populations will interact with or have been a woman in student leadership. Understanding the challenges faced and type of support these women need can help student affairs

professionals and women in leadership provide mentorship and increase the transition of

women in college to become leaders in the workforce.

Student affairs professionals. The women in this study felt supported overall by

the student affairs professionals with whom they interacted. Continuing to create

relationships with these leaders is crucial to their success and growing their self-esteem.

An area for student affairs professionals to take a closer look at is how they are preparing

these female leaders for the job search and workforce. Many campuses today have

slightly more women than men, but when entering careers and searching for

advancement, the favor tilts towards men. Helping women learn about negotiation tactics,

or being a listening ear to women who experience sexism can instill confidence and

provide useful information as they graduate and enter their careers.

Another area for student affairs professionals to look at is how they support the

students they advise. The women in this study felt most connected to the university and

confident in their positions when they had a larger focus on relationships with advisors

and peers. The support that the participants connected with more focused on emotions

and information-giving rather than tangible support. It may also be helpful for the

students to have an advisor help them expand their support network. This could look like

helping students attend conferences, or connecting them with other advisors or peers that

can help them grow professionally and personally.

Women in leadership. As stated previously, glass cliffs and glass ceilings exist

in the workforce and in higher education and administration. Other women in leadership

can be instrumental in giving the next generation of women leaders support they need.

Bonebright, et. al. (2012) describes the importance of the work done by a women's center

on a university campus. Creating mentoring programs inside the educational system and

beyond have been found to increase the confidence of women and girls, as well as the

likelihood of them continuing their involvement throughout their lives (Martin, et. al,

2016 and Taylor, 2016). The participants in this study also indicated that they often find

themselves in competition with other women since high school. Creating programs or

activities for girls from a young age could help them understand each other's experiences

and relate to one another instead of tearing each other down.

This information is also useful for those who are in charge of hiring practices.

Domingue (2015) explains that it is important for Black women to see themselves

reflected in the administrative positions. Hiring more women in higher-level positions,

particularly women of color, can challenge obstacles associated with the glass ceiling, as

described by Peterson (2016). It is important to hire these women not just after

tumultuous times in the university or organization, as this is more likely to create a glass

cliff, where the incoming woman in power could fail. Additionally, Ryan, et. al (2016)

explained that men in leadership are more likely to question the legitimacy of women

experiencing glass cliffs and ceilings. Men in higher positions should listen to their peers'

and students' experiences as women, as well as believe the stories they tell.

Future Research

This study was limited to the scope of its participants, and offers multiple avenues

for future research. Different methodology could have produced some different

responses, such as using focus groups with college women in leadership positions talking

about their experiences. Using a quantitative comparison on men's and women's

experiences would provide a different perspective on the gendered experiences of student

leaders. The conclusions derived from that research could then lead to a richer, more in-depth discussion on leadership challenges, support, and gender. While there is considerable research conducted on challenges women face in leadership roles, further examination could provide insight to the transition women go through from college leadership to their careers or organizational leadership after graduation. Another curious piece uncovered in this study that could use further explanation or understanding is the competitiveness and occasionally harsh relationship women in college leadership face with other women.

Summary

Considerable research has been conducted on the experiences of women in the workforce, their leadership styles, and the perceptions of their abilities. The results of this study support the previous research. Interviews with senior women in college leadership was conducted to explore the motivations, support, and challenges that exist. This study concludes that it is important for women in college leadership to have a supportive network of various people, ranging from peers to family, to advisors. The support can manifest in emotional, informational, and tangible ways, all of which was recognized by the participants in this study. Women face many challenges as student leaders, some of which stem from racial bias; others stem from competition with other women. Another challenge is being perceived differently than men in similar leadership positions. The support they receive in college is beneficial to overcoming these challenges, but the participants still have concerns about what lies ahead after graduation. Recommendations for future research could shed more light on this topic.

With the data gathered from this study, it is recommended that student affairs professionals who advise women listen to their stories and help them increase self-esteem through relationship-building and providing emotional support in addition to informational and tangible. Lastly, knowing that college women in leadership are concerned about leaving their 'bubble' of college, creating programs that help build connections with other women from all ages can help decrease the sense of competition and provide networking opportunities for women who are on the brink of entering their careers. With hope, the glass ceilings and cliffs that exist for women in leadership will be diminished over time.

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Appendix A

Contact E-mail

Hello, {Student Participant}

  My name is Becky Schwartz, and I am a graduate student in the College Student Affairs program at Eastern Illinois University. I hope to conduct research on student leadership development and social support. Thesis research is a required part of my degree program, and I am looking for women in leadership positions to interview for this research.

  You have been identified as a student who may be a good fit for this research. If you are interested in participating, you will be asked to schedule about 30-45 minutes for a one-on-one interview with me. We can meet at a time that is convenient to you in a location of your choosing on campus. Thank you for your time, and thank you for helping me complete my research for graduation!

Rebecca Schwartz
rsschwartz@eiu.edu

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

One of the things you need to know is as you share your information I will remove all identifiable information from this interview, that is if you share specific names or offices or student groups they will all be changed.

1) Tell me a little bit about yourself.

     a. What is your hometown?

     b. What is your family like?

     c. What is your major?

     d. What year in school are you?

2) Tell me about your high school experiences.

     a. How would you describe yourself while you were in high school? How would your friends describe you in high school?

     b. What sorts of things were you involved in? (Specific groups, academic clubs, social activities)?

          i. What attracted you to being in these groups or getting involved?

          ii. Did you ever hold a leadership position in any of these groups?

               1. If yes, what made you want to be in the leadership position?

               2. If no, why not?

     c. Who were your support people in high school?

          i. Family, friends, teachers, advisors, community members, etc.?

3) Tell me about your college experience thus far.

     a. How would you describe yourself? How would your friends describe you?

     b. What sorts of things are you involved in? (Specific groups, academic clubs, social activities)?

    i. What attracted you to being in these groups or getting involved?

  c. Who would you describe as your current support system?

    i. Family, friends, teachers, advisors, community members, etc.?

4) How did you first get involved in your leadership position?

  a. Tell me about your experience so far?

  b. What made you decide to sign up/apply/run for your position?

  c. Do you have a person you turn to for advice or help in this position? If so, who?

  d. What successes have you had in your organization while you have been a leader?

  e. Do you have any concerns for your position so far? If so, please expand.

5) How are you different as a leader now than when you were in high school?

6) How are you different as a leader today than in high school?

  a. Who has influenced you?

  b. What were some of your biggest learning experiences?

  c. Was there ever a time that you felt challenged as a woman in the role?

7) Was there anyone who encourage you to become a leader from a young age? If so, who?

  a. Who would you identify as your mentors?

  b. Tell me about your relationship with [specific] person?

8) How would you define a leader?   What makes a good leader?

9) Tell me how you see your gender identity influencing your leadership ability?

  a. Tell me how you see others perceive your leadership ability based on your gender identity

10) What are your future leadership/career goals after graduation?

11) Is there anything else you would like to share about yourself or your leadership involvement?

12) Is there anything else you anticipated me asking you about that you wanted to share?