Graduate Theses and Dissertations

2022

Exploring Gendered Barriers to Higher Education Leadership for Women in Midlevel Student Affairs Roles

Melodye J. MacAlpine

Follow this and additional works at: https://pilotscholars.up.edu/etd

Part of the Gender and Sexuality Commons, Higher Education Administration Commons, and the Inequality and Stratification Commons

Exploring Gendered Barriers to Higher Education Leadership for Women in

Midlevel Student Affairs Roles

by

Melodye J. MacAlpine

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education
in
Learning and Leading

University of Portland
School of Education

2022

Exploring Gendered Barriers to Higher Education Leadership for Women in Midlevel Student Affairs Roles

by

Melodye J. MacAlpine

This dissertation is completed as a partial requirement for the Doctor of Education (EdD) degree at the University of Portland in Portland, Oregon.

Approved:

REDACTED

_____ 3/16/22

Chairperson   Date

REDACTED

_____ 3/16/2022

Committee Member   Date

REDACTED

_____ 3/16/2022

Committee Member   Date

If applicable:

_____   _____

Additional Committee Member   Date

_____   _____

Additional Committee Member   Date

Approved:

REDACTED

_____ 3-16-22

Graduate Program Director   Date

REDACTED

_____ 3/16/22

Dean of the Unit   Date

REDACTED

_____ 3/16/22

Dean of the Graduate School or Representative   Date

Abstract

This qualitative case study explored the perceived barriers to leadership for female-identifying student affairs professionals at the midlevel who aspire to, but have not yet attained, a senior student affairs officer role. Women hold 71% of all student affairs positions in higher education compared to men; however, that majority shrinks to 56% for senior-level positions (Pritchard &McChesney, 2018). Thus, a study designed to explore gendered barriers to leadership was warranted. The research questions were designed to explore what barriers, if any, have participants experienced regarding their ability to move into a senior student affairs officer role and to what extent, if at all, participants experience higher education institutions as gendered organizations. A theoretical framework of gender role theory and gendered organizations was used to explore the research questions. The study was conducted in two phases; Phase 1 included a questionnaire in which participants ($n = 32$) responded to a series of statements about perceived barriers to leadership and gendered workplaces in student affairs. In Phase 2, follow-up interviews were conducted on a random selection of participants ($n = 8$) from Phase 1.

This study used a theoretical framework that combined the theories of gender role congruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and gendered organizations (Acker, 1990), which provided the context for investigating the role structures of the organizations in which participants worked and how social roles impact women's paths to leadership within student affairs. Findings from the study indicated three themes related to personal barriers, which were impostor syndrome, work-life conflict, and showing emotion is unacceptable. Findings also revealed sociological barriers that included the

nature of student affairs work, saying yes to everything, and religion's influence on gender roles. Implications for practice, as suggested by participants, were a move to more flexible policies about work hours and locations, providing networking and mentoring opportunities, teaching men to be allies to women, and professional development opportunities focused on developing leadership skills.

Acknowledgements

This study would not have been possible without the women who agreed to participate. I am humbled and grateful for their willingness to share their personal stories and for their trust in me to tell those stories in the context of gender barriers to leadership. I am honored by the time they spent with me and the vulnerability they showed through their participation.

I am deeply grateful for the support of my family throughout this journey. There were so many unexpected challenges, but they were beside me through it all – supporting me, cheering me on, and lifting me up when I was ready to give up. I am amazed by the strength that I felt from each of them when I needed it most. I love you Chip, Abigail, and Paige.

Barely a day has gone by on this doctoral journey when I was not in awe of the support that was available from my cohort. These are some of the best people I have had the privilege to know, and I am grateful for the lifelong friendships that will live on beyond our time together in class. I am a better person because of these friendships.

I am thankful for the support and guidance from my fantastic committee. They each provided wisdom, advice, and plenty of edits to help me improve my writing and create a dissertation that I'm truly proud of. I offer a special thank you to my chair, Dr. Rebecca Smith, who always seemed to know when I was spiraling, and was there to pull me back in so I could get back on track. I have enjoyed walking this journey with you.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

For decades, women, and the perspectives they bring, have been underrepresented in leadership roles within higher education (American Council on Education, 2017). In the United States, this lack of representation is mirrored across many areas of society. For example, in the healthcare industry, women hold only 19% of hospital leadership roles and only 33% of senior roles in healthcare companies generally (Catalyst, 2020b). In business, women represent 45% of total employees in S&P 500 companies, however they are only 11% of the top earners in the industry and less than 6% of Chief Executive Officers (Catalyst, 2020a). It is worth considering why women remain in the minority of leadership roles while they encompass approximately 51% of the United States population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). When women are not equally represented in leadership roles in society, female perspectives can be lost or overlooked in regard to issues that impact women on a daily basis.

Statement of the Problem

While disparity in leadership exists throughout American society, higher education is an area in which addressing this gap may have far-reaching impacts. According to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (PNPI, 2019), women earned more degrees than men in the academic year 2015-16, receiving 57% of all bachelor's degrees, 59% of all master's degrees, and 53% of all doctorate degrees. A more recent report by Silbert et al. (2022) states that women have earned the majority of bachelor's degrees for the last 40 years, the majority of master's degrees for the last 35 years, and the majority of doctoral degrees for the last 15 years. Despite these statistics, there is a

large discrepancy in who holds leadership roles in higher education institutions. Every five years, the American Council on Education (ACE) produces a report on American college presidents, which examines trends in representation and diversity. In 2016, women only held 30% of college presidencies and of those, most were at community colleges. Women were least likely to hold presidencies at doctorate-granting institutions, which are given more prestige than community colleges (ACE, 2017). In a more recent report just published in 2022, research into 130 elite institutions in the United States revealed that only 22% of these institutions have ever had a woman president (Silbert et al., 2022).

Female leadership is important in all types of higher education institutions. Recent research that measured female representation and salary in higher education revealed that at institutions with female presidents, women are more equitably represented in institutional administration and more equitably paid as compared to institutions with male presidents (Fuesting et al., 2022). Adding more female voices at the top of these hierarchies can help address gender gaps in salary and other institutional policies and can provide important role models for others who aspire to leadership roles.

Impact of Women in Institutional Leadership

Hannum et al. (2015) asserted that having women in leadership roles benefits not just women, but institutions as a whole. As students experience higher education, if the faces in leadership at their institutions are homogenous, that may send a message that there is only room for people with certain identities in leadership roles. In a public policy essay, Teague (2015) argued that as we are seeing more diverse student

populations at our universities, we should strive to match that diversity in leadership. Teague (2015) also asserted that higher education benefits not only the individual students who attend, but society as a whole through greater economic strength, and producing informed and engaged citizens.

Several studies have explored the role of women in higher education as a general concept, looking at women presidents and vice presidents, or academic leaders such as deans and provosts (e.g., Diehl, 2014; Hannum et al., 2015; Kleihauer et al., 2013; Vaccaro, 2011). These studies address topics such as career trajectories of women, navigating barriers to leadership, and issues related to gender discrimination and sexism. While this research has produced helpful and relevant information, there may be differences between academic leadership and student affairs leadership that could be explored separately.

Additional research has specifically studied women who hold senior student affairs roles in higher education (e.g., Dale, 2007; Marquez, 2014; Spurlock, 2009). Again, these studies have focused on women who have overcome barriers on their way to senior roles, retention of women within these roles, and strategies for success. Little attention has been given to the experiences of women in midlevel roles. Studying this population can provide important information about how women experience barriers in real time, rather than exploring reflections of those who have overcome such barriers. Therefore, an important group to understand in addressing the challenges of women holding senior student affairs officer (SSAO) roles are women who are currently in midlevel roles and aspire to senior positions. However, there appears to be a gap in the research in regard to studying this group. Turnbow (2019)

studied midlevel women in student affairs roles at four-year institutions to understand the context of how gender impacts experiences in these roles. Themes that were discovered included disparity in working hours, gendered divisions of labor, and microaggressions; however, the research questions in this study were not specifically focused on women who aspire to SSAO roles (Turnbow, 2019). A dissertation study exploring these concepts with women who currently hold midlevel roles would contribute to existing research and help identify barriers earlier in the career trajectory. Creating strategies for addressing these barriers may open pathways to senior roles for women.

Given the apparent bottleneck for women from midlevel to senior roles in student affairs (Biddix, 2011; Jones & Komives, 2001; NASPA, 2014; Pritchard & McChesney, 2018), as well as the importance of diversity in leadership, further exploration of the issues that prevent women from achieving senior roles is warranted. Barriers that have already been identified for women include gender discrimination, work-life conflict, gender role congruity, and the glass ceiling (Marquez, 2014; Spurlock, 2009). It is relevant to explore whether women in midlevel positions who aspire to senior roles experience these barriers, and whether there are additional factors that have not been investigated. Future research may include an exploration of women who left the field of student affairs at midlevel, prior to advancement to a senior role.

Barriers to Leadership for Women

Previous research has identified potential barriers to leadership for women in higher education. Examples include impostor syndrome, work-life conflict, and

discrimination (e.g. Bird, 2011; Blackhurst, 2000; Clance & Imes, 1978; Cosimini, 2011; McLean, 2017). One factor that does not contribute to the gap in female leadership in higher education, however, is the number of women available to serve in leadership roles. With regard to faculty roles, there has been a notion that because women make up a majority of the student population in higher education, there is a pipeline leading to faculty roles that will result in women holding equal numbers to men within faculty ranks (White, 2005).

Because ratios have not been maintained from student to faculty, many have described the pipeline as *leaky*, asserting that women are entering the pool but dropping off along the way. White (2005) posited that the pipeline is not leaky, but blocked, with systemic barriers in place that keep women out of these roles. Issues that create the pipeline block for women into leadership roles include family formation and the societal expectations on women for child rearing, as well as gender discrimination where women are paid less, have fewer opportunities for research grants, and are not selected for committees or other opportunities that could help demonstrate their readiness for advancement. Research indicates that the issue is not that women are not entering the teaching ranks, it is that they are concentrated at the lower ranks of teaching, such as instructor, lecturer, or non-tenure track, making up a higher percentage of these categories now than they did in 1974 (White, 2005). White (2005) underscores the importance of systemic change beyond a sole focus on the academic track. Women who work in other roles at higher education institutions are similarly unable to rise up through the ranks (Biddix, 2011), and until institutions are willing to address gender bias in their policies and practices, this trend is likely to continue.

Underrepresentation of Women in Student Affairs Leadership

Within higher education, an administrative area that seems to draw women in high numbers is student affairs. Student affairs is a profession that promotes college student learning and development. "Encouraging an understanding of and respect for diversity, believing in the worth of individuals, and supporting students in their development are just some of the core concepts of the student affairs profession" (NASPA, n.d., Who We Are section). Women hold 71% of all student affairs positions in higher education compared to men; however, that majority shrinks to 56% for senior-level positions (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). Data from 2014 indicate that women occupy anywhere from 37% to 52% of SSAO roles, varying based on institution type (NASPA, 2014). While historical data indicate that this is an increase over the past several decades, investigation is warranted to learn why women hold a large majority of student affairs roles as a whole, but not at senior levels. Jones and Komives (2001) documented changes to the census of student affairs leaders over approximately two decades. In 1980-81, women held 17% of SSAO roles; by 1995-96 they gained a modest increase to 33% of roles (Jones & Komives, 2001). Jones and Komives (2001) predicted that the rate at which women enter SSAO roles would continue to increase across time; however, the pace appears to have remained fairly steady. These data indicate that there may be barriers to achieving senior-level roles for women, which warrants investigation.

In order to better identify potential barriers to leadership, it is important to take closer look at where women are represented compared to where they are not. Biddix (2011) studied career paths for student affairs professionals who worked in senior

level roles. In the context of this study, it was noted that men held the majority of SSAO roles across all institution types. At baccalaureate institutions ($n = 86$), men held 55% of the SSAO roles as compared to 45% for women; at master's institutions ($n = 106$) the discrepancy rose to 67% and 33% for men and women, respectively; and at doctoral institutions ($n = 58$), men held the majority of these roles with 57% and women held 43% (Biddix, 2011). These statistics support the assertion by Pal and Jones (2020) that women are susceptible to *prestige hierarchies*, where a certain group of people are concentrated in roles or institutions that are less prestigious. The discrepancy between the percentages of women in all student affairs roles compared to the senior roles warrants investigation. What happens to women in midlevel roles, and why are they not proportionately represented at the SSAO level?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore the perceived barriers to leadership for female-identifying student affairs professionals at the midlevel who aspire to, but have not yet attained, a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) role. In the context of this research, student affairs is defined as the area within higher education that complements the academic curriculum by focusing on college student development, growth, and engagement. Midlevel roles in student affairs include those that are focused on one functional area (i.e., residence life, student activities, and academic advising) and may have some supervisory responsibilities. While titles can vary widely across institutions, these roles are typically represented by titles such as assistant director, director, or assistant dean. Senior-level roles refer to those that represent the chief student affairs officer within

the institution. These roles have policy-making and supervisory responsibilities over multiple areas within student affairs and report directly to the president or another cabinet-level position. Titles that accompany these roles are typically dean of students or vice president of student affairs.

Because much of the published research has studied women who have achieved SSAO roles, this study was intentionally focused on women at the midlevel who aspired to, but had not yet achieved, an SSAO role. Participants were asked to self-identify as midlevel, as different organizational structures create variance in the specific titles and roles that may fall into this category. Participants who self-identified as female were included, understanding that gender is a social construct that is not necessarily dictated by biological sex. The guiding questions for this research were:

1. What barriers, if any, have participants experienced regarding their ability to move into a senior student affairs (SSAO) role?

2. To what extent, if at all, do participants experience higher education institutions as gendered organizations?

Participants were identified through the NASPA – Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education, a national organization. Data collection began with a questionnaire to compile demographic information as well as to gather qualitative responses to prompts related to the research questions. A sub-sample of participants was randomly selected for follow-up interviews, using a semi-structured protocol, to obtain more in-depth responses. I performed all the data analysis for this study, and it should be noted that I have a personal interest in and experience with this topic. Use of first- and second-cycle coding, as described by Saldaña (2021), minimized the impact

of bias from the researcher. Additional details about data analysis are discussed in Chapter 3.

Significance

The results of this study may benefit women who currently hold midlevel roles in student affairs and aspire to senior leadership by identifying barriers which may be encountered during career advancement. Additionally, this research will be useful to leaders of higher education institutions who are interested in addressing the gender gap in student affairs leadership.

There is a dearth of research in this area as it relates to women in student affairs. Much of the current literature is focused on women in faculty ranks or those who serve as presidents of institutions. In student affairs research, there is focus on those who currently serve in senior roles, but little attention has been given to women in midlevel roles who aspire to be senior-level administrators.

The intent of this study is to contribute to the literature about barriers to leadership that exist for women in midlevel student affairs roles within in higher education institutions. Student affairs is an appropriate area to study when examining gendered organizations and barriers to advancement that are gender related because it is a profession that tends to attract large numbers of women, but those numbers drop off in senior-level roles.

Theoretical Framework

This study was framed through several theories of gender, work, and leadership. First was gender role congruity theory as developed by Eagly and Karau (2002), which posits that women are perceived less favorably than men for leadership

roles, and behaviors typically attributed to leaders, such as assertiveness, control, and confidence, are viewed as less fitting when they are exhibited by females. The resulting prejudice from role incongruity leads to less approving attitudes toward female leaders, as compared to male leaders; greater challenges for women in attaining leadership roles; and greater challenges for women in being perceived as effective in those roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

A second theory used to frame this study was Acker's (1990) concept of gendered organizations. This theory challenges the notion that organizations are gender neutral and posits that the distinction between masculine and feminine underlies processes within an organization, including who has power and control, as well as who does what work (Acker, 1990). Organizational structures and practices that are divided by gender include "divisions of labor, of allowed behaviors, of locations in physical space, of power, including the institutionalized means of maintaining the divisions in the structures of labor markets, the family, the state" (Acker, 1990, p. 146). Acker (1990) further argued that constructs such as language, attire, and ideology can explain and reinforce gender divisions within organizations. Interactions between men and women, and how those are dictated and interpreted, are also a part of the gendered nature of organizations. For example, when observing conversations, noting who sets the discussion topic, who interrupts, and who talks most can demonstrate gender inequities (Acker, 1990). Ultimately, organizations are hierarchical, and hierarchies are gendered (Acker, 1990). Critical examination of how policies and practices within an organization perpetuate gender inequality is essential to efforts toward equity. Only by understanding and acknowledging the institutional

structures that create gender-related barriers to leadership can progress be made to remove such barriers.

Acker (1990) also introduced the concept of the *disembodied worker*, which more current research addresses as the *ideal worker norms* (e.g.; Eddy & Ward, 2015; Jones et al., 2015; Sallee, 2012; Sallee, 2021) and this concept has been included in the theoretical framework for this study. If organizations were truly gender neutral, there would be no thought of gender when considering particular jobs or roles within the organization. However, Acker (1990) argued that the hypothetical worker who fills a role within an organization is actually a gendered construct. The idea of a disembodied worker is a person whose sole focus is work, and does not have outside obligations that take away from work. This hypothetical ideal is based on outdated social roles which create an image of a family unit that consists of one partner working outside the home to earn an income while the other partner stays home and tends to the house and children. Acker (1990) argued that many workplaces were built upon this concept, and while societal roles have moved away from this model, some workplace roles have not. Clinging to ideal worker norms creates a barrier to career progression, particularly for women. Acker (1990) explained how women were not included in the ideal worker concept:

> The closest the disembodied worker doing the abstract job comes to a real worker is the male worker whose life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children. While the realities of life in industrial capitalism never allowed all men to live out this ideal, it was the goal for labor unions and the image of the

worker in social and economic theory. The woman worker, assumed to have

legitimate obligations other than those required by the job, did not fit with the

abstract job. (p. 149)

The combination of role congruity theory, gendered organizations theory, and ideal

worker norms creates a framework that allows for critical examination of the

experiences of women in midlevel student affairs roles who aspire to, but have not yet

attained, a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) role.

Summary

This chapter outlined the issue within the student affairs profession that women

do not advance to senior roles at the same rates as men, given that women hold the

majority of all student affairs roles. It also addressed the importance of having female

perspectives in decision-making roles within student affairs specifically, and higher

education generally. This study will help fill the research gap by exploring the

experiences of women in midlevel roles who aspire to, but have not yet achieved, a

senior role; a demographic that is not well-represented in current literature.

The remaining chapters will address the current issues related to women who

aspire to leadership roles in higher education, and will outline the dissertation study.

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature related to this topic, including personal barriers

to leadership for women, such as impostor syndrome and work-life balance, as well as

sociological barriers such as discrimination, gendered organizations, and the ideal

worker norm. Topics specific to student affairs are also explored, such as the effects of

institutional norms on retention in the field. Chapter 3 outlines the planned

methodology, data collection, and data analysis for this instrumental case study.

Chapter 4 will detail the data analysis for each of the research questions and describe

the findings. Finally, implications for the student affairs profession will be discussed

in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature and research related to the examination of barriers to leadership for women in midlevel roles in student affairs. This review begins with an exploration of personal and sociological barriers that have been identified by women in leadership. Issues such as discrimination, male-normed work cultures, and the gender pay gap are described in terms of how women are uniquely impacted by these inequalities. The chapter then explores the nature of student affairs work in higher education and what it means to be in a midlevel role within the profession. Finally, there is an assessment of the institutional role in perpetuating gendered policies and practices in higher education.

Personal/Individual Barriers to Leadership

Research indicates that women may experience several types of barriers to leadership; one category of barriers can be identified as personal, or individual. Examples include impostor syndrome and work-life conflicts, both of which indicate internal obstacles (Clance & Imes, 1978; McLean, 2017; Parkman, 2016; Vaughn et al., 2019). Classifying these barriers as internal struggles indicates that the individual woman is responsible for overcoming these issues herself. While that may be, it is important to investigate these phenomena as general matters in order to understand how widespread they are and to investigate potential solutions.

Impostor Syndrome

Clance and Imes (1978) were the first to identify *impostor phenomenon*, also referred to as *impostor syndrome*, and studied its impacts on highly successful women. The core principle of impostor syndrome is that those who face it believe they are not

intelligent despite their accomplishments, and it is only a matter of time until this perceived truth is discovered by others. Additionally, those who experience impostor syndrome tend to attribute success to outside factors, such as luck or good fortune, rather than skill or ability (Clance & Imes, 1978). The 178 women participants studied by Clance and Imes (1978) were mainly from the middle- to upper-middle class, and were predominately White with an age range of 20 – 45. About one-third were therapy clients of the researchers and the remaining two-thirds participated in a growth-oriented group therapy or were students of the researchers. Participants were drawn from a variety of societal roles – undergraduate students at a small, private institution; graduate and undergraduate students at a large, urban university; college faculty members; and professional women from fields such as law, nursing, and counseling. Despite their varied backgrounds and experiences, participants exhibited certain consistent behaviors, discussed below, which indicated they were experiencing impostor syndrome as defined by Clance and Imes (1978).

First, when a woman in the study believed that she was unintelligent or unworthy, she would work extra hard in order to mask her perceived inadequacies (Clance & Imes, 1978). Next, she would find herself ceding her beliefs for those of someone in authority, rather than stating her own thoughts. Telling someone what they wanted to hear removed the opportunity to criticize the woman's thoughts. A third behavior that the researchers observed was that these women would often use charm to try to win over others, as only then would the person be able to see the woman's intelligence and ability. It is noted that this strategy worked against itself because if the authority figure recognized the intelligence in the woman, she attributed it to the

fact that she was able to win that person over, not that they actually believed she was intelligent. The final behavior that the researchers observed was that of the women maintaining the thought that they were not bright in order to avoid negative societal consequences, as intelligence was not seen as a favorable quality in women, at least not in the 1970's (Clance & Imes, 1978). This foundational research still informs current studies on impostor syndrome in education today.

Impostor Syndrome in Higher Education. In later research, McLean (2017) studied how impostor syndrome impacted women's pursuit of power. This study included 664 participants who were students at Rutgers University; 66% ($n = 434$) of the participants were female and 38% ($n = 227$) were male. Results indicated that women tended to experience impostor syndrome at higher rates than men ($p < .01$), and also that these feelings negatively impacted a woman's decision to pursue a graduate degree (McLean, 2017). The findings showed that those who experienced impostor syndrome were more susceptible to negative feedback about their performance. Since beliefs about performance are key to academic and career success, the researcher suggested that those who experience impostor syndrome are more likely to underestimate their performance, which could impact their career goals. Because this study found higher levels of impostor syndrome in women than in men, this could indicate that women are more likely to create this particular barrier to leadership roles (McLean, 2017).

Furthermore, Vaughn et al. (2019) studied the prevalence of impostor syndrome in women in academics, across all levels, and its impact on motivation in their profession. The researchers hypothesized that the levels of impostor syndrome

would decrease as academic rank increased. They also predicted that levels of

impostor syndrome would be lower for participants who more often attributed success

to ability and attributed failure to effort. Participants included 1,326 self-identified

female academics that included graduate students, faculty, and administrators. A range

of ages and institution types were represented, and most of the participants identified

as White. Results indicated that 94.8% of the sample population experienced impostor

syndrome at moderate, frequent, or intense levels. Tenured faculty had significantly

lower scores ($p < .05$) than graduate students. Despite this result, the fact that impostor

syndrome was experienced by women at all levels disputes previous research which

suggests that impostor syndrome is a symptom of inexperience or junior status.

Findings of this study indicate that support to minimize the impact of impostor

syndrome is needed at all levels of academics, not just for graduate students or for

untenured faculty.

Exploration of research indicates that impostor syndrome is real for women,

and it has a negative impact on the pursuit of leadership roles (Clance & Imes, 1978;

McLean, 2017; Vaughn et al., 2019). Therefore, organizations, including institutions

of higher education, should increase awareness of these issues, particularly as they

relate to women, and try to mitigate these factors. Hoang (2013) and Parkman (2016)

suggested possible solutions, such as creating mentoring programs and implementing

student and professional development programs. Vaughn et al. (2019) recommended

three positive ways of coping with impostor syndrome: "social support providing

emotional and instrumental support, validation of success and correction of cognitive

distortion, and positive self-talk and affirmations" (Vaughn et al., 2019, p. 791). The

literature is clear that impostor syndrome exists and is more prevalent for women as a barrier to leadership. It is logical to assume this extends to midlevel student affairs professionals and their perceptions regarding their own leadership ability.

Work-Life Conflicts

Another barrier to leadership that has been identified in the literature is a struggle with balancing work and non-work lives. Research shows that women are more negatively affected by work-life conflicts than men due to decisions about when, or if, to pause their careers for the purposes of starting a family, the disparate amount of time spent on family responsibilities, and the penalties they pay for these sacrifices (Caltagirone Karpacz, 2017; Cosimini, 2011; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Teague, 2015). Current events seem to have underscored work-life conflicts experienced by women as research has begun to emerge about the impacts of the global pandemic which began in 2020, and seem to have had disparate effects on women and on student affairs professionals (Ellis, 2021; Stefanova et al., 2021; Winfield & Paris, 2021).

A qualitative study of four female, senior administrators in higher education (Cosimini, 2011) confirmed that women administrators continue to contend with family responsibilities as a barrier to leadership roles. This perspective was shared by all participants ($N = 4$) in this study (Cosimini, 2011). One way in which the pressures of balancing work and family can present a barrier is through workplace attrition. Bailey (2011) conducted a qualitative study of 15 women working in student affairs in higher education who were also mothers. The purpose of the study was to understand how women in this career navigate the challenges of work and motherhood. Bailey (2011) found that while participants thought that both their professional roles and

family roles were rewarding, they acknowledged that the pressure can become overwhelming and they may decide not to persist in their professional role. Bailey (2011) summarized:

> They find themselves questioning whether student affairs is the right profession, not because of the type of work they do but because of the physical, emotional, and mental demands that the profession places on the due to the strong ethic of care in their work. (p. 198)

In order to lessen the impact of work-life conflicts and how they disparately affect women, organizations, including institutions of higher education, may explore policies that do not disadvantage women in their careers. Removing these barriers to leadership for women may help in reducing the leadership gap that currently exists.

One study (Caltagirone Karpacz, 2017) examined senior women leaders in a variety of professions who had made a career transition. Nine mid-career women who had left their leadership roles at least two years prior to the study were interviewed to understand their motivation to leave. Among the reasons for making the choice to leave, work-life conflict was a consistent theme for participants. The study described how some women thought that they could not be both a good mother and a good employee so they had to make a choice. Other participants prioritized the importance of time for self, travel, and other self-care that was getting pushed to the side because of work responsibilities. Although there were no male participants in this study, participant responses indicated that work-life conflict may be more of a concern for women, particularly as it relates to parenting. Participants expressed that women tend to invest more time than men into parenting, and acknowledged there is a shorter

biological window for women to become parents than men (Caltagirone Karpacz, 2017).

Making the choice to spend time at home rather than at work can also impact future opportunities for women. Eagly and Carli (2007) found that demands of family life can lead to less time for networking and making career connections. Many organizations rely on informal networks or personal recommendations when it comes to hiring decisions, so when women are taken out of this equation, they are missing out on career opportunities (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Impacts of Pandemic on Women and Work. Beginning in the year 2020, most of the United States began a long-term quarantine in an effort to curb the spread of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Research that examines the impacts of this quarantine is still emerging, and the pandemic is ongoing after more than two years since the initial lockdown. Some early studies about the impacts of the pandemic have revealed that lockdowns that forced many workers to work exclusively from home have exacerbated work-life conflict issues for women (Ellis, 2021; Stefanova et al., 2021; Winfield & Paris, 2021).

In a study that examined the gender differences in caregiving responsibilities and career outcomes as a result of the pandemic lockdowns, Stefanova et al. (2021) found that women spent more time on caregiving and less time on work during the lockdown, as compared to men. Additionally, the more caregiving responsibilities that women took on, as compared to other daily activities, the more negative career outcomes they experienced, such as lower career aspirations and lower career self-efficacy (Stefanova et al., 2021). Winfield and Paris (2021), as well as Ellis (2021),

wrote that higher education professionals, particularly in student affairs, have reported high levels of burnout during the pandemic, which has resulted in high turnover. Some of the reasons associated with increased burnout were higher workload due to staff furloughs or layoffs, the expectation of needing to be constantly available while working remotely, and the perception that institutions have been putting finances above employee well-being throughout the pandemic (Ellis, 2021; Winfield & Paris, 2021). In particular, Ellis (2021) noted, closures of schools and day-care centers have prevented many employees from being able to work full time, especially women.

As the world continues to navigate the challenges associated with the pandemic, additional research will examine the long-term impacts of lockdowns, particularly as they relate to women and work. Barhate and Hirudayaraj (2021) explored the impact of remote work on employees and posited that this increased flexibility may have a positive impact on the career development of women. This research indicated that one result of the forced shift to working from home could be that companies embrace more flexible work options, which may benefit employees, particularly women who struggle with work-life conflict (Barhate & Hirudayaraj, 2021). McKinnon-Crowley et al. (2021) studied working mothers in student affairs ($N = 21$) to understand how their work experiences were shaped by the written and unwritten norms of their respective institutions. The researchers argued that the pandemic lockdowns challenged old assumptions about the structure of work and raised questions about what work must be done face-to-face and during regular business hours (McKinnon-Crowley et al., 2021). As we continue to live through the global pandemic, new research will address questions about the structure of work,

impacts on female employees, and may suggest solutions for improved work-life balance.

Sociological Barriers to Leadership

In addition to personal barriers to attaining leadership roles, there are several structural barriers that exist for women. These barriers can include gendered workplaces and male worker norms (Acker, 1990); gender role discrimination (Eagly & Karau, 2002); and the gender pay gap (Miller et al., 2018; Silbert & Mach Dubé, 2021). By exploring how these different barriers impact women in their current work and their aspirations toward leadership, organizations can begin to develop policies and practices that counteract these negative experiences.

Gendered Workplaces and Discrimination

Research indicates that women have to fight against gender discrimination in the workplace. Discrimination may take several different forms, including gendered practices in hiring and promotion, devaluing tasks that are generally performed by women, and an *old boys' network* (Bird, 2011; Blackhurst, 2000; Cosimini, 2011; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eddy & Cox, 2008; Ibarra et al., 2013; Sabattini et al., 2007; Schneider et al., 2011).

Expanding on their, teaching, and consulting, and previous research, Ibarra et al. (2013) refer to these subtle, and sometimes invisible, barriers as second-generation gender bias. Practices that fall into this category are not as overt as deliberate marginalization of women; however, the impacts can be just as great. One example of this indirect bias is a lack of role models for women. When women are not represented in leadership roles, women who aspire to them may perceive that being female is a

liability (Ibarra et al., 2013). Another barrier is gendered practice, such as the type of work that is rewarded. For example, work that is typically done behind the scenes and often by women, such as team-building or proactive problem solving, may not be publicly valued in the same way as heroic work, such as making a big sale or launching a new product, which may often be led by a man (Ibarra et al., 2013). A third example of second-generation bias is women's lack of access to networks. Leaders tend to want to sponsor and promote younger professionals who remind them of themselves; therefore, men in leadership roles are more likely to create leadership pathways for men over women (Ibarra et al., 2013).

Gendered Institutions. When examining possible inequalities in a work setting, it is important to understand the role of the organization itself in either perpetuating or addressing these inequalities. Acker (1990) posited that organizations are built on gendered practices, which contradicted theories at that time that presented organizations as gender neutral.

> To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. (Acker, 1990, p. 146)

In later research, Acker (2012) used the concept of *gendered substructure* to explain why gender inequalities persist despite actions such as the passing of laws that have addressed these issues, women's movements, and an increase in women entering the workforce over the past several decades. One element of the gendered substructure is the institution's organizing process "in which inequalities are built into job design,

wage determination, distribution of decision-making and supervisory power, the physical design of the work place, and rules, both explicit and implicit, for behavior at work" (Acker, 2012, p. 215). Another element is organization culture, which addresses an institution's beliefs about gender inequalities. An example could be the belief that inequality does not exist because there are policies in place that prevent wage discrimination. Interactions between and among workers can also contribute to the gendered substructure through subtle or overt behaviors that may demean women. The concept of the ideal worker fits in here as well; Acker (2012) says this concept "implicitly differentiates women from men, with men more likely to be seen as real workers, because traditionally women have done the unpaid work that allows men to be unencumbered" (p. 218).

Research comparing career mobility, such as by Sagaria (1988) may have set the stage for this type of examination of the role of gender within institutions over 30 years ago. Sagaria (1988) explored career paths for men and women in higher education and discovered that men were more often selected for administrative roles than women; however, more women than men sought these opportunities. This research indicated that it was hiring practices that contributed to the gender imbalance in higher education administration, not the demographics of who was seeking these types of roles (Sagaria, 1988). It is notable that this older research was conducted following the passage of federal laws that required equal employment practices. However, Sagaria (1988) pointed out that the characteristics of what makes a good administrator may be subjective and difficult to articulate.

These unwritten standards call for a person who can fit socially and be easily

accepted by peers…[t]he effect may be that organizations such as universities,

in which men hold the vast majority of key administrative leadership roles,

tend to filter out women candidate unacquainted with hiring officials. (Sagaria,

1988, p. 310)

Colleges and Universities as Gendered Institutions. Colleges and

universities are institutions that have been built on gendered practices, and oftentimes

there are unspoken rules about personnel evaluation that are different for women than

for men (Bird, 2011). This result was revealed in a case-study approach to tenure

assistance, which means examining the formal and informal information that is

communicated to faculty as they are working toward tenure. The study revealed that

male tenure candidates were communicated with differently than female tenure

candidates, in regard to what looks most favorable to the tenure committee and how to

find those opportunities (Bird, 2011). For example, women may find it more difficult

than men to be named principle investigator on a research study. An inability to

achieve the principle investigator role works against tenure candidates during the

tenure review process, thus punishing them twice; first with the challenge of landing a

lead role in a research study, and then by criticism for not having enough lead roles.

Failure to address the disadvantages that women face in leading research and

publishing creates a domino effect where their accomplishments are not valued as

highly as men's accomplishments, who tend to have an easier time securing these

research roles (Bird, 2011). Additionally, Bird (2011) highlighted that there are

informal networking opportunities that are more available to men than they are to

women, particularly if these opportunities are only available after regular work hours when, traditionally, women tend to have other responsibilities at home. Moreover, Bird's (2011) study revealed that men tend to see these issues as individual, putting the onus on women to find and take advantage of these opportunities, whereas women see this as a systemic issue that should be addressed.

Schneider et al. (2011) conducted research to explore the gender gap in academic ranks within higher education, how women perceive the gender gap, and what long-term impacts may exist for women due to the gender gap. In this research, Schneider et al. (2011) described the *push* and *pull* factors that women face as they navigate their careers. Circumstances that tend to pull them away from their careers are traditionally associated with the responsibilities of being a mother or a caregiver to another family member or moving to support a spouse's career (Schneider et al., 2011). Factors that push women out of the way tend to be gender stereotypes, how women are perceived in the workplace, and policies and procedures that discriminate against women in areas such as hiring, promotion, and pay (Schneider et al., 2011). "In departments composed primarily of men, women, especially strong women, simply do not fit the preconceptions of who belongs, and may in fact be seen as threatening to existing males" (Schneider et al., 2011, p. 6). In addition, this study revealed that women were asked to perform more service roles than their male counterparts, such as committee work or student advising. It appeared that this work was expected to be performed on top of teaching and research, indicating that these tasks were not highly valued. Placing additional service expectations on female faculty

members without valuing the contribution can work against them when it comes to tenure and promotion decisions (Schneider et al., 2011).

When examining the concept of a gendered workplace, it is important to understand the views of the employees at the institution. Jones et al. (2015) examined the perceptions of female, non-faculty professionals at community colleges. In this mixed methods study of 934 participants, the researchers learned that even when female employees identify their workplace as gender neutral (i.e., policies and practices that favor men and women equally), when examined more carefully, it was apparent that there actually were practices that disadvantaged women (Jones et al., 2015). In this study, 47% of participants described their institution as gender neutral. However, when additional questions were asked, 60% said that there are institutional practices that were gendered, and 85% indicated that there were hidden norms that discriminated against women. An example identified by participants was that women tended to be responsible for taking notes during meetings, regardless of their position. Also, when men were leading projects, they were often assigned administrative support but that was not the case when women are project leaders; they were expected to work without clerical support. Additionally, only 32% of these respondents felt that the college administration was supportive of all genders (Jones et al., 2015). The results of this study appear to underscore the idea that higher education institutions are established on male norms, and women are at a disadvantage when it comes to navigating their careers. "Their hierarchical structures and male domination at the top-levels of leadership continue to enforce norms and practices that are not conducive to the advancement of women" (Jones et al., 2015, p. 14).

Navigating Male-Normed Work Culture. Acker (1990) posited that work in American society is built on a gendered norm that the author referred to as the *disembodied worker*. This concept is of an employee who is able to focus solely on work because any other needs, such as home and family, are being tended to by another person (Acker, 1990). While Acker's (1990) original research is dated, current literature identifies this same concept, renamed the *ideal worker norm*, as a male norm that is still pervasive in the modern workplace in the United States (e.g., Eddy & Cox, 2008; Pal & Jones, 2020; Sallee, 2021). A study (Eddy & Cox, 2008) of six women presidents at community colleges examined how the gendered structures of higher education influence the experience of women leaders. The authors asserted that higher education structures are based on this ideal worker norm, which creates a gendered work environment that benefits employees who do not have as many responsibilities outside of work. This concept was represented in the research in that a female president generally waited until her children were grown and out of the house, and/or her husband was retired before making the decision to pursue a presidency (Eddy & Cox, 2008). Additionally, the researchers found that a gendered workplace is perpetuated by judging women against men and male values and expecting women to operate in a more masculine way (Eddy & Cox, 2008). One example is that, in gendered organizations, leadership is defined by position rather than personal qualities:

> The model of positional leadership as the pinnacle of success begins to leave
> no alternative role models for women coming up through the ranks of the
> college. The bind for women is that the quickest route to the upper-level

positions is to mirror the practices currently expected, which are based on the

disembodied worker. (Eddy & Cox, 2008, p. 75)

The authors suggested that when women rise to leadership roles, they should begin to use their influence to shift institutional values away from a gendered system. It is this intentional breaking away from current norms that can shift the institutional culture toward being more gender neutral (Eddy & Cox, 2008).

A study of women who held senior leadership roles in higher education in the United States echoed these findings that women may be expected to meet expectations that were designed for men (Ballenger, 2010). A survey was administered to 35 participants with the purpose of identifying cultural and structural barriers for women, as well as cultural and structural benefits. All the participants were women leaders in roles such as president, dean, chancellor, director, or provost, and all worked at four-year public institutions with enrollments of 8,000 students or more. One of the barriers identified was a lack of mentoring, particularly by same-gendered leaders (Ballenger, 2010). Since few women held these senior administration roles, there were few opportunities, if any, for women who were coming up through the ranks to be mentored by another woman who has traveled that path. Participants also identified the old boys' network as a barrier, as well as gender inequities that were prevalent in policy and/or practice. An example of gender inequity in practice was a lack of diversity on hiring committees, which can create an atmosphere of homogeneity that prevents diversity in hiring decisions. Additionally, participants reported that women tended to have a more circuitous path to leadership than men by making several lateral

career moves, which institutions may use as a justification for lower salaries

(Ballenger, 2010).

Gender Role Congruity

Eagly and Karau (2002) utilized research to develop a role congruity theory in

the context of prejudice toward women leaders, which posits that women are

perceived less favorably than men for leadership roles and behaviors typically

attributed to leaders, such as assertiveness, control, and confidence, are viewed as less

favorable when they are exhibited by females. The researchers further explained that

this role congruity leads to prejudice against women in two ways. First is the belief

that characteristics of a strong leader belong to males, leading to the perception that

women are less capable of leadership than men. Second, leadership behaviors are

inconsistent with people's beliefs about desirable female behavior so women may be

seen as less feminine in these instances (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In their review of

research, Eagly and Karau (2002) examined public perceptions of gender roles over

time. One example of these perceptions was the compilation of responses to the

Gallup poll question about whether respondents would prefer to work for a male boss

or a female boss. In the year 1953, 75% of men and 57% of women respondents

indicated they preferred a male boss. In the year 2000, the numbers evened out a little

with 45% of men and 50% of women preferring a male boss. The same question found

that in 1975, 2% of men and 8% of women preferred a female boss. The numbers

increased slightly in 2000 with 19% of men and 26% of women preferring a female

boss (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The researchers used these data to underscore their

theory that, even across time, women are not valued as leaders in the same way as

men. Therefore, when women are in leadership roles, there is a perceived incongruity between gender and position (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This perception created a barrier for women seeking leadership roles that still persists today.

Eagly and Karau (2002) proposed that the resulting prejudice from role incongruity led to less approving attitudes toward female leaders, as compared to male leaders; greater challenges for women in attaining leadership roles; and decreased likelihood that women would be described as effective in those roles. Jones and Credille (2004) agreed with this theory and applied it to an exploration of women in leadership roles within higher education. This qualitative study explored motivations of eight women to move into administrative roles in higher education. They found that all participants indicated they had encountered barriers, some of which included struggles with breaking into the old boys' network and gaining acceptance from male colleagues (Jones & Credille, 2004). Another interesting observation was that, consistent with role congruity theory, females are socialized beginning in childhood to embrace qualities such as benevolence and understanding, and therefore may be drawn to service-oriented careers. They argued that it is possible that senior leadership roles may be less attractive to some women because these roles lack the personal relationships that women have found affirming (Jones & Credille, 2004).

Double Bind

Another form of gender discrimination is the *double bind*, which is the concept that women may be placed in impossible positions with no successful way out (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Research has identified three specific dilemmas of this type that are faced by women leaders (Sabattini et al., 2007). The first is the perception that when a

female leader exhibits traits such as nurturing, caring, and kindness, those are evaluated as being consistent with gender stereotypes but not competent traits for a leader. Whereas, if she is inconsistent with stereotypes and is assertive, straight-forward, and takes charge, she is evaluated as being too tough, or unfeminine (Sabattini et al., 2007). The second dilemma is that women are held to higher standards than men, but receive lower rewards. For example, women may need to demonstrate multiple times and in multiple ways that they are capable of leading (Sabattini et al., 2007); in other words, they have to work twice as hard to be considered half as good. The third dilemma identified by this research is that women may be perceived as competent, or they may be perceived as likable, but it is rare for them to be seen as both (Sabattini et al., 2007).

In addition to the double bind, which creates an impossible standard for women in the workplace, there is the concept of the "glass cliff" which is the notion that women are put in charge of situations where success seems unlikely (Peterson, 2016; Ryan et al., 2011). A study of gender and managerial stereotypes revealed that "women may be favored in times of poor performance, not because they are expected to improve the situation, but because they are seen to be good people managers and can take the blame for organizational failure" (Ryan et al., 2011, p. 470). In essence, this study showed that managers who exhibited leadership qualities that were person-centered and cooperative, referring to the women, were likely to be strategically placed in no-win managerial situations because the expectations were low and they would accept responsibility for the failure (Ryan et al., 2011).

Double Bind in Higher Education. Eddy and Ward (2015) published an analysis of cases from literature, the authors' previous research, and national data that highlighted the double standard that exists for women in academia. Specifically in the role of president, they found that expectation was that the leader should be decisive and in charge. Conversely, women leaders were expected to be collaborative and cooperative, and when they used this approach, they could be seen as indecisive (Eddy & Ward, 2015). "Given the history of colleges and universities as male enclaves, women often advance their careers by mimicking male behavior while being subtly pressured to enact gender norms" (Eddy & Ward, 2015, p. 10). The disfavoring of leadership qualities that are seen as feminine was also highlighted in an article that drew upon previous research in both quantitative and qualitative studies (O'Connor, 2018). "The depiction of women as more *communal* (helpful, concerned with the welfare of others) and less *agentic* (ambitious, aggressive, self-confident, independent) than men has militated against their access to senior positions" (O'Connor, 2018, p. 5, emphasis in original). When male behavior is defined as assertive, the same behavior in women is called aggressive. Women in leadership roles tend to perceive the need to prove their own credibility in order to push back against the gendered norms of leadership qualities (Cosimini, 2011). Many times, this means working longer hours or taking on more tasks than men. This behavior perpetuates the assertion that women have to work twice as hard to be seen as half as good (Cosimini, 2011; O'Connor, 2018).

An additional element of the double bind is perceptions of women's appearance in the workplace. Haynes (2012) argued that the societal rules about

women's appearance at work can be difficult to decipher; however it is apparent that the rules are different for men and women. For example, a professional male suit is easy to identify, but there is a lot more variation in descriptions of professional dress for women (Haynes, 2012). Further, appearance at work is judged not only by clothing by also by behaviors. "Through a process of commodification and socialization, women feel compelled to compensate for a lack of 'natural' masculine characteristics but are equally criticized for asserting themselves too much" (Haynes, 2012, p. 502). Because dress and behavior can be perceived in a variety of ways, particularly when there are few consistent societal rules for women in these areas, women may experience judgments about appearance and behavior as an additional aspect of the double bind in the workplace.

Gender Pay Gap

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) published a report about the gender pay gap that outlined the impact of unequal pay for women (Miller et al., 2018). The report revealed that in 2017, women in the United States earned 80% of what men earned for full-time, year-round work (Miller et al., 2018). As additional demographic factors are considered, such as race, ethnicity, age, level of education, sexual orientation, and gender identity, the gap gets even wider. The pay gap has long-lasting impacts due to its role in keeping women below the poverty level, as well as causing women to lag behind in lifelong earnings through Social Security benefits and retirement contributions. Additionally, women may not be eligible for the same level of disability or life insurance benefits as men, as those rates tend to be connected to annual earnings (Miller et al., 2018). The American Council on Education (ACE)

provided figures specifically for higher education faculty in regard to the pay gap (Johnson, 2017). In the 2015-16 academic year, male faculty earned, on average, almost $14,000 more than female faculty at public institutions and over $18,000 more than female faculty at private institutions (Johnson, 2017). The study also revealed that males earn a higher salary than females at every academic rank in higher education (Johnson, 2017).This striking gap, combined with the narrower path to tenure and full professor rank, leaves women who choose to pursue a teaching career in higher education at a notable financial disadvantage (Johnson, 2017).

At top research universities in the United States, the lack of diversity among top wage earners is stark. A recent report (Silbert & Mach Dubé, 2021) outlined this disparity through an examination of top-level employee compensation at 130 major research universities in the country. Among these institutions, women represented less than one quarter of all top wage earners; at eight of the institutions, there were no women among the top earners. The report also highlighted that across all disciplines, those which are traditionally male-dominated consistently pay the highest salaries; business, engineering, and science fields were among those identified (Silbert & Mach Dubé, 2021). When women are systematically denied the same earning potential as men, there are far-reaching economic impacts. Approximately two-thirds of student loan debt is held by women, and when they are not afforded equal opportunities in salary earnings, it impacts their ability to pay off that debt (Silbert & Mach Dubé, 2021). Closing the pay gap can not only help women individually, but the economy as a whole. When women have more buying power, they can purchase homes, pay for family needs, and begin to build retirement wealth (Silbert & Mach Dubé, 2021).

The profession of student affairs is not immune from the pay gap. A study that examined career satisfaction and perceived sex discrimination among women administrators in student affairs revealed that pay discrepancy between men and women in the field certainly exists (Blackhurst, 2000). In a survey of 290 female student affairs administrators, 60% reported that they had been paid less than their male counterparts for similar work (Blackhurst, 2000). While this particular study is now dated, it is still notable that such a large percentage of women in student affairs have experienced pay discrimination. Further study on current trends may be warranted to examine whether there have been any changes in recent years.

A recent article (Zahneis, 2020) highlighted that this problem continues, as evidenced by successful lawsuits that have been filed by female faculty against their institutions for pay discrimination. According to the article, Princeton University settled a lawsuit after it was discovered that 106 female faculty had been underpaid, as compared to their male colleagues, between 2012 and 2014; and Northern Michigan University had to pay $1.46 million to four women professors who brought a lawsuit for pay discrimination (Zahneis, 2020). At the time the article was published, Rutgers University and University of Oregon had lawsuits pending for the same complaint – women were not being paid equally to men for equal work. Zahneis (2020) wrote that, in at least one lawsuit, a reason cited for unequal pay was a retention bonus when an employee tells their employer that they have another job offer but will stay if they get a pay increase. Due to family responsibilities, women do not always have the same flexibility as men to pack up and move to a new city (Zahneis, 2020).

Compounding these salary figures is a phenomenon sometimes referred to as the *marriage penalty* or *motherhood penalty* for women (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Miller et al., 2018). Research shows that marriage and parenthood tend to have a positive impact on male earnings but a negative impact on female earnings (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Additionally, women who are mothers tend to lose out on more potential income as they are more likely than fathers to take time away from their careers to raise children; they may leave the workforce entirely for a period of time or reduce their hours (Miller et al., 2018). These factors demonstrate that while the gender pay gap is a result of discriminatory practice, it is also a barrier to equality for women.

Understanding that the gender pay gap is a reality for many women is an important first step in addressing it as a barrier to leadership for women. While this issue is not unique to higher education, this exploration of the literature has revealed that higher education contributes to this problem.

Navigating the Labyrinth and Glass Ceiling

Another barrier to leadership for women that is identified in the literature is a lack of senior roles that are available to women. A common reference to this barrier is the *glass ceiling*, which is the idea that women can climb the career ladder to a certain level but then can only see the top levels of leadership but are blocked from achieving them. Eagly and Carli (2007) proposed an alternative view of this barrier and referred to it as a labyrinth rather than a ceiling. The authors explained that the glass ceiling image is problematic for several reasons. First, it implies a lack of an absolute barrier to leadership; some women have held roles such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), university president, and academic dean, which shows that there can be a path to

senior leadership, as elusive as it may be for some. Second, the glass ceiling relies on an assumption that men and women have equal access to these roles; this review (Eagly & Carli, 2007) examines ways in which this is not true. Additionally, the glass ceiling implies that women are denied leadership roles as they reach the threshold of them, which is inaccurate; many women drop off along the way for a variety of reasons (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Instead, a more accurate metaphor may be that of a labyrinth. They write, "Passage through a labyrinth is not simple or direct, but requires persistence, awareness of one's progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead" (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 64). For Eagly and Carli (2007), the labyrinth metaphor implies a more complex journey than the glass ceiling.

In later writing, Carli and Eagly (2016) examined other metaphors that have been used to describe the limitations on women's ability to advance their careers in similar ways to men. Some of these metaphors applied only to certain types of women, such as the *motherhood penalty* or the *maternal wall*, so they are not applicable to all women with ambitious career goals. Another popular metaphor is the *sticky floor*, which refers to practices that slow women's advancement. These practices could include lower salaries in female-dominated professions or lack of advancement opportunities when women are placed in dead-end jobs. The problem with this concept is that it indicates that once a woman gets herself unstuck from those lower level issues, she will have an unencumbered path to leadership (Carli & Eagly, 2016). The labyrinth, they argue, is the most appropriate metaphor because it symbolizes that while the journey is complicated, it is not impossible. It also represents that women's path to leadership remains more difficult than men's:

If women can now reach their goal more easily than in the past, they still do so less easily than men. So, to be successful, women must continue to carefully chart a path through the impediments and puzzles that they encounter in the labyrinth. (Carli & Eagly, 2016, p. 522)

Studying how women are impacted after navigating these barriers, or labyrinth, is an important contribution to the research about leadership. Diehl (2014) conducted a qualitative study of women leaders in higher education to understand how they make meaning of adversity. Interviews with 26 women who worked in higher education roles of president, provost, or vice president revealed that these barriers can have individual impacts on self-esteem, identity, and perceptions of power (Diehl, 2014). The types of adversity that women identified included discrimination, barriers to advancement, unsupportive leaders, family challenges, health issues, and work-life conflict (Diehl, 2014). The author discovered five themes within the meanings that participants shared. First, it was apparent that growth can come from adversity if you redefine yourself afterwards. Some women described their resiliency after adversity and used it to empower themselves and take on new challenges. Second, perspective about adversity was extremely important. Acknowledging that they would certainly encounter difficulty, but that they had the capacity to face those difficulties, allowed participants to turn challenges into opportunities.

Another theme discovered from participant responses was that privacy is important when dealing with adversity (Diehl, 2014). Particularly when women worked in quite public roles, such as university president, being able to confide in a small group of trusted friends or family was helpful. A fourth theme that emerged

from the data was when women can apply meaning or reason to their adversity, it can positively impact self-esteem and feelings of empowerment. Participants who were unable to derive any meaning or make sense of their situations experienced decreased self-esteem. The final theme from the data was that the women participants viewed themselves as survivors. "These women did something relatively few women have done. They overcame adversity, navigated through obstacles, and broke through barriers to attain senior leadership positions in higher education" (Diehl, 2014, p. 61). Understanding adversity in these ways can provide an important perspective for women who are experiencing barriers to their goals.

Appreciating the role of adversity for women on the path to leadership can provide context for how they must navigate the labyrinth. Reis and Grady (2018) used prior research to understand how women in the role of university president experienced their winding paths to leadership. This narrative study included 5 women presidents at doctoral universities; out of 81 such universities in this Carnegie classification, only 11, less than 14% of these universities, had women presidents. Participants reflected on their paths and identified ways in which they navigated the labyrinth to leadership. An important theme that emerged was that women needed to "know the rules" (Reis & Grady, 2018, p. 102) of higher education. They need to understand how to move through the ranks to get the position they want, and then plan for it. A second tip for navigating the labyrinth was to "hear the message" (Reis & Grady, 2018, p. 104). These messages came from mentors or supervisors and could be explicit or implicit. It was important to hear what others were saying about opportunities as well as bias. A final theme about navigating the labyrinth was about

opting in. Women needed to make intentional decisions, sometimes difficult ones, to take advantage of opportunities that would get them closer to their goals. Some decisions could include making a lateral move, leaving an institution, or taking on volunteer roles in order to gain experience or expertise in a certain area (Reis & Grady, 2018). This research appears to reinforce the concept that higher education institutions are gendered workplaces, built on male norms, and women need to learn how to adapt. However, the authors assert that understanding how women have risen to the top can help to clear the path for more women in the future. "Learning how women reach top levels of administration is valuable in creating a collective voice for women in leadership" (Reis & Grady, 2018, p. 110).

Climate and Culture in Student Affairs Work

Much of the current research on women in higher education is focused on female presidents or faculty members. Some research, however, specifically explores these gender barriers in student affairs. Results indicate that the plight of women in student affairs who seek to rise in the ranks is consistent with the experiences of women in other areas of higher education (e.g., Dale, 2007; Ford, 2014; Marquez, 2014, Pal & Jones, 2020; Spurlock, 2009). This appears to be true despite the statistics that indicate student affairs is a female-dominated profession (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018).

Who Are Midlevel Professionals in Student Affairs?

In order to frame an exploration of the experiences of midlevel professionals in student affairs, it is important to identify typical characteristics and responsibilities of this group. Midlevel student affairs professionals typically hold a title of assistant

dean, director, or coordinator; however, there is a lot of variation in titles among different institutions. These professionals are likely to oversee one functional area within student affairs, such as residence life, student conduct, or student activities, and report to a senior-level administrator (Belch & Strange, 1995; Rosser, 2004; Rosser & Javinar, 2003).

Midlevel student affairs professionals are often the first point of contact for students on campus, which creates the potential to have a large impact on student development, satisfaction, and retention. They are responsible for carrying out programs and policies in which they likely have had no role in developing (Rosser, 2004). As long ago as 1995, Belch and Strange revealed that midlevel professionals often needed to continually switch their focus between day-to-day management and bigger picture leadership. Rosser (2004) found that individuals in these roles are not always recognized for their contributions to the institution; however, they seek out opportunities for professional development and advancement.

Rosser (2000) made a compelling argument for why midlevel professionals require more attention from institutions, as well as from researchers, by stating:

> College and university midlevel administrators are the unsung professionals of the academy – unsung because their contributions to the academic enterprise are rarely recognized and professionals because of their commitment, training, and adherence to high standards of performance and excellence in their areas of expertise. Those in midlevel ranks constitute the largest administrative group within most college and university systems, yet they have little participation in administrative policy decisions and no formal structure of

governance. Despite their significant numbers and professionalism, they lack

visibility throughout the academy and have been of little concern to

educational researchers. (Rosser, 2000, p. 5)

A further argument for the need to study this population is that student affairs work

tends to be nurturing, which has led to a feminization of the profession. "As a result,

higher education genders the work of student affairs by regarding their efforts as less

important than the activities of academic and business affairs units, thereby pushing

student affairs to the periphery of the hierarchy of the institution" (Yakaboski &

Donahoo, 2011, p. 280).

Barriers in Student Affairs Consistent with Other Areas of Higher Education

As with women in faculty or administrative roles in higher education, work-

life conflict is a common theme that has emerged from participants in these studies of

student affairs professionals, particularly as it relates to parenting (Dale, 2007; Ford,

2014; Marquez, 2014; Spurlock, 2009). Women struggled with the decision of when

or if they should start a family, and how much time to spend away from work in order

to meet the needs of their families. Spurlock (2009) noted that participants thought

that women in leadership roles were more scrutinized for their choices about family

than men in those roles.

Another theme that emerged from these qualitative studies, specifically

referring to student affairs work, was the number of times women reported needing to

relocate in order to progress in their careers. They reported that relocation can be

harder for women than for men, as men are more likely to have a non-working spouse

which makes moving easier. Participants also stated that women are more apt to

consider factors such as distance from extended family and impacts on children when deciding whether to move for a job (Ford, 2014; Marquez, 2014; Spurlock, 2009). These observations were echoed in research by Biddix (2011), whose participants noted surprise at how many times they needed to move in order to advance their student affairs careers.

Participants in these studies also shared personal experiences of discrimination in the workplace (Dale, 2007; Ford, 2014; Marquez, 2014; Spurlock, 2009). Marquez (2014), who studied female SSAOs at large prestigious universities, found that women had to fight against the assumption that men are better suited to lead these institutions. Spurlock's (2009) participants reported experiencing discrimination in pay or promotion based on gender. Additionally, Dale (2007) revealed that women in student affairs were not immune from the double bind, where they needed to be seen as authoritative in order to be successful in their roles, but if they were too authoritative, then they were described as aggressive and may have lost credibility. Another barrier identified was women had to find their voice and fight feeling invisible compared to male leaders (Dale, 2007; Ford, 2014). The inability to break into informal networks, typically occupied by men in leadership roles, prevented women from being seen or heard in ways that opened future opportunities for them (Dale, 2007; Ford, 2014).

The concept of feeling invisible was echoed in a perspective piece written by Manning in 2009. Women, she noted, were working as directors, serving on committees, and performing many of the daily tasks required at a university; however, they were less likely to be sought out for career advancement than men (Manning, 2009). As a faculty member in a master's program for student affairs administration,

Manning (2009) had a first-hand perspective of the experiences of women who were just starting in the profession, as well as those who had many years of experience. Manning (2009) observed that more women than men were moving through the master's program, but that trend was not maintained through senior leadership roles in student affairs.

Challenges to Staff Retention in Student Affairs

There has been some research into why midlevel student affairs professionals choose to leave the profession, and similar themes have emerged in the findings of these studies. Jo (2008) conducted a qualitative study of 30 women in midlevel roles who worked for at least two years in student affairs. Buchanan (2012) examined the experiences of five individuals who stayed in the profession for less than six years. Additionally, Marshall et al. (2016) surveyed 153 participants who had left student affairs to learn about their reasons for leaving. Themes that were present in all of these findings over time included low salary, lack of work-life balance, lack of opportunities for advancement, and negative relationships with supervisors (Buchanan, 2012; Jo, 2008; Marshall et al., 2016).

Interestingly, some of these challenges are apparent prior to attaining any role in student affairs. Silver and Jakeman (2014) conducted a qualitative study of 20 master's students enrolled in a student affairs preparation program. Half of the participants indicated they were considering leaving the field before even starting in their first role. Some of the reasons that were provided echoed those that have been discussed – low pay and lack of work-life balance. Additionally, these students recognized that there is an emotional burden that comes with working so closely with

college students, and that work is not always valued by the institution (Silver &
Jakeman, 2014). All of these findings indicate that the institution has a role in
retention and satisfaction of student affairs professionals, particularly those in
midlevel roles.

Institutional Role in Addressing Barriers

The literature considered to this point has been an examination of current
research on women in higher education leadership and indicates that women have
some individual control over their perceived barriers and how to navigate them.
However, it is important to recognize that these barriers exist within the established
structures of work environments. Therefore, it is imperative that those in the highest
levels of leadership in these institutions, specifically presidents and members of the
boards of trustees, work toward dismantling gendered policies and practices.

Effects of Institutional Culture on Retention in Student Affairs

A recently conducted mixed methods study (Pal & Jones, 2020) investigated
the impact of campus climate and culture on career aspirations of women in midlevel
student affairs roles. Participants had titles such as associate director, director, and
assistant dean and had been at their respective institutions for an average of 12 years.
There were 257 participants who completed the quantitative survey, and 18 who
agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews. Of the 257 participants, about one
third indicated that they aspired to senior roles at some point in their careers, and the
majority of respondents (66%, $n = 150$) perceived that women had the same career
advancement opportunities as men at their institutions and that there was general
institutional support for advancement (Pal & Jones, 2020). Participants also cited

professional development opportunities, flexible work environments, and supportive supervisors as indicators of an institutional culture that supports women in leadership.

This study also revealed perceived barriers to advancement for women in student affairs. Among them were a lack of work-life balance, a current gender imbalance in leadership, being too far removed from direct work with students, and institutional politics (Pal & Jones, 2020). Women who encountered these barriers sometimes made trade-offs in their careers by staying in their current roles while trying to expand their responsibilities, leaving them stuck at midlevel (Pal & Jones, 2020). An additional barrier that was identified by participants in the study was the concept described earlier in this paper as the ideal worker, essentially indicating that the employees who are rewarded with advancement tend to be those who commit all of their time to work, without having to balance outside responsibilities. Sacrificing time away from work in order to prioritize the needs of the institution, and seeing this as an expectation of senior leaders, made advancement less desirable for some participants (Pal & Jones, 2020).

When employees in midlevel roles encounter barriers to advancement, such as those described by Pal and Jones (2020), they may decide to leave the profession rather than stay in their current role (Johnsrud, 2000; Marshall et al., 2016). For student affairs in particular, the nature of the work itself appears to be a factor in decisions to leave the profession. A survey utilizing quantitative and qualitative questions was answered by 153 participants who had recently left the student affairs profession (Marshall et al., 2016). The reasons for leaving the profession included a lack of work-life balance, lack of opportunity to advance, low pay, and lack of

supervisor support (Marshall et al., 2016). This study highlighted the importance of creating a supportive and flexible work environment in order to retain employees. Since women appear to be more impacted than men by issues related to work-life balance, this issue is an important one for higher education institutions to address.

Gender and Student Affairs Work. Some recent studies indicate that institutional culture may impact the experience of women in student affairs in specific ways. Turnbow (2019) conducted a qualitative study of women midlevel administrators in student affairs to understand how they experience these roles. Findings indicated that there may be gendered divisions of work that disadvantage women. For example, some participants indicated that men tended not to volunteer for the additional work of taking on a special project, so that responsibility fell to women. Additionally, participants noted that when staff meetings were led by women, they were often more efficient and productive than those led by men. When men were leading meetings, they were heavy in discussion rather than action, and women would be asked or expected to perform secretarial duties such as taking notes (Turnbow, 2019). Another gender difference that emerged from this study was the expectation of who should cover after-hours work, which is typically uncompensated. Participants from Turnbow's (2019) study indicated that women without children were the staff members that others looked to for evening work, and this expectation was seemingly not applied to men. It is common for student affairs responsibilities to fall outside of regular business hours, so this issue is particularly noteworthy.

García et al. (2020) examined female midlevel student affairs professionals from a different perspective that may be informative about how to encourage women

to seek senior leadership roles. This narrative study of 21 non-academic, midlevel women in higher education used empowerment theory as a lens through which women can perceive their level of influence. Empowerment theory suggests that individuals need to identify with five constructs in order to feel empowered; self-efficacy, personal consequence, meaning, self-determination, and trust (García et al., 2020). Participants revealed that fostering relationships with colleagues and displaying leadership traits are more important than what position title is held. Gaining the trust of supervisors, sharing knowledge, and supporting other women were additional ways that participants felt empowered in their roles (García et al., 2020). Understanding the ways in which midlevel women perceive their own power and ability to influence decisions at the institution may lead to improved retention in midlevel roles or could encourage more women to seek senior leadership roles (García et al., 2020). Additional research utilizing empowerment theory may help women navigate gendered institutions in which policies and practices might be impeding their attempts to influence institutional practice and provide insight into navigating into higher roles.

Institutional Policies Perpetuating Gender Barriers

Much of this literature review about women in leadership has focused on the role of the individual and how she must navigate challenges, or on overall societal barriers that disadvantage women. Another barrier to leadership for women is the institution itself, and what roles and responsibilities it has in perpetuating or, ideally, changing these circumstances. Expecting women to bear the burden of working their way to the top of gendered organizations without addressing the systemic issues that organizational leaders could change is not an effective path toward equity in

leadership (Cox, 2014; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Eddy & Cox, 2008; O'Connor, 2018).

Burkinshaw and White (2017) used a two-case study approach to examine gendered power relations in higher education. One case included women who were serving as Vice Chancellors in the United Kingdom, and the other included younger women in midlevel roles at a newer university in Australia. The experiences of the women in both cases showed that their main strategy for succeeding in leadership was adapting to fit into male norms. Adapting required a lot of emotional labor due to the effort required to understand and navigate the double bind and other gendered practices (Burkinshaw & White, 2017). The findings of this research suggest that organizations are not apt to change their gendered practices as long as women continue to be judged based on male norms. An opportunity for true change will exist if the institutional leaders acknowledge that they are perpetuating the problem, and the onus to change is not on the women who aspire to leadership roles.

A beginning strategy for removing institutional barriers may be to diversify individual leadership at the highest level. Cox (2014) conducted research with seven women presidents, provosts, and vice presidents at private, non-profit universities, and results indicated that gender prejudice is still prevalent in higher education. One suggestion informed by this study's data was that the board of trustees at the institution needed to include at least three women in order for female voices to be heard (Cox, 2014). Efforts to address gendered institutional policies and practice need to be led from the top down, and the board of trustees has tremendous influence over high-level hiring decisions which help shape the campus environment.

Shift in Institutional Values. Acker's (1990) view on organizational structure posits that gender dynamics are an implicit part of the hierarchy within an organization. This assertion underscores the value of the institutional role in addressing inequities. Yakaboski and Donahoo (2011) address the importance of changing the dynamics of male-dominated hierarchies by stating:

> Because of this implicitness, change occurs not by requiring women to assimilate or acculturate to the masculine nature of higher education but rather "transformation" occurs when the organizational culture values equally the contribution of women and their multiple identities and roles within personal and work life. The "radical transformation" that Acker called for would require higher education to acknowledge the value of student affairs and the role that this largely feminized field plays within the organization. (p. 281)

It cannot be understated how integral an intentional shift in institutional values would be in order to change systemic policies and practices that can address gender inequalities. A study by Sallee (2012) examined how fathers who worked in academia balanced the expectations of both work and home. The study compared experiences among four research institutions; two of which had family-friendly human resources policies that were more progressive than the other two institutions in the study. Sallee (2012) found that even when institutions had policies that allowed for flexible work schedules, pausing the tenure clock, or others that attempted to promote a work-life balance, employees could be viewed negatively for taking advantage of those policies; as if they were not as committed to their jobs as they should be. Results of this study indicated that even though structural change was in place, such as family-friendly

policies, it was not always utilized due to possible stigma. Therefore, the policies were ineffective without an accompanying culture change (Sallee, 2012).

In their book chapter about ideal worker norms and the conflict with work-life balance, Isdell and Wolf-Wendel (2021) agreed that institutions play an important role in addressing practices that are counter to work-life balance. The authors believed that "it is incumbent upon institutions of higher education to create policies, structures, and cultures that allow their employees to have fulfilling lives outside of work" (Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021, pp. 17-18). Additionally, instituting policies that encourage a balance between work and home can ultimately benefit the institution. Flexible work schedules, remote work, time off for professional development, and access to wellness resources on campus can help recruit and retain highly talented employees. The presence of these employees can, in turn, contribute to increased morale and productivity, which can have a positive impact on the student experience (Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021).

Systemic Change in Higher Education Institutions. Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) argued that even when organizations make attempts to address gender barriers, they tend only to address one barrier at a time; however, true change requires a more comprehensive approach. These researchers conducted a cross-sector analysis of two qualitative research studies of women leaders from higher education and religious organizations, and identified societal barriers that impacted women's ability to advance their careers. One study's participants included 26 women presidents, provosts, and vice presidents in colleges and universities in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The other study included 12 women at executive levels of

leadership in mission organizations. In both studies, the participants were women who led in areas that were dominated by male leadership, despite the fact that more than half of the constituents in these areas were female. Both studies were based in a social constructivist epistemology, and both utilized semi-structured interviews to gather data. The comparison of the two studies identified 27 gender-based leadership barriers that were organized into three levels of society – macro (societal), meso (organizational), and micro (individual). The analysis revealed that most attempts to remove barriers occurred at the meso level, but to be effective there needs to be a broader look at barriers at all three levels of society to identify and eliminate them (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

The authors identified four organizational approaches to removing barriers. First was *fix the women* which focused on encouraging women to change in order to fit into gendered organizations, for example by being more assertive. The second approach was *create equal opportunity*, which centered around changing workplace policies that tend to favor men. Offering flexible hours, family leave, and equal pay are examples of creating equal opportunity. *Celebrating differences* was a third approach, and its emphasis was on valuing female work styles equally to those of males. The approach that deserves the most attention, according to the authors, was *revising the work culture*. This tactic begins with the acknowledgment that the organization is gendered and reflects masculine values. Once that is accepted, the organization can take steps to address inequalities. Some examples are creating diverse governing boards, tying performance to achievement of goals rather than time

spent at work, and encouraging balance by requiring employees to take time off when they work past regular business hours (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

Addressing bias from an institutional level can require reflection on current policies and practices (Eddy & Cox, 2008). A phenomenological study of six women presidents at community colleges revealed that a male hierarchy is still in existence in these organizations, and behaviors that are rewarded are steeped in male norms (Eddy & Cox, 2008). The onus for addressing these inequalities is on the leadership of the institution and is likely to require confronting some uncomfortable truths about organizational practices. The first step, according to the authors, is to review the goals and mission of the institution with the acknowledgement that they are not gender neutral documents, and identify ways to make them gender neutral. Because most college and universities were founded by men, the masculine ideals that have guided institutional leaders for generations are likely still in place (Eddy & Cox, 2008). Next, leaders need to take the time to identify practices in areas of the institution that are positively contributing to gender equality, and work to replicate those practices throughout the entire institution. Additionally, institutions need to identify ways in which gendered practices are rewarded and compensated and eliminate them. For example, work related to soft skills, such as student advising and community building, is often handled by women and may be taken for granted and not acknowledged as valuable. This type of work is often directly associated with student success and retention and should not be valued less than research (Eddy & Cox, 2008).

Institutional practices that are gendered may sometimes be attributed to elements of community culture, and may require careful scrutiny to identify their

imbalance. In hiring practices, for example, ideals such as *excellence* and *fit* are based on social constructs that disadvantage women (O'Connor, 2018). *Excellence* is often ill-defined or its definition disfavors qualities that are typically attributed to women, such as being collaborative, helpful, or concerned about others, in comparison to qualities typically attributed to men such as independence, self-confidence, and aggressiveness (O'Connor, 2018). *Fit* can reinforce the double bind that women face. "If they behave like women they are not seen as leaders, if they behave as leaders they are critcised as women" (O'Connor, 2018, p. 6). The most effective way to counteract these gendered practices, the author argues, is to hire candidates with demonstrated success in rectifying inequalities in their organizations, rather than hiring based on these vague concepts of excellence and fit and then convincing new leaders that gender equity needs to be addressed (O'Connor, 2018).

Summary

This examination of research related to barriers to leadership for women has revealed that there are many factors that create these barriers. These factors include personal barriers such as impostor syndrome or work-life conflicts, as well as structural barriers such as discrimination, gendered workplaces, and the double bind. The literature indicates that women who seek leadership roles, particularly in higher education, can benefit from learning about strategies to overcome these barriers. Current leaders at institutions, including presidents and members of the board of trustees, also need to work toward addressing gendered practices, both explicit and implicit, to clear the path for more women leaders. Much of the current research focuses on women who have already reached senior leadership and have reflected on

their journey. There is value in adding to the literature by exploring the experiences of midlevel women who aspire to senior roles to understand what other barriers may exist.

  The next chapter will describe the research questions, methodology, participants, and data analysis for the current study. It will also address the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and strategies for establishing trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology that was used in this qualitative instrumental case study which explored the experiences of women in midlevel student affairs roles who aspire to, but have not yet attained, a senior-level role. This chapter will outline the research questions for this study, explain the rationale for selecting the methodology, describe the participants and the strategies for recruiting them, outline the steps taken to collect data, and will provide an overview of the data analysis strategies. The role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and strategies for establishing trustworthiness of the study are also discussed.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore the perceived barriers to leadership for female-identifying student affairs professionals at the midlevel who aspire to, but have not yet attained, a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) role. In the context of this research, student affairs is defined as the area within higher education that complements the academic curriculum by focusing on college student development, growth, and engagement. Midlevel roles in student affairs include those that are focused on one functional area (e.g., residence life, student activities, academic advising) and may have some supervisory responsibilities. While titles can vary widely across institutions, these roles are typically represented by titles such as assistant director, director, assistant or associate dean. Senior-level roles refer to those that represent the chief student affairs officer within the institution. These roles have policy-making and supervisory responsibilities over multiple areas within student affairs and report directly to the president or another cabinet-level

position. Titles that accompany these roles are typically dean of students or vice

president of student affairs.

Because much of the published research has studied women who have

achieved SSAO roles (e.g., Cosimini, 2011; Dale, 2007; Ford, 2014; Marquez, 2014;

Spurlock, 2009), this study was intentionally focused on women at the midlevel who

aspire to, but have not yet attained, the SSAO role. Participants who self-identified as

female were included, with the understanding that gender is a social construct that is

not necessarily dictated by biological sex. The guiding questions for this research

were:

1. What barriers, if any, have participants experienced regarding their ability to

   move into a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) role?

2. To what extent, if at all, do participants experience higher education

   institutions as gendered organizations?

Rationale for Methodology

Qualitative research is appropriate when a study seeks to find meaning and

understanding of a topic. A qualitative design uses a *constant comparative* process,

which is defined as "comparing one segment of data with another to determine

similarities and differences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 32). Utilizing the constant

comparative process during data analysis creates the ability to arrive at categories and

themes with robust warrants, which allows the researcher to address the research

questions and inform the problem under study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This

qualitative study used an instrumental case study design to answer the research

questions and utilized a constant comparative process throughout. This methodology is

appropriate when the issues being studied are of higher importance than the case itself (Stake, 1995). "Issues are not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical, and especially personal contexts" (Stake, 1995, p. 17). Examining how gender has impacted participants' career paths places the focus on the social and historical issues related to gender. The use of an instrumental case study design allowed for examination and understanding of the phenomenon of barriers to leadership for women.

The case was bound by gender, career path, and geography. Participants included those who identify as women who work in midlevel roles within student affairs, and who aspire to a senior-level role. Participants were selected from the membership of Region V in NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, which includes the Northwest states of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, and Utah.

A critical epistemological perspective was used for this study in order to provide a basis of change and empowerment when interpreting the results. With a critical perspective, multiple realities can exist and they are rooted in political, social, and cultural contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study used a theoretical framework that combined the theories of gender role congruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and gendered organizations (Acker, 1990), which provided the context for investigating the role structures of the organizations in which participants worked, and how social roles impact women's paths to leadership within student affairs. The use of a critical epistemology is "designed to result in collective action to address the problem" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 13). Further, critical research is a mechanism

not merely to understand what is going on, but "to critique the way things are in hopes of bringing about a more just society" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 60). Therefore, this study was designed to understand whether gender dynamics create barriers to leadership for women, and the means used were women's stories of how they may have encountered gender barriers in their careers.

Data Collection

This instrumental case study used an explanatory sequential design for data collection. Phase 1 utilized a questionnaire that included demographic questions, Likert-type questions, and an open-ended qualitative question, while Phase 2 utilized interviews for data collection. In this type of research, the questionnaire data are collected first and those responses inform the interview process, with the purpose of utilizing the interviews to explain the questionnaire data in more depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The flowchart in Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the phases of this design.

Figure 1

Phases of Explanatory Sequential Design
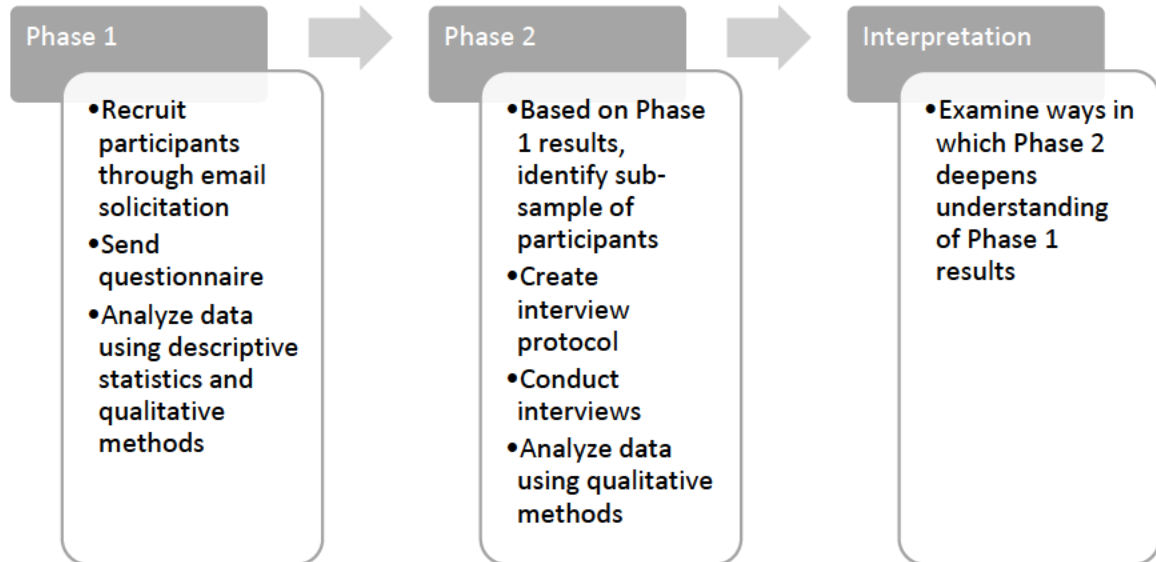
The first phase of this study utilized a questionnaire that included demographic, Likert-type, and open-ended qualitative questions. Descriptive statistics were used in the initial analysis, followed by provisional coding using a researcher-generated list of a priori codes based on relevant research (Saldaña, 2021); results were used to inform Phase 2. The second phase of this study was conducted through follow-up interviews with a randomly selected sub-sample of participants, using a semi-structured protocol. This sequential approach was appropriate for this study because the qualitative interviews could be used to expand upon the results from the questionnaire (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The items from the questionnaire in Phase 1 were used to discover what beliefs and attitudes were held by the participants, and the qualitative question was designed to provide insight into individual experiences.

The follow-up qualitative interviews in Phase 2 were used to create a deeper understanding of participant experiences and explored how beliefs and attitudes impact a participant's behaviors or perspectives. In this phase, the constant comparative process of qualitative research design created the opportunity for deeper understanding through the utilization of questionnaire responses to inform some of the interview questions. In this case study design, interviews were an appropriate method for data collection, as participants were recalling and reflecting on experiences that happened in the past; these were experiences which could not be replicated for the purpose of this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In qualitative research, data collection and analysis need to be thorough to address issues of reliability and trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Strategies for establishing trustworthiness are discussed later in this chapter.

Participants and Setting

Purposeful criteria sampling was utilized to identify study participants. This sampling method was appropriate for this study because it allowed for selection of participants who could add to the understanding of the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To qualify for the questionnaire, participants were females who self-identified as currently working in midlevel student affairs roles at an institution of higher education within the Northwest region of the United States. To qualify for the interview, participants who completed the questionnaire needed to indicate that they aspired to a senior student affairs officer role.

Phase 1 Participants Sampling

Participants were identified through the membership directory of NASPA – Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education. Specifically, the directory search was limited to those who reside in Region V, which includes the states of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, and Utah, and who self-identified as a midlevel professional in their member profile. These potential participants ($N = 192$) received an email that included the purpose of the study, the criteria for participation, and a link to the Qualtrics questionnaire. Two weeks after the initial recruitment message, a reminder email was sent to maximize participation. Thirty-two completed questionnaires were received, which was a 17% response rate. Interview data from Phase 2 of this study provided a more thorough understanding of the research questions. The questionnaire responses from Phase 1 helped inform this follow-up data collection and provided a narrow, targeted sample for interviews.

Phase 2 Participants Sampling

The final question asked participants to enter their contact information if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Participants were eligible for Phase 2 if they identified as female and indicated that they aspire to an SSAO role. Of the 32 responses, 17 participants indicated they were willing to participate in an interview. Two of those 17 participants responded *no* to the question "Do you aspire to an SSAO role" so those participants were not considered for interviews. Four others responded *unsure* to that question; however, three of those four also indicated a range of years in which they may pursue an SSAO role. The one participant who indicated they were unsure about pursuing this role and also did not indicate a range of years in

which they might pursue it was removed from eligibility. From the remaining 14 participants, a random sample of 8 participants were identified and contacted to schedule interviews.

Interviews utilized a semi-structured protocol, and questions were informed by Phase 1 results as well as themes from current literature. The interview protocol was pilot tested with individuals who were similar to the target population but were not part of the participant pool, and revised for clarity and flow.

Instruments

Two separate instruments were utilized for data collection in this instrumental case study which used explanatory sequential design. The first was an electronic Qualtrics software questionnaire. The second instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol which was drafted prior to collecting any data, and then finalized following initial analysis of the questionnaire responses. The process of using the questionnaire results to inform the interview protocol was part of the explanatory sequential design and was necessary to ensure that the interview questions reflected the areas that required deeper and more detailed understandings by the researcher. The interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of participants from Phase 1.

Questionnaire Instrument

A link to a questionnaire that was intended to measure participants' attitudes about gender barriers to leadership was sent via email to each participant for data collection. The researcher-developed instrument was based on barriers to leadership that were identified through a literature review. Questions were pilot tested with

doctoral students in a research class, as well as with individuals who work in higher

education but were not part of the study population.

The instrument included 13 demographic questions, 23 questions that

identified potential barriers to advancement, and one open-ended question.

Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each item using a five-

point Likert-type scale, with available choices as *strongly agree*, *somewhat agree*,

somewhat disagree, *strongly disagree*, and *unsure*. A final question on the instrument

was an open-ended prompt that asked participants to list any additional barriers that

may exist but were not identified in the previous questions, or to expand on any of

their responses to the previous questions. A copy of the questionnaire and instructions

are included in Appendix A.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol used in Phase 2 was designed to create a broader

understanding of the participants' experiences with their path to an SSAO role. For

example, participants were asked to respond to prompts such as "What interests you in

becoming a senior student affairs officer?" and "What hesitations do you have, if any,

about the prospect of being an SSAO?" Additional questions were derived from the

literature and also from responses to the Phase 1 questionnaire. Specifically, questions

were added to explore role expectations of administrators based on gender, and a

double bind issue where Phase 1 respondents indicated they thought they had to work

harder than others to be valued equally. The interview protocol was pilot tested with

individuals who were similar to the target population but were not included in the

participant pool, and final protocols were approved by the faculty chairperson for this study. A copy of the semi-structured interview protocol is included in Appendix B.

Design and Procedure

The explanatory sequential design of this study included two phases.

Phase 1

In Phase 1, potential participants were identified through the NASPA member directory ($N = 192$). Members can choose what information to include in their NASPA member profile, and participants were selected if they were part of Region V and identified themselves as a midlevel professional on their profile. Members who used a prefix of *Mr.* in their profile or had a traditionally male first name were excluded from the sample. The recruitment email contained the purpose of the study, criteria for participation, and a link to the Qualtrics questionnaire for completion. Two weeks after the initial recruitment email, a reminder message was sent. Participants who included their names for potential interview participation were not sent the reminder message, nor were any individuals who had an auto-reply stating that they were no longer at the institution or that they were on extended leave that spanned the timeframe of this study. The questionnaire remained open for approximately three weeks. Results were analyzed using descriptive statistics and provisional coding using a researcher-generated list of a priori codes based on relevant research (Saldaña, 2021). These results will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Phase 2

Phase 2 consisted of eight individual interviews with a sub-sample of participants from Phase 1. Interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes and were

conducted by video conference. Interviews began approximately four and a half weeks after the questionnaire closed and were completed over the course of three weeks.

Interviews were audio and video recorded through the video conference software and a transcript was created using the built-in transcription feature in the software. Transcripts were reviewed while listening to the recording and word misspellings corrected as necessary. Data were analyzed using Saldaña's (2021) first- and second-cycle coding techniques.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, interpretation of findings is impacted by the experiences and biases of the researcher. It is important to acknowledge potential biases before embarking on the study (Creswell, 2014). My positionality as the researcher includes over 15 years of experience working in student affairs in higher education, and I have aspirations for an SSAO role. I identify as female and have advocated for, and supported, other women in the student affairs profession. Throughout my career, I have mentored female professionals which, combined with personal experiences, has familiarized me with barriers some women may face in terms of aspirations to leadership roles. These barriers include impostor syndrome, work-life balance, and discrimination, to name a few.

Throughout my career, I have witnessed and experienced gender biases within the student affairs profession, and in higher education generally. Among these biases are pay discrimination and double bind issues, where a woman needs to be authoritative to be seen as a leader, but this can be interpreted as aggression and work against her (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Awareness of the potential for personal bias is

helpful in that strategies are then employed to prevent such bias from interfering with data interpretation which, in turn, would influence the findings that arose from that data. While it is impossible to eliminate all biases, I used caution to ensure that qualitative data included only the perspectives of participants, and were not influenced by my personal feelings. Strategies for establishing trustworthiness and minimizing bias are discussed later in this chapter.

Ethical Considerations

The research study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Portland in August 2021. Instructions for participation in this questionnaire included the approximate time necessary to complete the instrument, the categories of information being sought, and a statement that a participant could exit the questionnaire and end their participation in the study at any point. Participants were asked to voluntarily enter their name and email address in order to be contacted by the researcher to be included in Phase 2 of the study. Data collected through interviews were coded with pseudonyms so individual participants were not identifiable. Participants were invited to select their own pseudonym and were assured that the researcher was the only person who knew which pseudonym belonged to which participant. For participants who did not choose their own pseudonym, one was assigned. Interviews were audio and video recorded utilizing video conferencing software. Participants were asked to consent to the recording and assured that it would be used for data collection purposes only and would not be shared. A transcript was initially produced by the built-in feature of the software, and

then I reviewed the transcripts while listening to the audio and corrected them as necessary.

All data have been stored electronically on a university-owned, password-protected network drive accessible to me. The drive is automatically backed up on a daily basis. As an additional security measure, data were copied to a password-protected external hard drive that is owned by me. Hard copies of data have been stored securely in a locked box, and I am the only person with the combination.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted first on the questionnaire data, and then separately on the interview data. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze questionnaire data in order to identify patterns in the data. First- and second-cycle coding techniques were utilized to analyze the qualitative data from the interviews.

Questionnaire Data

Items on the questionnaire included demographic questions, one open-ended question, and 23 statements to which participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement. Data from the questionnaires were downloaded from Qualtrics into Excel; data from incomplete questionnaires were removed. The spreadsheet was then uploaded into IBM SPSS Statistics software for analysis. A total of 192 recipients were identified from the NASPA member directory. Forty responses were received, though eight were removed because they were less than 50% completed. This resulted in a total of 32 completed questionnaires, which was a 17% response rate. The responses from Phase 1 helped inform this follow-up data collection and provided a

narrow, targeted sample for interviews. Table 1 summarizes the demographic

information of the Phase 1 participants.

Table 1

Demographics of Phase 1 Participants

Demographic category	*n*	%
Race/Ethnicity		
Asian	3	9
Black/African American	1	3
Hispanic/Latinx	2	6
White	19	59
More than one race	6	19
Prefer not to answer	1	3
Years in student affairs		
1 – 4 years	4	13
5 – 9 years	6	19
10 – 14 years	10	31
15 years or more	12	38
Years in current role		
Less than one year	2	6
1 – 4 years	14	44
5 – 9 years	10	31
10 – 14 years	4	13
15 years or more	2	6
Age		
25 - 34	6	19
35 - 44	14	44
45 - 54	8	25
55+	4	13
Family status		
Married/partnered	22	69
Divorced/separated	2	6
Single	7	22
Prefer not to answer	1	3
Age of youngest child		
0 – 5 years	3	9
6 – 12 years	6	19
13 – 17 years	2	6
23 years or older	4	13
No children	17	53

The majority of participants were under the age of 45 and reported working in their current role for fewer than 10 years and within the student affairs profession for fewer than 15 years. While there was some racial and ethnic diversity in the population, the majority of participants were White. Additionally, most participants were married or partnered and did not have children.

Likert-Type Question Analysis. Phase 1 participants were presented with 23 statements and were instructed to indicate their level of agreement based on their own experiences and aspirations to an SSAO role. The available responses were *strongly agree*, *somewhat agree*, *somewhat disagree*, *strongly disagree*, and *unsure*. For the purposes of data analysis, responses of *somewhat agree* and *strongly agree* were collapsed to indicate overall agreement, and responses of *somewhat disagree* and *strongly disagree* were collapsed to indicate overall disagreement. Questions that had 19 or more responses in overall agreement or overall disagreement were noted as having a strong response. Questions with between 16 and 18 responses in either *agree* or *disagree* category were noted as evenly split.

Each of the questions was sorted based on the two research questions for this study, with one group of questions addressing barriers to leadership for women and a second group of questions addressing higher education institutions as gendered workplaces. Results of this analysis will be reported in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5.

Qualitative Analysis. The questionnaire contained one open-ended question which asked participants if there was additional information about women's aspirations to SSAO roles that they wanted to share. Qualitative analysis of the data

collected from this question was done through provisional coding using a researcher-generated list of a priori codes based on relevant research (Saldaña, 2021). Provisional a priori codes for this study included the following: impostor syndrome, work-life conflict, ideal worker norms, gendered workplace, pay gap, and double bind. All of these provisional codes were derived from themes that appeared repeatedly in the literature.

Interview Data

Interview data were analyzed using Saldaña's (2021) method of two-cycle coding. According to Saldaña (2021), "first cycle coding is *analysis* – taking things apart. Second cycle coding is *synthesis* – putting things together into new assemblages of meaning" (p. 6, emphasis in original). First-cycle coding was conducted in two phases; initially through holistic coding followed by in vivo coding. Holistic coding is a method that analyzes data as a whole, rather than line by line (Saldaña, 2021). In vivo coding utilizes the participants' own words and is an important method in "studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 138). Analytic memo writing was used throughout the coding process to reflect on reactions of participants during interviews, to note responses that I found surprising or intriguing, and to identify links between participant responses. Saldaña (2021) asserts that coding and analytic memo writing are concurrent processes in qualitative research that contribute to the understanding of the data. The constant comparative approach was utilized in both first- and second-cycle coding such that what was emerging from the data was constantly shaping the analysis and synthesis process.

Pattern coding was used in the second cycle and organized based on the research questions in this study. Pattern coding is a method of grouping first-cycle codes into a lesser number of categories or themes based on their commonality (Saldaña, 2021). Once pattern coding was completed, the results were themed based on the two research questions for this study. Themeing the data is an interpretation, rather than a description, of results (Saldaña, 2021). Results were organized into two main themes based on the research questions – barriers to leadership for women, and higher education institutions as gendered workplaces. Within the first theme, it was logical to separate the pattern codes into internal or external barriers, based on whether the individual had some level of control to change or influence the barrier. The pattern codes that were included as internal barriers were: (a) impostor syndrome, (b) showing emotion is unacceptable, and (c) work-life conflict. The pattern codes included as external barriers were: (a) saying yes to everything, (b) nature of student affairs work, and (c) religion's influence on gender roles.

The second theme in the data was related to higher education institutions operating as gendered workplaces. The pattern codes included in this theme were: (a) ideal worker norms, (b) double bind, (c) pay gap, (d) sexual harassment and sexism, (e) women doing unpaid or hidden work, and (f) male-dominated leadership. The results of this data analysis are outlined in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5.

Trustworthiness of Data and Results

Validity in qualitative research is established through methods of trustworthiness (Creswell, 2014). "Validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the

standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account" (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). According to Guba and Lincoln (1982), the four criteria used to establish trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility establishes whether "the data sources find the inquirer's analysis, formulation, and interpretations to be believable" (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 246). Credibility was established in the current study through several strategies. First, I employed "persistent observation" (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 247) by making notes about body language and nonverbal cues that participants exhibited during the interviews. Additionally, I utilized member checking during administration of the interviews by paraphrasing participants' responses and then seeking confirmation that I was understanding them accurately. Because the interviews were video recorded, I was able to review the video while editing the transcripts for transcription, spelling, and typographical errors, which allowed for additional observations. "Peer debriefing" (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 247) was also utilized to establish credibility. I worked with a peer group in my doctoral cohort who provided an external yet informed check on selected methodology and analysis strategies.

Transferability was addressed through the selection of the sample as being representative of the population to which the study applies. All the participants identified as females working in midlevel roles within student affairs, and all indicated that they had aspirations for an SSAO role. Interview participants were selected using random sampling, which further adds to the transferability of results (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). In addition, *thick description* was utilized during data analysis to capture the

experiences of participants, which increases the transferability of the results (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). In order to create this thick description, interviews were audio and video recorded and transcribed, and participants' own words were used in the data analysis. Reviewing the videos of participants while transcribing allowed for matching of body language with verbal cues, which contributed to the thick description in the data.

Dependability in qualitative research means that a study can be reasonably replicated in the future study (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). *Triangulation* contributes to dependability and involves collecting data through multiple methods and looking for convergence (Creswell, 2014). In this study, triangulation of questionnaire data, interview data, and the literature was used to demonstrate dependability of the data. Additionally, a research journal was kept throughout the data collection and analysis and served as an audit trail of the steps that were taken and decisions that were made.

Guba and Lincoln (1982) stated that the fourth element of establishing trustworthiness of data is through confirmability. This means that the data are objective and not analyzed based on the biases of the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). In this study, triangulation, as described above, was one strategy used to establish confirmability. Comparing the data from the questionnaire with the interview responses, and further with the current literature established the opportunity to compare information from different sources and find commonalities. Another method used to establish confirmability in this study was a research journal, which served as a mechanism for checking research bias. Third, having an inherent awareness of my own biases, I was able to use analytic memos and journaling as an ongoing check

against them. All of the strategies defined here contributed to the trustworthiness of this study and its findings.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the methodology for this qualitative instrumental case study designed to address the research questions about women in midlevel student affairs roles who aspire to SSAO roles. Strategies for identifying and selecting participants were reviewed. The two phases of this explanatory sequential design were outlined according to the study timeline. The first phase included a questionnaire link which was emailed to participants. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative methods. Results of Phase 1 informed the selection criteria for participants in Phase 2, as well as the development of the interview protocol which was used. The second phase of this design included semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of participants from Phase 1. Interviews were transcribed and coded using Saldaña's (2021) first- and second-cycle coding techniques. The role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and strategies for establishing trustworthiness were also outlined.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore the perceived barriers to leadership for female-identifying student affairs professionals at the midlevel who aspire to, but have not yet attained, a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) role. This chapter outlines the results of the data analysis and is organized to address the two research questions in this study:

1. What barriers, if any, have participants experienced regarding their ability to move into a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) role?

2. To what extent, if at all, do participants experience higher education institutions as gendered organizations?

Phase 1 Participants

A total of 192 recipients were identified from the NASPA member directory. Forty participants responded by completing the questionnaire, though eight were removed because they were less than 50% completed. This resulted in a total of 32 completed questionnaires, which was a 17% response rate. The responses from Phase 1 helped inform this follow-up data collection and provided a narrow, targeted sample for interviews. Phase 1 participants were asked to volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview if they were interested. Interview participants were randomly selected from those who indicated interest.

Participant Profiles – Interviews

A total of eight women were interviewed for this study. Interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes and were conducted using video conferencing software. The individual profiles for each participant are included below.

Claudia

At the time of the interview, Claudia served as a director and planned to move into an SSAO role within the next five to seven years. She had worked in student affairs for over 15 years. Claudia had applied for SSAO roles previously, so she was able to provide an important perspective about the path to leadership in student affairs.

Janet

At the time of the interview, Janet served as a director and aspired to an SSAO role, though she said it would likely be eight or more years before she is ready for that move. She had worked in student affairs for more than 10 years and had been in her current position for more than five years.

Kari

At the time of interview, Kari was in an associate director role, and was one of two participants who had earned a doctoral degree. She was still deciding whether an SSAO role would be part of her career path but, if so, she envisioned herself at that level within five to seven years. Kari had worked professionally in student affairs for less than five years.

Margie

At the time of the interview, Margie had more than 15 years of experience in student affairs and served in a director role. She aspired to an SSAO role within the next two to four years and had worked in several interim roles during her career.

Patricia

Between the time that Patricia completed the questionnaire and the time that she was contacted for an interview for this study, she accepted an SSAO role at her

institution. While Patricia's role at the time of interview was not midlevel, because her transition was so recent, she was able to provide valuable insight into her journey as a midlevel professional in student affairs. She had earned a doctoral degree and had worked in student affairs for more than 10 years.

Peg

Shortly after completing the questionnaire for this study, Peg accepted a role that was student affairs adjacent, but was structurally part of academic affairs. Prior to accepting this position, she had been working in student affairs for more than 10 years and was considering a move to an SSAO role within the next five to seven years. Because her move from student affairs was so recent, she was still able to provide valuable observations about barriers to leadership for women in midlevel student affairs roles.

Ruby

At the time of the interview, Ruby served as an assistant dean and had been working in student affairs for less than five years. She aspired to an SSAO role within the next two to four years.

Wendy

At the time of interview, Wendy had more than 15 years of experience working in student affairs and was serving in a director role. She aspired to an SSAO role within the next five to seven years, and she had already applied to and interviewed for at least one SSAO position.

Research Question 1: Barriers to Leadership

Participants in this study were asked to respond to a questionnaire and interview questions regarding their perceived barriers to leadership within student affairs. Phase 1 participants were selected from the membership of Region V in NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and whose membership profile identified them as a midlevel professional. In total, there were 32 participants who completed the questionnaire, and all indicated that they identified as female and as currently working in a midlevel student affairs role.

The questionnaire was developed by drawing on themes of gender-related barriers to leadership that were found through a literature review. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather preliminary data regarding current attitudes toward those themes, and to use those data to inform the qualitative interviews. Prior to sending the questionnaire, each item was assigned an a priori code based on themes from the literature and each item was designed to address one of the two research questions. These codes included: (a) impostor syndrome, (b) work-life conflict, (c) ideal worker norms, (d) gendered workplace, (e) pay gap, and (f) double bind. Participants were asked to respond to each statement by indicating their level of agreement on a Likert-type scale with options of *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, *strongly disagree*, and *unsure*. The categories *strongly agree* and *agree* were collapsed to indicate overall agreement, and the categories *strongly disagree* and *disagree* were collapsed to indicate overall disagreement. Table 2 summarizes the level of agreement with each of the statements which address the first research question which explored perceived barriers to leadership.

Table 2

Questionnaire Items Addressing Perceived Barriers to Leadership

Questionnaire Item	Strongly Agree/ Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (%)	Item Code
When someone critiques my work, I lose confidence in my abilities.	50	50	IP
I currently have healthy boundaries between work and home.	53	47	WL, IW
I feel it is necessary to pause my career advancement in order to care for my family.	47	47	WL
I often opt out of additional work responsibilities or activities which may help me advance my career, due to family obligations.	53	47	WL
I could relocate to pursue a career advancement opportunity.	53	47	WL, IW
If I were an SSAO, I would have strategies for maintaining healthy boundaries between work and home.	59	38	WL, IW
I am confident that I have the skills necessary to be successful in an SSAO role.	84	13	IP
I am comfortable talking about my strengths.	91	9	IP
I am comfortable talking about my weaknesses.	91	9	IP
When someone compliments my work, I feel they value my contributions.	100	0	IP
When someone compliments my work, I feel they are being honest and truthful.	97	3	IP
If I were in an SSAO role, I would have to sacrifice my personal time in order to be successful in my role at work.	78	19	WL
My family is supportive of my desire for career advancement.	94	3	WL

Note. The codes identified are IP = impostor syndrome, WL = work-life conflict, IW = ideal worker norms.

Each of the six items that were coded with the theme of impostor syndrome

had a high level of agreement, with 50% – 100% of participants agreeing or strongly

agreeing with this statement. This result indicates that impostor syndrome did not

appear to be a barrier for Phase 1 participants. Interview data revealed different

findings that will be discussed later in this chapter. Responses to questionnaire items

within the theme of work-life balance indicated that this is likely a barrier to

leadership for participants. One example of work-life balance being a potential barrier

to leadership was 78% ($n = 25$) of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the

statement *if I were in an SSAO role, I would have to sacrifice my personal time in*

order to be successful in my role at work. Results regarding these two a priori themes

from the questionnaire were explored further during the interview phase of this study.

RQ 1: Personal/Individual Barriers

This study included eight interview participants who were asked a series of

questions designed to gain an understanding of perceived barriers to leadership they

had experienced on their career paths. Findings from the interviews were divided into

two main themes to address the first research question about perceived barriers. Those

two themes were (a) personal barriers, and (b) sociological barriers. Under the theme

of personal barriers, three subthemes emerged and they were (a) impostor syndrome,

(b) work-life conflict, and (c) showing emotion is unacceptable. The first two

subthemes aligned with the themes from the literature described in Chapter 2. The

third subtheme, showing emotion is unacceptable, was not reflected in the literature

but was present in the interviews. Findings from the study related to personal barriers

are outlined below, with sociological barriers to follow.

Impostor Syndrome. The first subtheme of personal barriers present in the

results of this study was impostor syndrome. Although the questionnaire responses

indicated that impostor syndrome may not be a barrier to participants, the interview responses revealed that women may still struggle with this barrier. During the interviews, several of the women used the term *impostor syndrome* in their responses as they were describing their career paths, and decisions they made about whether or not to apply for certain roles. Two participants who spoke of their experiences in applying to SSAO roles, Claudia and Wendy, described the feeling of vulnerability they experienced during the interview process. Both of these women had applied for a senior role at the institutions where they were currently working, and in each case, they were not selected for the role. Wendy talked about the public nature of the process and how she felt trepidation about applying for other roles because she felt exposed and vulnerable. Claudia shared her internal dialogue that she recalled during the process, "Who do I think I am and why do I think I should be doing this? And, do I really have the goods to back this up?" These results indicate that women who decide to pursue SSAO roles may still have to contend with impostor syndrome.

Some of the participants acknowledged that impostor syndrome was a barrier they had encountered throughout their careers but also discussed how they had pushed through that barrier by gaining self-confidence. Margie shared that impostor syndrome had influenced her decisions about which positions to apply for on her career journey. She shared that reflecting on how impostor syndrome may have been holding her back helped her to overcome this barrier. She reflected about the past several years and shared,

> There was a time where I self-edited and didn't apply for things because other people were applying and like, "Oh, this person's better; I'm never going to

beat him out. I'm not going to waste my time" and after doing that a couple

times, I learned better and was more confident in my abilities.

Peg talked about the intentional way that she worked against impostor syndrome by

applying for jobs even though she might not have thought she was fully qualified. She

reflected on her transition from a small, private institution to a large, public institution

and she was worried that she would not even be considered for a position. She stated:

I did not feel qualified for it. I had never worked in public higher ed, and this

was a director position. I had been applying for maybe assistant director,

associate director, thinking to myself that might be a better transition coming

from such a small school. But this was a director position, so I applied anyway,

and I feel like that's been the story of my life. I 'apply anyway' and yeah,

things work out.

While the questionnaire responses indicated participants did not seem to struggle with

impostor syndrome, the interview data did not seem to align with that. One possible

explanation is during interviews, there is the opportunity to discuss and reflect on

career choices and the decisions leading to them. The questionnaire may measure one

moment in time, but does not capture the nuance of how impostor syndrome may

influence participants' thinking through a decision process such as which job

opportunities to pursue.

Findings from the interviews indicated that impostor syndrome is a barrier that

is not only encountered in a job search, but also in other areas. Janet spoke about the

importance of confronting impostor syndrome for the benefit of her students. She

shared a story that underscored the importance of modeling confidence for young

women:

> I was approaching a room and one of our sorority women was sitting outside of
> it. I was like "What are you doing? The meeting's inside." And she was like,
> "Yeah, like I'd be the only girl in there." And I said, "Well, I'm here" and she
> went in and sat next to me. I didn't think much of it [at the time] except, "Are
> we not preparing her to handle this type of situation?"

Janet further described the interaction that followed, and the young woman was

curious about how Janet was able just to go into a room and speak with authority. She

admitted that she did not have a great answer other than sometimes you just have to do

it. This experience led to some additional reflection by Janet about how professional

women need to be more intentional about encouraging confidence in young women,

particularly since there may be times when they are the only women in the room.

These findings indicate that it is important for women to identify when impostor

syndrome is acting as a barrier, and that self-confidence is one possible way to push

through that barrier. Participants' experiences indicated that confronting impostor

syndrome is not only important on a personal level, but also to model for other

women.

Work-Life Conflict. The second subtheme of personal barriers found in this

study was work-life conflict. Consistent with the current literature, participants in both

phases of this study shared that conflicts between work life and home life may be

barriers to leadership for women in student affairs. Several of the questionnaire items

specifically asked participants to weigh in on the impact of family obligation on their

careers. Most Phase 1 participants agreed that taking on a senior role would require some sacrifice of their personal time, and most also agreed that their families were supportive of their career goals. However, several of the responses to questionnaire items in this category were evenly split, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Results from Questionnaire Items about Work-Life Conflict

Questionnaire Item	Strongly Agree/Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree/Disagree (%)
I feel it is necessary to pause my career advancement in order to care for my family.	47	47
I often opt out of additional work responsibilities or activities which may help me advance my career, due to family obligations.	53	47
I could relocate to pursue a career advancement opportunity.	53	47
I currently have healthy boundaries between work and home.	53	47
If I were an SSAO, I would have strategies for maintaining healthy boundaries between work and home.	59	38
If I were in an SSAO role, I would have to sacrifice my personal time in order to be successful in my role at work.	78	19
My family is supportive of my desire for career advancement.	94	3

In regard to one of these questionnaire items listed, an ability to relocate in order to pursue career advancement, interview participants addressed this issue from

different angles. Several participants stated that they were bound by geography because of their spouse's career. Two participants, Claudia and Wendy, indicated that they previously had to restart their careers after moving for their spouses' jobs, requiring them to make a lateral move or even take a step backward in their careers in order to stay in higher education. Claudia noted that, from her perspective, this situation seems to happen for women often. Margie shared that she had to care for her husband after an accident, which likely impacted her career path. She shared:

I stayed in a coordinator role, probably for longer than I would have normally, which, I think, stifled my career trajectory. But it was what I needed at the time to be able to take care of me and my husband. I feel like life circumstances impact women a little bit more than they do men.

Caring for family is another work-life issue that women tend to have to navigate as they plan their careers. Two of the interview participants had children, and they spoke about *mom guilt*, and noted their perspective of an unequal impact of the pandemic on women as compared to men. Arranging child care tends to be the responsibility of mothers, rather than fathers, and can have a negative impact on work life of women. Margie, who was not a mother at the time of the interview, shared that she has seen this impact women in senior roles:

I know senior leaders that have children and they take time off, or they have hired nannies in order to be able to take care of things because they don't feel like they can take the time to go and do school drop off or those other things. Where, male colleagues aren't expected to do those things.

The findings indicate that women with and without children at home both struggle balancing work and life. For instance, of the Phase 1 participants, less than half ($n = 11$) indicated that they had school-aged children at home; however, responses to some questionnaire items about balancing work and family were evenly split. Additionally, some of the interview participants had not yet made the choice to start a family; however, they indicated that they were aware of how family responsibilities can impact their career. They spoke of the realities of thinking about what a timeline would be if they chose to have children, and where in their career they might be. Some were unsure of whether they would be willing to apply for senior roles if they had a young family. Balancing work and home is not solely an issue for women with children. Family responsibilities can include caring for elderly parents, or managing relationships with partners, spouses, or siblings.

Overall, work-life conflict appeared to be a barrier to leadership for participants for several reasons. Family considerations for relocation, caring for family members, and mom guilt were all factors that contributed to work-life conflict for participants.

Showing Emotion is Unacceptable. The third subtheme to personal barriers to leadership that emerged from the interview responses relates to the ways that women may show emotion at work. Most of the interview participants spoke of strengths that they have in creating relationships with others and leading with empathy, and many contributed those qualities to their career success so far. There was also discussion during the interviews about how showing emotion at work, often associated with empathic relationship building, is viewed as unprofessional and,

specifically, it appears to make men uncomfortable. Of the eight interview participants, five talked about how they perceive showing emotion is unacceptable at work even though none of the interview questions specifically asked about this. Peg stated her perspective that in student affairs, showing a soft side of your personality is considered a strength in working collaboratively, however it is not considered a strength in leadership. She reflected on this further by adding:

> Student affairs is predominately full of women; I genuinely think that is. But is there sexism? Yes, because women are given opportunities, but they're expected to not be emotional. There have been maybe two instances where I have become emotional in the workplace in the eight years I've been here. For the most part, I can maintain my composure, but in the moments where I was emotional? Completely judged for it, looked down upon. Completely sexist environment because "Oh, you don't do that. No, that's not professional." Professional is to maintain your composure and, yeah, you want to be professional, but it was very gender oriented and it felt very sexist in that regard.

Showing emotion with others was not the only situation where this barrier was apparent. Some participants talked about how to convey, or not convey, emotion in email communications. Kari noted that, particularly as a younger woman, she was struggling to find ways to earn respect among her colleagues and not to be treated like she did not know what she was doing. She made the decision to start introducing herself and signing her emails with her earned title of Doctor, and she took emotion out of her email communication and referred to her emails as "dry" and focused on the

factual information she needed to convey. She noted that she felt this was a necessary step to be taken seriously as a student affairs professional. Conversely, Patricia recalled a time when she was given feedback that her email communications were too straightforward, and she was encouraged to convey a more caring nature in her emails to students. These conflicting messages indicated that women's written communications may be scrutinized in a way that created a barrier to leadership for these participants; they were not certain if they were perceived as too emotional and not ready for leadership, or as too cold and uncaring and therefore, unfeminine.

The participants in this study shared their frustration of receiving messages that they needed to suppress their emotions. For some, it felt inauthentic to not show their feelings, particularly given the emotionally-laden nature of student affairs work. Peg shared her hope that this could change in the future by adding:

> If I was espousing what I would like to see in our world of higher ed, I would like to see a world where vulnerability and, at times when appropriate, even emotion is viewed as a positive leadership trait. That it's not always the aggression that is promoted or becomes the high achievers.

Results of this study indicate that women feel a variety of emotions, and that in some instances these authentic emotions are considered a strength, particularly in student affairs. However when it comes to expectations of a leader, participants indicated that showing emotion can be viewed as unprofessional and can create a barrier to leadership, particularly for women. These differing expectations create a dissonance between being authentic and being viewed as a leader.

RQ1: Sociological Barriers

The second theme used to address the first research question about perceived barriers was sociological barriers that have impacted participants' ability to attain a senior leadership role in student affairs. Under the theme of sociological barriers, three subthemes emerged and they were (a) the nature of student affairs work, (b) saying yes to everything, and (c) religion's influence on gender roles. The first two subthemes aligned with the themes from the literature described in Chapter 2. The third subtheme, religion's influence on gender roles, was not reflected in the literature but was present in the interviews. Findings from the study related to sociological barriers are outlined below.

Nature of Student Affairs Work. The first subtheme of sociological barriers present in the results of this study was the nature of student affairs work. Interview participants talked about some of the aspects of student affairs work that contributed to decisions about whether to pursue senior roles, and may act as barriers to leadership. The ways that participants described the nature of student affairs work fell into three categories; they were (a) the emotional energy needed to be effective, (b) navigating the bureaucracy of higher education, and (c) strategies for moving up.

Emotional Work. First, participants acknowledged that student affairs work can be emotionally and physically draining. Several participants talked about the number of hours that they regularly work, and the energy that it takes to be present for students and to respond to crises. Ruby spoke of her role in student conduct and how it does not seem conducive to a long-term role:

> I enjoy my role, but I also don't see myself doing it forever. It's hard. It's
>
> draining. I do behavioral misconduct specifically and that's really hard work,
>
> and I haven't found yet a lot of ways to interact with students positively.

Ruby indicated that serving in a role that focuses on the negative behaviors of students takes a toll on her emotions and makes her wonder if she could maintain the necessary emotional energy to continue in this work long-term.

In addition to the emotional energy required to work effectively in student affairs, some participants spoke about how the profession has changed in recent years. Janet reflected on her observations that students, and their parents, have expected higher education professionals to be more involved in students' lives and to do more checking in and hand-holding to make sure that students are doing what they need to do. As she contemplated her desire to seek a senior role, she added, "That causes some pause as well; just all of those societal expectations and the litigation that can come from that." These interview responses indicate that the emotional work that is required in student affairs can contribute to barriers to leadership.

Navigating Bureaucracy. A second category of student affairs work that may create a barrier to leadership is the high levels of bureaucracy that need to be continually navigated. Ruby spoke of her supervisor, the dean of students, and her perspective of his role:

> I think a lot of his work is shielding everyone else from the bureaucracy. I see
>
> him kind of as this sponge soaking up all of the crap that large systems have to
>
> cycle through. You know, I like the idea of relational work and being a person
>
> who builds relationships to break down silos. But I think he just gets stuck in

bureaucracy, and making really hard decisions about students, and responding

to really extreme behavior.

Ruby's perspective that the dean of students had to navigate bureaucracy from two

sides – on one hand, wading through institutional policies to respond to extreme

student behaviors, and on the other, protecting his staff from dealing with the same

issues – highlighted a hesitation she had about pursuing student affairs leadership.

Another participant noted that she has seen enough of the negative side of

student affairs leadership, that she thinks about whether it is something she wants to

continue to pursue. She shared, laughing, "I think the closer that I've gotten to those

positions, there's just a lot of BS that I don't know that I want to, or am equipped to

deal with." As participants contemplated their aspirations for senior roles in student

affairs, they indicated they would need to decide whether they were ready to navigate

these additional levels of bureaucracy.

Strategies for Moving Up. A third category that described barriers to

leadership that are specific to student affairs work was the need to be patient and

flexible in waiting for a senior position to become available. Many of the participants

talked about being geographically bound because of the small number of institutions

in their area. For those who were unable or unwilling to relocate, they spoke of having

to wait for someone else to leave the institution in order for new opportunities to

become available.

In addition to patience, flexibility may be required as a strategy for moving

into a senior student affairs role. Three participants talked about their decisions to step

into interim roles at various points of their career, and how they felt it was necessary

to prove that they had the ability to take on a senior level role. Claudia explained how that is not always possible, however, because stepping away from a current role to take on an interim one is not always acceptable to supervisors. She explained that supervisors may not be willing to temporarily release an employee from some duties so they can serve in an interim role, and this may harm their ability to move into leadership. She shared at the time of the interview that there was an assistant vice president role that will be filled on an interim basis and she applied, but she was concerned that her vice president would not select her for the role:

> It's frustrating to me because I feel like sometimes when you make yourself essential, the benefit you get is more work. And I know a lot of stuff is gained, but you don't necessarily get to move into these higher positions.

Claudia further explained that because she had made herself indispensable in her current role, she thought her supervisor would be reluctant to allow her to step into an interim role. She indicated that serving in these higher level interim roles can provide an opportunity to demonstrate that she is ready for a leadership position, so being denied the interim opportunity creates a barrier.

For those who do not have an opportunity to serve in an interim role internally, they may need to make a decision to leave the institution to pursue a senior position. As Patricia shared, "In order to move up, you often have to move out." Participants indicated that if there are not many higher education institutions in the area, upward mobility presents a difficult choice – either make a decision to move to a new geographical area, or stay at an institution with few, if any, opportunities to gain an SSAO position.

Despite the barriers to leadership due to the nature of student affairs work, several of the participants noted that it is the work itself that makes them want to continue to a senior role. Several participants stated their desire to have a greater influence on institutional policy and process, and that is why they were interested in senior roles. Another specifically stated that she was interested in playing a larger role in student success. Yet another saw a senior role as an opportunity to infuse equity and diversity work into more departments, working toward making these values central to the institution rather than compartmentalized into only a few offices.

The data indicated that the desire for pursuing a senior role must be weighed against the perceived barriers and, therefore, this is a complicated decision for many women. Each of the interview participants talked about the sense of fulfillment and purpose that they get from working with students, but also discussed the emotional energy that is required for this work. Participants seemed to share a belief that moving into a leadership role and being one step removed from daily work with students may provide a better emotional balance to student affairs work.

Saying Yes to Everything. The second subtheme of sociological barriers to leadership was the notion that women need to say yes to every available opportunity to demonstrate their ability to move into a senior role. One of the questionnaire items read "There have been occasions when I have felt that I have worked harder than someone else to be valued equally" and 91% ($n = 29$) agreed with this statement. The interview protocol included a question about this statement to gain a deeper understanding of how this concept resonated with participants. Wendy described her struggle with this statement:

I don't feel like I'm in a position where I can ever say no. Because if I say

no…I wonder is my boss going to think I'm saying no because I'm a mom and

so then I'm not going to get these opportunities. Or because I'm a woman or

because I'm too this or too that. And so whether that is perceived or actual, I

don't know, and I'm never going to give myself the opportunity to find out

because I just say yes to everything. But then, you know, the price is I'm

exhausted.

Participants shared that they thought turning down an opportunity would be more

harmful to their prospects for promotion than being overburdened with tasks. Many

expressed that they did not believe they had a choice, and if they were asked to do

something they were expected to say yes. Some participants indicated that being in a

continual loop of taking on more tasks was a barrier to leadership.

An additional aspect of this concept of saying yes to everything was that it

seemed to impact women differently from men. Two participants specifically

discussed their perceptions that men are not held to the same expectation. In their

experience, they thought they have had to work more hours than men, and do it

flawlessly, in order to be offered the same opportunities for professional growth.

Patricia shared an experience which highlighted how taking on this extra burden can

result in missed opportunities for recognition. She was working in student activities at

the time, which tends to require a lot of work outside regular business hours:

The guys who were there from 8 to 5, and did less, they were seen as the

golden children of the department. Whereas the two women, we were always

staying late…and so I felt that was just really unfair. And then when it came

time for awards and things, they were nominating the guys for awards in

excellence and these different things. Just because [the women] were picking

up the slack, [the men] could do more work in assessment to show the results

of their efforts with student groups.

This example demonstrates how differing expectations can hold women back in their

careers, in addition to creating a workload that is difficult to manage.

Participants acknowledged that it is necessary to take on new challenges for

the purpose of professional growth. However, they also said it is difficult because it

seems as if they can never stop doing one thing in order to make room for something

new. Kari spoke of the importance of professional development but noted that there is

not always time for those opportunities on top of her regular work. Patricia said that it

was important to find ways to let go of some things in order to perform better in other

areas but confirmed that this was a struggle. She noted that during the course of this

research project, she had accepted a senior role and attributed some of her success to

her ability to find ways to move things off her plate in order to focus on other

priorities. However, not all women feel empowered to delegate tasks or advocate for

letting go of some responsibilities in order to accept new ones. Wendy described this

challenge in more detail, particularly from her perspective of working with young

women professionals:

Based on our staff satisfaction survey, I've tried to think of different ways that

we can do that because it's just some of the consistent feedback that we've

gotten – women don't feel empowered to take advantage of opportunities.

When I think about my journey, the thing that would have been most helpful

would have been for leadership opportunities to not be another thing on my

plate. Wouldn't it be so great if I'm going to tap you on your shoulder and say

I want you to do this, and in order for you to do this I'm going to take

[something else] off your plate so you can give a portion of your attention to

this thing. And I think that, especially for a lot of the young women that work

in our division, they don't take advantage of opportunities because they feel so

tapped out.

The dissonance between these two positions creates a barrier; one on hand, it seems

that women perceive they need to take advantage of every opportunity that comes

along to show their abilities, and on the other hand, they feel overburdened and find it

difficult to take on new challenges.

Religion's Influence on Gender Roles. The third subtheme of sociological

barriers to leadership was the role that religion played on gender roles and

expectations. This was an unexpected finding because it was not discovered in the

literature. Of the interview participants, 50% ($n = 4$) reported that they lived in areas

where many people subscribe to conservative religious views, and that has served as a

barrier to leadership. Margie described this by saying, "The church puts [women] in

more of a servant, administrative assistant [role]; taking care of the house rather than

running the house, kind of mentality." All four of the women discussed their

perception of how difficult it is for women to attain leadership roles in this

environment because men, not women, are seen as leaders. Kari added that "there is a

very patriarchal attitude towards women [here]." When women are perceived as

incapable of leadership, a gender barrier exists that is difficult to overcome. Because

social and religious norms impacted gender roles for these participants, it is an important context to consider when examining barriers to leadership for women.

In addition to influencing the work roles that women are expected to hold, these religious beliefs also appeared to influence the way women were expected to interact with others. According to interview participants, women are expected to be nice to others at all times and should avoid conflict. Kari shared a specific example of when she was asked to change her vocabulary:

A good example is that I like to say "non-negotiable" because some of the things I deal with are non-negotiable. So, my boss says, you can't use words like "non-negotiable" because it's not the nicest thing you could say. Maybe we could say it a little bit differently to make sure that feelings aren't hurt.

Participants who lived in these highly religious environments expressed frustration that they were not taken seriously as professionals because of their gender. One participant shared that she previously worked in a department where the department head did not believe that women should work outside the home.

In addition to limited opportunities in the workplace, some women living in this religion-dominated environment struggled to find childcare that would support them working a full-time job. Wendy shared her struggle:

There was one [daycare] option to send my kids to that transported to their elementary school when they got to elementary age. One option. No schools do before and after care and I was like "What in the heck?" Because if you're a *good mom*, you stay home [and don't need childcare].

Results of this study indicated that there are personal and sociological factors that create barriers to leadership for women in student affairs. Personal barriers such as impostor syndrome and work-life conflict seemed to be prevalent for all participants, and they were still searching for ways to overcome these barriers. Additionally, participants described a variety of sociological barriers that included the nature of student affairs work, the expectation to always take on more work, and the impact of religion and how it relates to women's roles at work.

Research Question 2: Gendered Workplaces

The second research question in this study focused on whether participants experienced higher education as a gendered workplace. There were six themes that emerged from this research question, and they were: (a) ideal worker norms, (b) male-dominated leadership, (c) the double bind, (d) the gender pay gap, (e) unpaid work and emotional labor, and (f) sexual harassment and misogyny. The emergence of these themes from participants indicated that they experienced their institutions as gendered workplaces.

The second research question was explored first through a questionnaire to gather preliminary data regarding current attitudes about gendered workplaces, and those data were then used to inform the qualitative interviews. Prior to sending the questionnaire, each item was assigned an a priori code based on themes from the literature and each item was designed to address one of the two research questions. The codes were (a) gendered workplace, (b) pay gap, and (c) double bind. Participants were asked to respond to each statement by indicating their level of agreement on a Likert-type scale and the available options were *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*,

strongly disagree, and *unsure*. The categories *strongly agree* and *agree* were collapsed

to indicate overall agreement, and the categories *strongly disagree* and *disagree* were

collapsed to indicate overall disagreement. Table 4 summarizes the questionnaire

items and responses that relate to experiences of a gendered workplace.

Table 4

Responses to Questionnaire Items Addressing Gendered Workplace

Questionnaire Item	Strongly Agree/ Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree (%)	Item Code
I have felt at a disadvantage in a job search because of my gender.	57	40	GW
I have a male mentor who supports me in my career aspirations.	47	53	GW
I have a female mentor who supports me in my career aspirations.	63	37	GW
I believe I have been paid less than someone of a different gender for the same or similar work.	81	13	PG
I have attempted to negotiate for a pay raise and was not successful.	66	31	PG, GW
There have been occasions when I have felt that I have worked harder than someone else to be valued equally.	91	9	DB
At my institution, women are expected to be social organizers of events.	72	22	GW, DB
I believe that I have been paid more than someone of a different gender for the same or similar work.	9	84	PG
At my institution, administrators have the same role expectations regardless of gender.	22	66	GW, DB
I have negotiated for a pay raise and been successful.	38	59	PG, GW

Note. The codes identified are GW = Gendered Workplace, PG = Pay Gap, DB = Double Bind

It is notable that 81% ($n = 26$) of Phase 1 participants indicated that they have been paid less than someone of a different gender for the same work. Additionally, 91% ($n = 29$) of Phase 1 participants agreed that they thought they had to work harder than others in order to be equally valued. This questionnaire item was explored further in the interview questions and will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

Ideal Worker Norms

This study sought to explore gendered work environments based on prior research about this topic. Acker's (1990) research on gendered organizations included the description of the concept of a *disembodied worker*, labeled as *ideal worker norms* by current research. This concept describes an employee whose sole focus is work and is unencumbered by outside obligations because they have someone at home taking care of these needs. This hypothetical ideal is based on outdated social roles that create an image of a family unit that consists of one partner working outside the home to earn an income while the other partner stays home and tends to the house and children.

Interview participants talked about ideal worker norms in regard to understanding workplace culture and what kind of time commitment is expected of an SSAO by university leadership. When discussing her hesitations about pursuing a senior role, Wendy provided a specific of example about her supervisor sending and responding to email while he was on vacation. She found herself wondering whether that was what was expected by his supervisor or if that was the way he chose to navigate his role, which led her to contemplate how or if she could navigate those expectations for herself in a senior role. "There's a hesitation. I don't want to

necessarily never take a vacation again because of this role, and is there really an opportunity to do it different?"

Peg shared similar thoughts based on her experience in student affairs. "What I've seen in student affairs [is] an inherent expectation of, without fail, get the job done and that it requires every evening to be spent doing follow-up at home." Several interview participants indicated that they were not willing to accept these expectations as part of a senior role, and there was some doubt as to whether they would have the power or ability to shift expectations once they got into that role.

Male-Dominated Leadership

The second theme that emerged in response to the research question about gendered workplaces was at participants' institutions, there was a lack of gender equity in senior leadership roles. All the participants mentioned that, in their experience, senior roles at their institutions are mainly filled by men. Several participants even noted surprise that they had not noticed it until they actually thought about it in the context of these interviews. In particular, one participant noted that in a recent search for a new dean of students at her institution, all the finalists were male and it was disappointing to see. She said that she believes it sends a public message that male leadership is what is preferred at the institution.

Adding Women's Voices. One potential impact of having male-dominated leadership is that women's voices are left out of important conversations. Some participants mentioned that at times they may be the only woman in the room, and how it was important to them to make sure that women's voices are represented.

Claudia spoke about how being a representative voice was part of her motivation for
seeking a senior leadership role:

> It's not just the title. I'm not invited to senior leadership meetings [for the
> college] but I'm on the student affairs leadership team. So, there's all of these
> moving parts and pieces where maybe I don't get to be a part of those
> conversations and I feel like I should be.

Wendy shared a similar sentiment after talking with several of the women that were
part of her division:

> When I started this position, I had several of our department directors come
> and say "Wendy, we need you" and the weight of all the women in our
> division was promptly placed on my shoulders…That kind of fueled my fire
> and definitely made me know that I'm on the right path.

Providing a voice to the experiences and concerns of women, one that participants feel
appears to be missing, seemed to contribute to participants' desire for a senior role in
order to contribute women's perspectives to decision making at the university level.

Men Informally Identified for Promotion. Another aspect of male-
dominated leadership that contributed to participants' experiences of their institutions
as gendered workplaces was an informal network that seemed to benefit men over
women. Participants indicated that as part of what they perceived to be a male-
dominated work culture, often it is other men who are identified for new opportunities
and promotion, and many times this is done informally through casual conversations.
Interview participants shared that they have had to learn to advocate for themselves in

ways that they had not before in order to be recognized for advancement opportunities. Claudia shared her realization:

> I felt like if I did a good job, I'd be recognized and it would just naturally happen. And it took me a long time to realize that I actually have to go after this and advocate for myself, and that nobody's going to hand this to me. There were other opportunities where I was clearly the most qualified person, and I was hoping those opportunities would be presented to me. And then they were presented to a man who was not even close to as qualified; and they were just handed it, they didn't have to apply or anything.

The frustration Claudia felt was apparent during the interview as she described how the unwritten rules were different for men and women. Wendy shared a similar realization:

> Because a lot of times when opportunities come up, we talk about all these great male candidates that would be a good person for this, that, and the other thing. And so I feel like I've had to put myself out there and let everybody know I'm interested in all kinds of things in order to even have my name thrown in when opportunities come up.

Even when women are in senior leadership roles, some participants described how they tended to exhibit leadership traits that may described as typically male, such as being very direct and unemotional. Peg described her perspective on leadership traits:

> We're still in a world where the unemotive, the very strong style of leadership is what is desired in the workplace. And I would say that is the traditional male

trait. And I would say that the women I have seen be promoted, given

opportunities, have more of what our culture would call the male traits.

And Patricia shared a similar perspective about traits that seem common among

leaders she has experienced:

In my career, most of the senior level people like SSAOs are men, or they have

more of those masculine leadership traits. They're no nonsense, really

practical, oftentimes they're not processing in an emotional way. I'm definitely

an empath so I think I'm drawn to that ability to kind of compartmentalize the

emotion from the work that needs to be done.

Responses from interview participants indicate that there is still a divide

between which leadership traits are seen as characteristically male, and which are

characteristically female. Further, they articulated that when senior leadership roles

are predominately filled by men, a dilemma is created for women as to whether they

can exhibit their authentic leadership traits, or if they need to adopt new traits to match

current leaders. This uncertainty in their view can create a barrier to leadership for

women and perpetuate the experience of higher education institutions operating as

gendered workplaces.

Double Bind

The double bind is a concept that puts women in an impossible situation in the

workplace, and it was the third theme identified in response to the research question

that addressed gendered workplaces. Essentially, women are expected to behave in

ways that are consistent with gender norms, such as being caring and nurturing, but

when they do, they are not seen as leaders. Further, when they demonstrate traits such

as decisiveness and authority, they are viewed as unpleasant or difficult to work with (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sabattini et al., 2007). The existence of differing expectations based on gender contributes to the concept of gendered workplaces. The theme of double bind was apparent in the interviews conducted for this study. One clear example was provided by a participant who shared her experience of seeking feedback after not being selected for a senior role:

> There was contradictory information. For example, one of the things I got marked low on was that I would collaborate too much, which I was like "okay," but then on the other side, my strength was that I'm a great collaborator. So, is collaboration a strength or a weakness?

This lack of clarity on what is expected from women can cause frustration. Participants shared that they had been told that they are too task-oriented or too focused on process, and not coming across as caring. Two participants stated that they had been given feedback from supervisors that their communication was too direct, and they needed to soften their approach. One participant described this feeling as walking a line between being caring and being authoritative. Another participant shared that sometimes she has felt that she has had to work against her natural instincts in order to be seen as helpful. She described the feeling when supervisors ask for volunteers to take on some extra work, "I don't want to do this, but I feel like if I don't, people are going to see me as not a team player and that's going to be detrimental to my future."

Appearance was another factor that contributed to the double bind among interview participants. Margie described herself as being very tall and, as a result, she

has been called intimidating in some instances, which has caused her to try to soften her approach on occasion. Claudia recalled when she was told that she "wasn't as polished" as another female colleague, which she interpreted as a gendered comment. She noted that she chooses not to wear dresses and high heels, whereas the other woman did, and therefore Claudia was not seen as "living up to the gender norms."

In addition to differing rules about leadership traits and appearance, another dilemma that can be attributed to the double bind is how women communicate in professional settings (Sabattini et al., 2007). Several interview participants thought that they needed to be aware of how they present themselves in meetings because some things are perceived differently when they are said by a woman versus a man. Patricia shared, "With interactions with people I also had to learn. Because some of those male characteristics, if I'm even just a little bit over the edge with them, switching over the gender line, it's magnified." She further explained that by crossing over that gender line, she has been perceived as overreacting to a situation, whereas her perception was that if a male had responded the same way, no one would have interpreted that as an overreaction. Janet talked about how she has had to edit her comments at times:

> I've tried to soften them a little bit; I don't always say exactly what I want to say. In part, because I want to keep my job, and part because I recognize I'm a woman and that may not be received so well. So I try to, I don't want to say cushion it, but I've tried to be really mindful of how this is being delivered while still being forceful, assertive, decisive, but I guess with some rounded edges.

Janet's comment highlights how she has had to edit her communications so she is not perceived as aggressive. She described how she has had to walk the line of seeming agreeable and pleasant to work with, while also asserting her expertise and authority.

Participants indicated that the double bind can leave them feeling confused and frustrated about how to navigate their current roles, as well as how to advance their careers. It is a seemingly impossible situation when there is an expectation to act one way based on gender, but that is not aligned with the expectations of leadership behavior.

Gender Pay Gap

The fourth theme which indicated that participants experienced their institutions as gendered workplaces was the discrepancy in pay between men and women. In this study, respondents indicated that they have experienced a pay gap based on gender with 81% ($n = 26$) of Phase 1 participants who agreed that they had been paid less than someone of a different gender for the same work. Additionally, 66% ($n = 21$) of Phase 1 participants agreed that they had attempted to negotiate for a pay raise and had been unsuccessful.

Although there was not an interview question that specifically asked about the pay gap, four interview participants talked about it in the context of gendered workplaces within student affairs and higher education as a whole. Several of them mentioned it as a given, as if it is something that women have come to accept, though reluctantly. Wendy shared her frustration from a personal experience with the pay gap when a male colleague was hired:

>We both worked in higher ed with very similar CVs, though he had two years less work experience. He was hired at almost $15,000 more a year than I was, and I had been at the institution for five years at that point. And so you know it's just that constant battle; it's like you want me to not feel less than, but you keep paying me less than, and you treat me less than.

Both Wendy and Claudia spoke about salary negotiation, and how it is not something that women are generally taught how to do. Claudia shared that she consistently gives advice to young women professionals to negotiate their salary, however she has struggled to do that for herself. Wendy said that in a previous role, it seemed that the blame was placed on her for the gap in pay; that she should have negotiated when she was hired, and it could have been avoided.

Recognizing that there is a pay gap based on gender, and acknowledging that there is an institutional role in perpetuating this inequity, is an important step participants identified in addressing the gendered workplaces in higher education. Participants' frustration at their lack of control or influence over closing the pay gap was apparent in the interviews.

Unpaid Work and Emotional Labor

The fifth theme of gendered workplaces that emerged from the questionnaires and interviews in this study was the expectation that women take on the bulk of the emotional labor that exists in student affairs work. In addition to being paid less than men, interview participants discussed the challenges of carrying the weight of emotional labor, which tends to be expected of women and also may be unpaid. Phase 1 participants tended to agree that women bear the burden of this additional work.

Table 5 highlights the questionnaire items that were related to the topic of unpaid work.

Table 5

Responses to Questionnaire Items about Unpaid Work

Questionnaire Item	Strongly Agree/Agree (%)	Strongly Disagree/Disagree (%)
There have been occasions when I have felt that I have worked harder than someone else to be valued equally.	91	9
At my institution, women are expected to be social organizers of events.	72	22
At my institution, administrators have the same role expectations regardless of gender.	22	66

Based on questionnaire results, two questions included in the interview protocol were adapted to gain a deeper understanding of these perspectives. The first was whether interview participants thought they had worked harder to be valued equally, and the second was whether tasks and responsibilities tended to be assigned based on title and role or based on gender.

Interview participants agreed that they have often thought that they need to do more in order to be valued equally to men. One of the themes that arose through this question is the idea that women tend to be the ones to take on the unassigned work which often includes emotional labor, nurturing of others, and hidden work. Wendy shared "it is expected of me to be the one that keeps these unwritten things moving in the division." Sometimes emotional labor is needed to address the needs of the team

and to keep morale up among staff. One participant shared that in her experience, this expectation relies heavily on women:

> That's one of these random things that, because she's a woman, the expectation is that she'll do a better job of mediating. That whole, again unwritten, if something's going on with somebody emotionally, or a baby, or a wedding, or a death or whatever, that the women in the room are going to be the ones that step up and say we need to do something.

Another participant shared her thought that the fact that women tend to take on this additional work is due to societal expectations. "I think women are socialized to pick up the slack. We're kind of expected to do it all at home and at work, and so, if we see that there's a need, we do it." These participants' quotes underscore that the barrier of taking on unpaid and emotional work is a gendered barrier.

> Patricia shared her perspective about how valuable this work is, even though it may go unrecognized or uncompensated by sharing:

> What I consistently find is it's the women who are showing up for those committee meetings. It's the women who are signing up to take on subcommittee leadership. It's the women who are doing that work, that daily work, to keep us moving in some of these extras that are vital to the function of our institution.

Several of the participants noted that the burden of this emotional or unpaid labor may contribute to higher burnout among women in student affairs. The notion that women are expected to volunteer for tasks, to fill in the gaps, to make sure that things do not

slip through the cracks; all of this may lead to feelings of frustration and resentment, according to participants.

Another item from the questionnaire that was explored more through the interviews was whether work tasks tended to be assigned based on gender, such as advising or other nurturing work, or if tasks were generally based on role and title. The majority of Phase 1 participants ($n = 21$) indicated that administrators had different role expectations based on gender. However, when asked directly, interview participants tended to say that tasks were assigned based on title or role, rather than on gender. As participants discussed this question, they provided information indicating that women administrators may indeed have different expectations than their male counterparts.

Two participants shared their observations of Cabinet-level presentations that had been made at their respective institutions. In both cases, noting that these were different institutions, the participants described a presentation whereby female Cabinet members were the organizers behind the scenes, and the male Cabinet members were put forward as presenters and content experts, even though everyone involved was at the vice president level.

Margie shared a personal experience related to a perceived discrepancy in how tasks were assigned, she stated:

In my role within student government, at one point I was one of three coordinators, the other whom were male. I initially felt obligated to take on the programming board roles because they wanted to do other things. And it was

> more of a like, "You do the fun stuff, you put the events together and we're going to take care of these more serious things."

Other participants shared anecdotes that were similar to Margie's experience, going so far as to say they had been asked to complete tasks they felt were below their title and not part of their role. Some examples were, as the only woman in the room, being asked to take notes during a meeting when everyone there was at the same administrative level; and being asked to complete tasks that would normally be completed by an administrative assistant, such as creating a spreadsheet or other organizing tasks. Two different participants also shared that they had been asked to train the new person who had been hired for the position they applied to but did not receive, and that it felt like a gender-based request because their perception was that the training should have been handled by the supervisor, a male in both cases, and not the person who was not chosen for the role, a female.

Participants described how problematic these situations can be, particularly when it comes to opportunities for advancement. They described a perception of having to do more than their male counterparts to show that they are ready for the next step. Margie shared:

> It's more in line of, like, do this thing that's going to give you extra work or take extra time away from your job duties so you can be seen doing that in order to elevate. Where I don't feel like with males that they're pushed to do as much of the extra stuff to be able to prove worth and that they are ready for that next step.

Kari discussed similar experiences that led to frustration for her:

> If there is someone who needs help hiring, they will never ask the men. They
>
> will always ask the women for the extra help. It's all the extra tasks that don't
>
> come along with your job that bogs you down from getting a promotion. And
>
> the men just exist. All they have to do is exist and they don't have extra
>
> expectations or caregiving jobs that come along with it.

These results indicate that women tend to be expected to take on extra and unpaid work in ways that men are not, and that it contributes to higher education institutions operating as gendered workplaces.

Sexism, Misogyny, and Harassment

The final theme that contributed to participants' perceptions of their institutions as gendered workplaces was their direct experiences of sexism and other discriminatory behaviors. Throughout the interviews, there were comments from all the participants that related to both subtle and overt sexism and misogyny, as well as descriptions of being harassed in the workplace. Some participants expressed the sentiment that society has progressed enough that sexism and harassment should no longer be a problem at work, however this problem lingers and it is frustrating.

Several of the interview participants did not have children, and they shared that sometimes the maltreatment comes from other women, in addition to men. Several of them spoke about the perception that women without children are expected to do more of the evening and weekend work. One participant shared:

> Essentially, sometimes I feel like I have to do more or take on more duties
>
> because I don't have children. Almost like I'm, I don't want to say a second-
>
> class citizen, but because I don't have anything else *important* going on in my

life right now. You know, I don't have anyone to pick up or take to parties on

the weekends, therefore, I can do the programming on the weekends or at

night. I think that often comes from other women.

This participant continued:

If you were to put up the ladder or something, the people without the children

are at the bottom, rather than male or female. You know, we [people without

children] have less priority; we have less say in our autonomy as people

outside of work.

The examples provided by this participant demonstrate that discrimination based on

gendered norms can be perpetuated by both male and female leaders.

Other experiences of sexism or misogyny were demonstrated through criticism

of their work that participants had received. Several participants indicated that this

criticism tended to come from male colleagues or supervisors, rather than women. One

participant stated that she has often been called aggressive, which can feel like a sexist

comment because when similar behavior is exhibited by men it is often not labeled as

aggressive. She shared that over time, she has learned to not shy away from it;

however, she still experienced frustration over this label.

An additional example of women being treated differently than men at work

had to do with reactions of others when women take time away from work. Margie has

observed that colleagues seem more critical of women when they are away from work,

regardless of the reason, than they are of men. She said it would be helpful if

institutions could normalize the act of taking time away from work for family reasons:

And not having it be like "this person's out again and I can't ever get ahold of them," and it seems to happen more with females than it does with males. With males, it's more like "oh, this person's on vacation so I won't bug them until later." [With females] it's like, "why do they take so much time off?" I don't hear that with male colleagues as often as I do with female colleagues; the criticism of why they're taking their time.

These comments indicate that participants believe women may be viewed as not as committed to their work because they are perceived as being away a lot. This sentiment was underscored by a participant who shared reactions from administration that she had observed when women requested more opportunities for remote work in light of the ongoing pandemic. She was part of a team that was evaluating requests for remote work, and shared that questions were raised about whether women can really handle working from home, and if the requests were mainly about convenience. This participant noted that these questions did not come up when they were evaluating requests from men for remote work.

Another aspect of sexism at work is when someone experiences overt sexual harassment. One participant was open with an experience she had with a male colleague who was coming on to her at work. In addition to the personal discomfort that was felt as a result of this situation, this participant described how it undermined her confidence in her work:

It was just so disheartening to me that it was like, no matter all of my accomplishments and the professional things that I accomplished. That to you

I'm still [just] a woman, a piece of whatever, instead of a colleague and a

professional.

The fact that, even in the small sample size of this study, women have described recent

examples of being harassed and criticized because of their gender indicates that

sexism and misogyny still remain issues in the workplace. The experiences of these

participants indicated that they perceive their institution to be gendered workplaces.

Summary

Results of this study indicate that women in midlevel student affairs experience

multiple barriers to leadership based on gender. These barriers may be personal in

nature, such as impostor syndrome, work-life conflict, and displaying emotion being

perceived as unprofessional. Participants also described sociological barriers to

leadership, including the expectation that women need to say *yes* to every opportunity

to avoid negative consequences, and the nature of student affairs work itself

sometimes creating a barrier to leadership. Additionally, this study revealed that in

some areas where religion is a cornerstone of culture, highly conservative views about

the work women should, and should not, be doing can create barriers to leadership.

This study also showed that participants experience higher education as a

gendered institution. Results that supported this finding include the notion that, in

many instances, leadership equals male, and that ideal worker norms still serve as

barriers for women. Additionally, participants described their experiences with the

double bind, the gender pay gap, and sexism. Further descriptions of expectations that

women take on unpaid work and emotional labor, whereas it was reported those

expectations did not exist for men, indicating that higher education still has progress to

make in order to create equal opportunities for leadership in regard to gender. The next chapter will connect these findings to current research and will discuss implications to student affairs practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to present a discussion of findings from Chapter 4 and draw connections to current research. The discussion will be framed in the context of the two research questions that guided this study. Implications for supporting women in midlevel student affairs roles who aspire to senior roles will be discussed, and recommendations for future research will be offered.

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore the perceived barriers to leadership for female-identifying student affairs professionals at the midlevel who aspire to, but have not yet attained, a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) role. Because much of the published research has studied women who have already achieved SSAO roles, this study was intentionally focused on women in midlevel roles. Participants were asked to self-identify as midlevel, as different organizational structures create variance in the specific titles and roles that may fall into this category. Participants who self-identified as female were included, understanding that gender is a social construct that is not necessarily dictated by biological sex. The guiding questions for this research were:

1. What barriers, if any, have participants experienced regarding their ability to move into a senior student affairs (SSAO) role?

2. To what extent, if at all, do participants experience higher education institutions as gendered organizations?

Discussion of Findings

Data collection for this study included a questionnaire and follow-up interviews conducted with a randomly selected group of Phase 1 participants.

Questionnaire responses (*n* = 32) were analyzed and used to inform the interview protocol, and then interview responses (*n* = 8) were coded and themed to provide an in-depth analysis of the experiences and perspectives of participants. An analysis of the key findings from Chapter 4 as they relate to the research questions follows.

Research Question 1 – Barriers Experienced by Participants

Participants in this study experienced barriers similar to those that have been described in current literature, which included individual and sociological barriers. These barriers involved impostor syndrome and work-life conflict, which included balancing work with caring for family, as well as an inability to relocate for a job due to family situations. Recent research has examined how the COVID-19 pandemic and required lockdowns may have exacerbated work-life conflict issues for women (Ellis, 2021; Stefanova et al., 2021; Winfield & Paris, 2021). According to this research, women spent more time on caregiving and less time on work during the lockdown, as compared to men (Stefanova et al., 2021).

Winfield and Paris (2021), as well as Ellis (2021), wrote that the impacts of navigating the pandemic have contributed to high levels of burnout for higher education professionals, particularly in student affairs. Some of the reasons associated with increased burnout were higher workload due to staff furloughs or layoffs, the expectation of needing to be constantly available while working remotely, and the thought that institutions have been putting finances above employee well-being throughout the pandemic (Ellis, 2021; Winfield & Paris, 2021). In particular, Ellis (2021) noted, closures of schools and day-care centers have prevented many employees from being able to work full time, especially women.

Beyond the barriers that were discussed in the literature, participants in this study described additional barriers to leadership that they have experienced. One of these barriers was that showing emotion in the workplace is perceived as unprofessional, which creates an internal conflict for women, many of whom are naturally empathic and compassionate. Participants discussed this barrier by describing the challenge of being authentic when their personality traits, such as empathy, nurturing, and caring, are not perceived by administrators to be consistent with the traits of a strong leader. Participants suggested that offering leadership training in higher education that outlines the benefits of leading with empathy and compassion could be one way to start changing the perception that a leader cannot show emotion. Investigation into how women experience and display emotion in the workplace, and how it impacts others' perceptions of their leadership could be a topic for future research.

Barriers in Student Affairs. Participants in this study seemed to experience barriers to leadership that are specific to student affairs, as described in current literature. One example was the high level of emotional and physical energy that is required to work in student affairs. Participants described their roles as being responsible for the emotional labor of caring for and nurturing students who experience academic and personal struggles. In addition, they shared that they have served in roles where it is common for student affairs responsibilities to fall outside of a typical 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p. m. work day, which can be physically draining. Current research indicates that these time demands of continually working evening and weekend hours create a barrier to leadership because some professionals choose to

leave student affairs due to burnout rather than stay to pursue leadership roles (Buchanan, 2012; Jo, 2008; Marshall et al., 2016).

Despite the propensity for leaving the profession due to burnout, most of the participants in this study indicated that they planned to continue to pursue an SSAO role in the future. However, one participant left student affairs for academic affairs between completing the questionnaire and participating in the interview, and another indicated that she has thought of leaving student affairs altogether to pursue another career path. As discussed above, higher education professionals seem to be experiencing higher levels of burnout as a result of the pandemic, which may continue to negatively impact retention in the field (Ellis, 2021; Winfield & Paris, 2021).

Move Out to Move Up. Limited opportunities for advancement was another barrier that was identified by participants in this study as well as in current research (Marshall et al., 2016). Participants shared that it is common to have to wait for someone in a leadership role to leave their position in order to make room for another person to move up. The lack of opportunity to advance was a factor for some participants in deciding whether to stay in student affairs or to pursue other career options. This choice was especially salient for participants in this study, as they all work in areas of the country where there are not a lot of higher education institutions nearby, which would mean that they would have to consider relocation in order to move into a senior role. As described above, many participants have to weigh the choice of relocation against the needs of their family and, particularly for some, whether their partner is willing to leave their job to relocate.

Saying Yes to Everything. Another barrier that participants described in the context of student affairs work was the expectation that women should say *yes* to any opportunity to build their skillset or leadership profile. Examples of additional responsibilities included accepting a role on a university committee, attending leadership training or other professional development opportunities, and training new employees. The barrier of having to say yes to all opportunities aligns with current literature on the double bind, a concept that women may be placed in impossible positions with no successful way out (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Sabattini et al. (2007) described an aspect of the double bind as the dilemma of women being held to higher standards than men, but receiving fewer rewards. Using this view, women have to work twice as hard to be perceived as half as good. While accepting new challenges can be beneficial to career growth, participants in this study shared that often there is no trade-off with these opportunities. In other words, they were not able to let go of an old responsibility in order to take on a new one, which left them feeling stretched too thin. Participants observed that men were not expected to take on additional responsibilities in order to prove that they were ready for leadership, indicating that this is likely a gender barrier experienced by women.

Religious Views as a Barrier. An interesting finding from this study, and one that was not expected, was the influence that religious beliefs in a region had on women's aspirations for leadership roles. Several of the participants in this study lived in an area of the country where religion is a large part of the culture, and they described this particular religion as espousing traditional gender roles. Generally, men are viewed as the breadwinners of the family and women do not work outside the

home but, instead, focus on raising children and maintaining the home. The

participants who lived in this area shared the far-reaching impacts that these traditional

values had on their careers. In particular, one participant discussed the struggle with

finding childcare when she moved to the area; there were not many options for full-

time care, nor those that would transport children between the center and their schools.

Given that these women were being held to faith-based, stereotyped roles, it fell on

them to resolve the issues. This served as a gendered barrier because, as described by

participants, securing childcare and transporting the children to and from the center

was the responsibility of the mother. She would have to make the sacrifices to her job

in order to take care of these needs.

A more direct impact of religious values on women's careers, however, was

the reality that leadership roles across the universities were male-dominated and that

these male leaders held many of these faith-based values and stereotypes regarding

women. Participants shared frustration that they were overlooked for positions while

men who were less qualified and had less experience appeared to be hand-picked for

leadership roles. Faith-based stereotypes regarding gender, participants noted, often

resulted in only male finalists in searches for senior roles. Gender-based

discrimination of this kind generated disappointment in participants and that would

likely be experienced by other women who desired SSAO positions. Perceptions and

perceived agency matter in organizations. The only strategy that participants seemed

to use to combat the issue of women not being viewed as leaders in faith-based

communities was continuing to push against this idea individually, which they

admitted was tiring. The fact that many of the participants in this study resided in

areas where religion is a dominant part of the culture was unintentional and due to the random sampling of interview participants. They certainly did not share these values or beliefs nor do they subscribe to the stereotypes. Exploring the experiences of women who live in areas with more conservative values, as compared to areas with more liberal values, could be a topic for future research that would bring to the forefront the faith-based barriers faced by women.

Research Question 2 – Gendered Workplaces

Participants in this study experienced their institutions as gendered workplaces in various ways, which included a lack of gender parity in leadership roles, the gender pay gap, women taking on unpaid work, the double bind, and ideal worker norms. Acker (1990; 2012) posited that organizations are built upon a *gendered substructure*, which contributes to gender inequality within the organizations. Included in the substructure are assumptions about how work should be divided, whether there are some roles for men and others for women, the gender pay gap, and who has decision-making authority (Acker, 2012). Acker (2012) posited that the gendered substructure perpetuates gender inequality within the organization. While Acker's (1990) research is several decades old, it is noteworthy that the participants in this study described experiences that indicate higher education institutions are still gendered workplaces.

Male-Dominated Leadership. Research indicates that women hold the majority of all student affairs positions in higher education compared to men, however men still dominate senior student affairs roles. Participants in the current study confirmed that, at their institutions, men held the majority of senior-level roles not only in student affairs but across the institutions. Interestingly, several participants

noted their own surprise that they had not noticed or thought about gender disparity in senior leadership prior to discussing it during the interviews. The lack of recognition by a midlevel student affairs professional that men outnumber women in administration could be indicative of a larger societal issue; we are accustomed to seeing men in leadership roles so gender disparity at the most senior level goes unnoticed, even by those whose skills and abilities may match or exceed those who currently hold the position.

Participants discussed the impacts they experienced from a lack of gender equity in senior administration roles at their institutions. One notable impact was the lack of female representation in institutional decision making. For example, one participant noted that her institution was not planning to address the need for flexibility in work schedules as employees were returning from work after quarantine due to the global pandemic. This participant worked among a lot of women who were mothers and would be expected to stay home from work if the schools or daycare centers were closed because of COVID. Because the decision makers in this scenario were all men, and likely did not need to think about being the primary caregiver to children, it did not occur to them that flexible work situations might be necessary while employees were still navigating the impacts of the pandemic and current realities of an economy just starting to return. This example indicates why it is important to have female voices in spaces where institutional decisions are being made. They can hold valuable perspectives on issues central to establishing a more equitable and responsive workplace.

Double Bind. The *double bind* is the concept that women may be placed in impossible positions with no successful way out (Eagly & Carli, 2007). It is a gender-based concept which creates a lack of clarity for women about how they are expected to act in the workplace. An example that was presented by a participant in this study was when she was told that collaboration was a strength she possessed, but then a reason she was given for not receiving a promotion was that others thought she would be too collaborative. This example is consistent with the literature which indicates when women exhibit traits that are consistent with gender expectations, such as being caring and nurturing, they are not viewed as leaders; and when women exhibit traits such as decisiveness and assertiveness, they are viewed as too harsh or unfeminine (Sabattini et al., 2007).

A second example of the double bind that was present in this study centered on appearance. One participant described herself as very tall, at over six feet, and said that she had been described as intimidating due to her size. Another participant spoke about her choice in clothing and that she preferred not to wear skirts and high heels, and this had been used against her in job search processes. In a study about gender and professional appearance, Haynes (2012) wrote that women tend to have a more difficult time than men when it comes to navigating rules about professional dress. Additionally, professional appearance is linked to credibility; women are expected to present themselves with a certain level of authority, but it is a thin line between being perceived as authoritative versus overbearing (Haynes, 2012).

Gender Pay Gap. Consistent with the literature, women in this study indicated that they have experienced disparity in salary based on gender. Specifically, Phase 1

participants indicated that they have been paid less based on gender and have experienced struggles in attempting to negotiate for a higher salary. Table 6 displays the responses to questionnaire items related to the gender pay gap, using the percentages of respondents who indicated they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Table 6

Responses to Questionnaire Items about Gender Pay Gap

Questionnaire Item	*N*	% Agreement
I believe that I have been paid less than someone of a different gender for the same or similar work.	26	81
I have attempted to negotiate for a pay raise and was not successful.	21	66

These questionnaire responses indicate that participants have experienced pay discrimination during their careers, which mirrors data that are available in current literature. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) published a report about the gender pay gap that outlined the impact of unequal pay for women (Miller et al., 2018). The report revealed that in 2017, women earned 80% of what men earned for full-time, year-round work (Miller et al., 2018). The pay gap has long-lasting impacts such as causing women to lag behind in lifelong earnings through Social Security benefits and retirement contributions, in addition to the direct impact of having a lower yearly income than men.

Interview participants discussed the pay gap as a workplace barrier for women, although there were no interview questions that specifically addressed salaries. Participants suggested that their respective institutions need to give more attention to the pay gap and its impact on female employees. They noted that not only does the pay gap directly impact the quality of life for women, but it sends a message that they are not as valued as their male counterparts.

Unpaid Work and Emotional Labor. Consistent with current literature, participants in this study expressed frustration with the burden that they said institutions placed on women to take on the unpaid work and emotional labor associated with supporting college students. Research that has been conducted on higher education faculty revealed that female professors were often asked to perform service roles in addition to teaching and scholarship, such as student advising and committee work in ways that were not expected of their male counterparts (Schneider et al., 2011). The current study revealed that the burdens of unpaid work and emotional labor are also experienced by women who work in student affairs. Participants shared their perspectives that, often, it was up to them to develop and execute ideas to increase staff morale or to mediate conflict. In many instances, the rationale they were given as to why this fell to them was that women are better at the soft skills that are required for this type of work.

Participants expressed frustration that issues related to staff morale and providing emotional support for students, which are essential to the health of the institution, were being completed because women felt an obligation to serve in this way "out of the goodness of their hearts," as one participant shared. It follows that if

an institution places value on the connection that employees and students have to the institution, this work should be accounted for and compensated accordingly. This finding echoes themes from previous research that indicates it is important for women to believe that their contributions are valued, and parity in pay is a factor (e.g., Eddy & Cox, 2008; Pal & Jones, 2020; Sallee, 2021).

Implications for Women in Student Affairs

One of the interview questions asked participants to imagine they were able to build a program at their institution that would encourage women to seek leadership roles, and to describe what would be included in that kind of program. The participants' responses provided insight into what higher education institutions can do in order to remove some of the identified barriers to leadership. The suggestions included flexible work policies, networking and mentoring opportunities, teaching men how to be better allies to women, and additional professional development opportunities to develop leadership skills.

Flexible Work Schedules

Of the eight interview participants, five suggested that more flexibility in work schedules would be beneficial to women in the workplace. The participants noted that there was a call for flexible work schedules prior to the pandemic, and now we are seeing the disparate impact that the pandemic and the impacts of quarantine have had on women, particularly working mothers. Barhate and Hirudayaraj (2021) suggested that organizations utilize the unexpected opportunity of forced remote work because of the pandemic to reevaluate the structure of the work day and to determine whether a flexible work arrangement would benefit employees, particularly women.

The sentiment from the participants in this study was that not all student affairs work fits neatly into a regular 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. work schedule, and many women are balancing other things in their lives that require attention during the regular work day. Having flexibility for when they are expected to be at work, which is encouraged and supported by university administration, would allow women to believe that they could meet their commitments better, both at work and at home. Flexibility in schedules would support working mothers in particular, however Ruby shared that you do not have to be a mother in order to benefit from a flexible work schedule. She stated:

> I do not have children and I'm not a caregiver in any way, but I see that impacting a lot of women's ability to make choices or make leadership a priority. I think there has to be flexibility, and when you engage women in work, I think there has to be intentionality with mentorship and intentionality with opportunity. I think that you have to make work available to people who have different things going on in their life, and considerations for people for whom work isn't the only thing they do.

In a review of literature on student affairs work, Isdell and Wolf-Wendel (2021) noted how institutional policies and practices on flexible work schedules can have a positive impact on student affairs staff. They suggested that having policies which demonstrate that personal commitments do not always need to take a back seat to work responsibilities can improve job satisfaction and employee retention. Examples of these policies included flexible schedules, compressed work weeks, time off for professional development, and the ability to take unpaid vacation or sabbaticals

(Isdell & Wolf-Wendel, 2021). Results from the current study indicate that in addition to flexibility in work hours, having childcare options on campus, or being able to bring children to work on occasion, would be a way that institutions can support women who aspire to senior student affairs roles.

The concept of flexibility in working hours also needs to confront the ideal worker norm, which is the model of a worker who is fully dedicated to their job without being distracted by outside obligations (Acker, 1990; Sallee, 2021). Something that became apparent in this study was that women need to know that they have the ability to protect some of their time from work. Taking it one step further, women would benefit from knowing that the expectations of their supervisors and of university administration was that there are times during the day when people are not available for work, and that no one is expected to be *on call* at all times.

Networking and Mentoring

One idea that surfaced during interviews was the importance of women seeing other women in leadership roles as a way to inspire women to seek out promotions. As has been discovered in previous research, networking and mentoring of women and by women, is an important consideration when promoting gender equality in leadership. Providing opportunities for women to come together and discuss the gender-based challenges that they face in the workplace can provide them with strategies for navigating difficult situations. Patricia shared:

> I think that if the institution actually created opportunities for women to come together and talk, have some open forums – safe, confidential forums – where people could authentically talk about some of the ways that gender impacts

how work is divided and how recognition is done, I think we could address

some of those things.

Research suggests that mentoring, particularly from those of the same gender, can

provide women with the skills and confidence to confront barriers to leadership

(Ballenger, 2010; Hoang, 2013; Parkman, 2016; Reis & Grady, 2018). In the context

of the current study, Patricia explained that in the time between the study's

questionnaire and the interview, she had accepted an SSAO role. During the interview,

she said that achieving the promotion was possible because she advocated for the type

of role and responsibilities that she wanted. She attributed her ability to advocate for

herself, in part, to strong mentorship that she had received throughout her career.

Men as Allies

Another implication of this research is the acknowledgement that women need

men to be allies in their pursuit of leadership roles. Current statistics are clear that men

hold the majority of SSAO roles despite the fact that women outnumber men in entry-

and midlevel roles (NASPA, 2014; Pritchard & McChesney, 2018). These statistics

indicate that men are more likely to be selected for SSAO roles than women. One way

to mitigate this gap in leadership, according to interview participants, is to encourage

men in leadership to seek out women who have the motivation and skills to be good

leaders and to support their development and promotion. Claudia gave a telling

example of what it might look like for men to support women differently. She shared:

I've got a colleague who she's got children. Her boss is a friend of mine and he

has told me "I don't want to ask her to do that because she's got kids at home,"

and I'm like "Right, but if you don't give her this opportunity she's not going

to get that promotion later, so let her decide if she wants to turn that down or

not. You shouldn't make that decision for her." So sometimes I think there's

this benevolent, like "we're trying to protect you" but then you're protecting

me from opportunity.

Institutions that are interested in addressing barriers to leadership for women can

create opportunities for men to sponsor women into leadership roles. Sponsorship can

include encouraging senior administrators to consider qualified women for new

opportunities, as well as advocating for the unique needs of women.

Professional Development

Another implication of this study's results is the need for professional

development for women to prepare them better for leadership roles. Some of the

specific skills that were suggested were supervision, providing constructive feedback,

and effectively managing conflict. Several interview participants shared that they had

struggled with feedback received from female supervisors; that it often was not

constructive or developmental in nature. They seemed to agree that giving feedback

can be difficult; however, it is necessary for supervisees to understand where they

need to improve.

An additional topic that could be covered through professional development

trainings is leading with compassion. Janet felt that a training of this nature would

particularly help women, who tend to be compassionate toward others but have

difficulty translating that compassion into a leadership strength. She shared:

I think a program that I would love to see would be, how can you lead with

compassion? Because I feel like compassion is something that we talk about a

lot with leadership, but we don't always see it, and it can be used as something

against folks.

Peg had similar thoughts about the need for an expansion in how leadership is

perceived or defined. She said:

I think leadership training needs to see an increasing focus on emotional

intelligence because vulnerability matters. And there needs to be freedom in

that, I think. We obviously can't go to work crying every day, but we need to

have grace for emotion.

Results of this study indicate that there may be several strategies that can be

used to address barriers to leadership for women and higher education institutions as

gendered workplaces. Participants suggested many solutions that include flexibility in

work schedules and settings, creating opportunities for networking and mentoring,

engaging men as allies for women, and professional development trainings.

Employing these strategies in the context of individual institutions may help to

dismantle the gendered workplace culture, and could result in fewer gender-based

barriers to leadership.

Limitations

This study was limited in several ways. First, the sample population was

narrowly focused on women who currently serve in midlevel roles and aspire to a

senior-level role. Including only women in the study prevented the opportunity to

compare experiences between men and women who aspire to SSAO roles. Future

research could explore this issue to determine whether career paths in student affairs

differ between men and women.

This study also utilized a small sample size, as the call for participants was limited to a specific geographic region within NASPA. To identify potential participants, I relied on the member directory and limited my search to those who included the designation of *midlevel professional* in their profile. When completing a member profile, it is not required to include a designation of role and, therefore, it is likely that there were many other potential participants who were not identified because they left that field blank on their member profile. As noted earlier in this discussion, the limit on geographical region led to an unintended result of including several participants who resided in an area where conservative religious views were a dominant part of the culture. Perhaps conducting this type of study on a national, rather than regional, basis would yield different results.

Additionally, this study focused only on administrators in student affairs within higher education. It is likely that the experiences of student affairs professionals differ from those in other areas of an institution, such as faculty, academic department staff, and business operations, among others. The results of this study may not be generalizable to these other areas; however, these research questions may be able to be adapted and applied to different areas within higher education.

An important limitation of this study to note is my positionality and potential bias. I have been working in student affairs for almost two decades and have had personal experiences with barriers to leadership. While I made many efforts to limit the impact of bias on this study and its outcomes, it is impossible to eliminate all bias, which could limit the impact of this study on current and future research.

Future Research

The results of this study, along with its limitations, revealed several opportunities for further research. As noted previously, an unexpected result that was not found in current literature was the notion that showing emotion is interpreted as unprofessional. Investigation into how women experience and display emotion in the workplace, and how it impacts others' perceptions of their leadership could be a topic for future research. Another area for exploration that was revealed by this study, but not found in current literature, is religion's influence on women in leadership. Some participants in this study described the impacts on their careers of living and working in a part of the country where conservative religious views are a dominant part of the culture. These results indicate that further investigation is warranted to understand better how conservative religious views may create unique barriers to leadership for women, and whether there are strategies for obtaining leadership roles despite these barriers. Have women discovered ways to influence the culture of leadership on their campus at institutions that are dominated by conservative religious views? Understanding women's strategies for pursuing leadership and creating work-life balance in the context of religious values could be insightful for those who seek leadership roles.

The current study was completed during a global pandemic that has already spanned more than two years. Research is beginning to emerge on how the pandemic and resulting quarantines and lockdowns have impacted the workplace. There are implications for future research, particularly in student affairs because this work is, in part, defined by the need to contribute to the well-being of students. Research

questions could focus on whether there is a change in the number of women who choose to leave the profession after navigating work and life during the pandemic, and what factors have influenced any changes.

The intersection of identities provides another avenue for future research, which was not explored in this study. Because it is impossible to examine a single aspect of an individual's identity separately from others, a study that compares experiences among women but across different identities such as race, ethnicity, age, or marital and family status could provide additional insights that would be beneficial to women seeking leadership roles. In the context of gender, there is room for further study on participants who identify as transgender or non-binary to investigate how their paths to leadership align with or diverge from those who identify as either female or male.

Summary

The results of this study indicate that barriers exist for women in student affairs who aspire to senior roles. While some of these barriers are individual, such as impostor syndrome and work-life conflict, others are systemic and can be addressed by institutions that are interested in creating gender parity in leadership roles. Participants in this study experienced their institutions as gendered workplaces through issues such as disparity in gender representation in leadership roles, the pay gap, and differing expectations for men versus women. That many workplaces remain mired in inequitable and gendered practices in 2022 is a call to action for all leaders.

Outcomes of this study indicate that there are measures for higher education institutions to take in order to address some of these barriers. These measures include

offering flexible work schedules, encouraging mentoring or creating programs so mentoring is readily available to women, engaging men as allies to women who aspire to leadership roles, and offering professional development so women can gain additional leadership and supervisory skills. Higher education institutions need to recognize that it is in their interest to have women represented in senior leadership roles. This study indicates that women perceive that they do not have the same access to these roles as men, but they are eager to contribute to their institutions by serving in these senior roles.

References

Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender and Society, 4*(2), 139-158.

Acker, J. (2012). Gendered organizations and intersectionality: Problems and possibilities. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, 31*(3), 214-224.

American Council on Education. (2017). *American college president study*. https://www.aceacps.org/summary-profile/

Bailey, K. J. (2011). *Women in student affairs: Navigating the roles of mother and administrator* (Order No. 3500089) [Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Ballenger, J. (2010). Women's access to higher education leadership: Cultural and structural barriers. *Forum on Public Policy Online, 2010*(5), 1-20.

Barhate, B., & Hirudayaraj, M. (2021). Emerging career realities during the pandemic: What does it mean for women's career development? *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 23*(3), 253–266. https://doi.org/10.1177/15234223211017851

Belch, H. A., & Strange, C. C. (1995). Views from the bottleneck: Middle managers in student affairs. *NASPA Journal, 32*(3), 208 - 222.

Biddix, J. P. (2011). "Stepping stones": Career paths to the SSAO for men and women at four-year institutions. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 48*(4), 443-461.

Bird, S. R. (2011). Unsettling universities' incongruous, gendered bureaucratic

    structures: A case-study approach. *Gender, Work, and Organization, 18*(2),

    202-230.

Blackhurst, A. E. (2000). Career satisfaction and perceptions of sex discrimination

    among women student affairs professionals. *NASPA Journal, 37*(2), 399-413.

Buchanan, J. (2012). *Factors that influence attrition of new professionals in student*

    affairs (Order No. 3532682) [Doctoral dissertation, Widener University].

    ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Burkinshaw, P., & White, K. (2017). Fixing the women or fixing universities: Women

    in HE leadership. *Administrative Sciences, 7*(3), 30.

Caltagirone Karpacz, H. (2017). *Career transitions of women leaders: An exploration*

    of why women leave senior leadership positions (Order No. 10261997)

    [Doctoral dissertation, Fielding Graduate University]. ProQuest Dissertations

    and Theses Global.

Carli, L. L., & Eagly, A. H. (2016). Women face a labyrinth: An examination of

    metaphors for women leaders. *Gender in Management, 31*(8), 514-

    527. https://doi.org/10.1108/gm-02-2015-0007

Catalyst. (2020a, January 15). *Pyramid: Women in S&P 500 companies*. Retrieved

    from https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-sp-500-companies/

Catalyst. (2020b, April 24). *Quick take: Women in science and medicine*. Retrieved

    from https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-science-and-medicine/

Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. A. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high achieving

women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory,*

Research & Practice, 15(3), 241-247. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0086006

Cosimini, S. H. (2011). *Female administrators in higher education: Victories, broken*

barriers, and persisting obstacles (Order No. 3456113) [Doctoral dissertation,

Johnson & Wales University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Cox, B. J. (2014). *Examining the experiences, perceptions, and challenges of women*

leaders in private, nonprofit universities (Order No. 3584986) [Doctoral

dissertation, University of La Verne]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses

Global.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods*

approaches (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. W. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design:*

Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Dale, D. C. (2007). *Women student affairs leaders advancing and succeeding in*

higher education senior leadership teams (Order No. 3260766) [Doctoral

dissertation, Drexel University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Diehl, A. B. (2014). Making meaning of barriers and adversity: Experiences of women

leaders in higher education. *Advancing Women in Leadership, 34*, 54.

Diehl, A. B., & Dzubinski, L. M. (2016). Making the invisible visible: A cross-sector

analysis of gender-based leadership barriers. *Human Resource Development*

Quarterly, 27(2), 181–206. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21248

Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). Women and the labyrinth of leadership. *Harvard Business Review*, *85*(9), 63–71.

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, *109*(3), 573–598.

Eddy, P. L., & Cox, E. M. (2008). Gendered leadership: An organizational perspective. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 2008*(142), 69-79. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.326

Eddy, P. L., & Ward, K. (2015). Lean in or opt out: Career pathways of academic women. *Change (New Rochelle, N.Y.), 47*(2), 6-13. https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2015.1018082

Ellis, L. (2021, August 25). *The great disillusionment. College workers are burning out just when they'll be needed most.* The Chronicle of Higher Education. https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-great-disillusionment

Ford, D. (2014). *Rising to the top: Career progression of women senior-level student affairs administrators* (Order No. 3618098) [Doctoral dissertation, Texas Southern University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Fuesting, M., Bichsel, J., & Schmidt, A. (2022, January). *Women in the leadership pipeline in higher education have better representation and pay in institutions with female presidents and provosts* (Research Report). CUPA-HR. Retrieved from: https://www.cupahr.org/surveys/research-briefs/women-executives-in-higher-ed.

García, H. A., Nehls, K., Florence, K., Harwood, Y., & McClain, T. (2020). "The ones who move things along": How women mid-level managers navigate academic landscapes. *New Directions for Higher Education,* (189), 25-39.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1982). Epistemological and methodological bases of naturalistic inquiry. *Educational Communication and Technology*, *30*(4), 233–252. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02765185.

Hannum, K. M., Muhly, S. M., Shockley-Zalabak, P., & White, J. S. (2015). Women leaders within higher education in the United States: Supports, barriers, and experiences of being a senior leader. *Advancing Women in Leadership, 35*, 65-75.

Haynes, K. (2012). Body beautiful? Gender, identity, and the body in professional service firms. *Gender, Work, and Organization, 19*(5), 489 - 507. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2011.00583.x

Hoang, Q. (2013). The impostor phenomenon: Overcoming internalized barriers and recognizing achievements. *Vermont Connection*, *34*, 41–51.

Ibarra, H., Ely, R., & Kolb, D. (2013). Women rising: The unseen barriers. (Cover story). *Harvard Business Review*, *91*(9), 60–67.

Isdell, L., & Wolf-Wendel, L. (2021). How the structure and demands of student affairs reflect ideal worker norms and influence work-life integration. In M. Sallee (Ed.) *Creating sustainable careers in student affairs: What ideal worker norms get wrong and how to make it right* (pp. 15-33). Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Jo, V. H. (2008). Voluntary turnover and women administrators in higher education. *Higher Education, 56*(5), 565-582.

Johnson, H. L. (2017). *Pipelines, pathways, and institutional leadership: An update on the status of women in higher education*. American Council on Education.

Johnsrud, L. K., Heck, R. H., & Rosser, V. J. (2000). Morale matters: Midlevel administrators and their intent to leave. *The Journal of Higher Education (Columbus), 71*(1), 34-59. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2000.11780815

Jones, B. R., & Credille, R. O. (2004). The changing face of higher education: Why more administrators are wearing lipstick. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership, 2*(2), 115–132.

Jones, S. R., & Komives, S. R. (2001). Contemporary issues of women as senior student affairs officers. In J. Nidiffer & C. T. Bashaw (Eds.), *Women administrators in higher education: Historical and contemporary perspectives* (pp. 231 – 248). State University of New York Press.

Jones, S. J., Warnick, E. M., & Taylor, C. M. (2015). Identification of institutional genderedness through organizational operations: An analysis of community college working environments. *Journal about Women in Higher Education, 8*(1), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/19407882.2014.987024

Kleihauer, S., Stephens, C., Hart, W. E., & Stripling, C. T. (2013). How six women deans of agriculture have attained their leadership role: A qualitative study. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 54*(3), 15-27.

Manning, K. (2009). Increasing women's senior-level leadership in student affairs. *Student Affairs Leader, 37*(23), 6.

Marquez, Y. A. (2014). *Female senior student affairs officers at four-year public institutions: Pathways to advancement* (Order No. 3621903) [Doctoral dissertation, Fordham University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Marshall, S. M., Gardner, M. M., Hughes, C., & Lowery, U. (2016). Attrition from student affairs: Perspectives from those who exited the profession. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 53*(2), 146–159. https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2016.1147359

McKinnon-Crowley, S., Bukoski, B., Black, V., Burmicky, J., Molina, V., & Chacon, K. (2021). "I had to jump through a lot of hoops": How working mothers in student affairs navigate institutional policies and student affairs norms. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education, 00*(00), 1–22.

McLean, M. C. (2017). *The impostor syndrome: An obstacle to women's pursuit of power* (Order No. 10799978) [Doctoral dissertation, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Miller, K., Vagins, D. J., Hedgepeth, A., Nielson, K., & Nelson, R. (2018). *The simple truth about the gender pay gap* (Fall 2018 ed.). American Association of University Women. https://www.aauw.org/app/uploads/2020/02/aauw-2018-simpletruth-nsa.pdf.

National Association of Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA). (n.d.). *About student affairs*. https://www.naspa.org/about/about-student-affairs

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). (2014). *Vice*

    president for student affairs census: Leadership perspectives, organization,

    compensation. Retrieved from http://census.naspa.org/reports

O'Connor, P. (2018). Gender imbalance in senior positions in higher education: What

    is the problem? What can be done? *Policy Reviews in Higher Education, 3*(1),

    28-50. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322969.2018.1552084

Pal, P. R., & Jones, S. J. (2020). Effects of the culture and climate of doctoral-granting

    institutions on the career aspirations of women midlevel student affairs

    professionals. *Journal of Women and Gender in Higher Education, 13*(1), 16-

    36. https://doi.org/10.1080/26379112.2020.1730193

Parkman, A. (2016). The imposter phenomenon in higher education: Incidence and

    impact. *Journal of Higher Education Theory & Practice*, *16*(1), 51–60.

Peterson, H. (2016). Is managing academics "women's work"? Exploring the glass

    cliff in higher education management. *Educational Management*

    Administration & Leadership, 44(1), 112-

    127. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143214563897

Postsecondary National Policy Institute. (2019, March). *Women in higher education*.

    Retrieved from https://pnpi.org/women-in-higher-education/

Pritchard, A., & McChesney, J. (2018, October). *Focus on Student Affairs, 2018:*

    Understanding Key Challenges Using CUPA-HR Data. (Research Report).

    CUPA-HR. Retrieved from: https://www.cupahr.org/surveys/research-briefs/

Reis, T. C., & Grady, M. L. (2018). Women as university presidents: Navigating the

    administrative labyrinth. *Leadership and Research in Education, 4*, 97-113.

Rosser, V. J. (2000). Midlevel administrators: What we know. *New Directions for Higher Education, 2000*(111), 5 - 13. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.11101

Rosser, V. J. (2004). A national study on midlevel leaders in higher education: The unsung professionals in the academy. *Higher Education, 48*(3), 317-337. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:HIGH.0000035543.58672.52

Rosser, V. J., & Javinar, J. M. (2003). Midlevel student affairs leaders' intentions to leave: Examining the quality of their professional and institutional work life. *Journal of College Student Development, 44*(6), 813-830.

Ryan, M. K., Haslam, S., Alexander, H., Mette D., & Bongiorno, R. (2011). Think crisis-think female: The glass cliff and contextual variation in the think manager-think male stereotype. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 96*(3), 470–484. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022133

Sabattini, L., Carter, N. M., Prime, J., Megathlin, D., & Kman, S. (2007). *The double-bind dilemma for women in leadership: Damned if you do, doomed if you don't.* Catalyst. https://www.catalyst.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/the_double_bind_dilemma_for_women_in_leadership_damned_if_you_do_doomed_if_you_dont.pdf

Sagaria, M. A. D. (1988). Administrative mobility and gender: Patterns and processes in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education, 59*(3), 305 - 326.

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Sallee, M. (2012). The ideal worker or the ideal father: Organizational structures and culture in the gendered university. *Research in Higher Education, 53*(7), 782–802. https://doi-org.ezproxy-eres.up.edu/10.1007/s11162-012-9256-5

Sallee, M. (Ed.). (2021). *Creating sustainable careers in student affairs: What ideal worker norms get wrong and how to make it right*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Schneider, B. Z., Carden, W., Francisco, A., & Jones, T. O., Jr. (2011). Women "opting out" of academia: At what cost? *Forum on Public Policy Online, 2011*(2).

Silbert, A., & Mach Dubé, C. (2021). *The power gap among top earners at America's elite universities*. Eos Foundation. https://www.womenspowergap.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/wpg-power-gap-at-elite-universities-2021-study-4.pdf

Silbert, A., Punty, M., & Brodbine Ghoniem, E. (2022). *The women's power gap at elite universities: Scaling the ivory tower.* Eos Foundation. https://www.womenspowergap.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/WPG-Power-Gap-at-Elite-Universities-v17.pdf

Silver, B. R., & Jakeman, R. C. (2014). Understanding intent to leave the field: A study of student affairs master's students' career plans. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 51*(2), 170-182.

Spurlock, R. L. (2009). *Work, nonwork, and network: The public and private lives of women chief student affairs officers.* (Order No. 3384329) [Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. SAGE Publications.

Stefanova, V., Farrell, L., & Latu, I. (2021). Gender and the pandemic: Associations between caregiving, working from home, personal and career outcomes for women and men. *Current Psychology*, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02630-6

Teague, L. J. (2015). Higher education plays critical role in society: More women leaders can make a difference. *Forum on Public Policy Online*, *2015*(2).

Turnbow, E. (2019). *Gender and work: An analysis of mid-level women administrators in student affairs* [Doctoral dissertation, Wayne State University]. Wayne State University Dissertations. https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/oa_dissertations/2373.

United States Census Bureau. (2020). *Quickfacts*. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/SEX255219

Vaccaro, A. (2011). Divisions among us: Women administrators, faculty, and staff on the complicated realities of support and sisterhood. *NASPA Journal about Women in Higher Education, 4*(1), 26-49. https://doi.org/10.2202/1940-7890.1063

Vaughn, A. R., Taasoobshirazi, G., & Johnson, M. L. (2019). Impostor phenomenon and motivation: Women in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education (Dorchester-on-Thames), 45*(4), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1568976

Winfield, J., & Paris, J. (2021, October 12). A mixed method analysis of burnout and turnover intentions among higher education professionals during COVID-19. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/dj62p

White, J. S. (2005). Pipeline to pathways: New directions for improving the status of women on campus. *Liberal Education, 91*(1), 22-27.

Yakaboski, T., & Donahoo, S. (2011). In (re)search of women in student affairs administration. In P. A. Pasque & S. E. Nicholson (Eds.) *Empowering women in higher education and student affairs: Theory, research, narratives, and practice from feminist perspectives* (pp. 270-286). Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Zahneis, M. (October 19, 2020). *A raft of pay-gap lawsuits suggests little progress for academic women. Why is that?* The Chronicle of Higher Education. https://www.chronicle.com/article/a-raft-of-pay-gap-lawsuits-suggests-little-progress-for-academic-women-why-is-that

Appendix A

Phase 1 Survey

Survey Introduction

This survey is part of a dissertation research study designed to explore the experiences of women who work in a mid-level student affairs role and aspire to a senior-level role. Current research indicates that women may experience barriers to leadership, and this research study seeks to examine if women in student affairs experience similar barriers.

For the purpose of this study, "mid-level professional" is used to describe those whose work is mainly focused on one functional area in student affairs (i.e., residence life, student activities, academic advising, etc.) and may have some supervisory responsibilities. These roles typically report, directly or indirectly, to a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) role. In this study, the SSAO role is defined as that which has policy-making and supervisory responsibilities over multiple areas within student affairs, and reports directly to the president or other cabinet-level position.

This study intends to use broad definitions of the terms "woman" and "female", acknowledging that gender is a social construct that is not necessarily dictated by biological sex.

Participation in this survey is complete voluntary, and you can exit the survey at any time. This survey is expected to take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The questions included in this survey ask about personal experiences as well as some demographic information that some participants may find to be sensitive. Demographic questions may be skipped if you are uncomfortable responding to them. This information will be reported in aggregate in the final research report, and not attributed to any individual participant. Qualtrics, a third-party software, is being used to collect survey responses. Qualtrics complies with applicable data privacy laws, however participants should be aware that sharing information through an electronic survey carries a certain level of risk through a possible, though unlikely, data breach.

While there are no direct benefits to the participants in this study, results may help others better understand how women experience a path to leadership in student affairs.

The final question on the survey asks for contact information only if you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview to further examine this research topic. This question is completely voluntary, and interview participants will be chosen at random from those who indicate interest.

Protecting confidentiality of participants is of the utmost importance. Individual information will be protected in all data resulting from this study. Personal

information being collected includes demographic descriptors, and participants can choose to enter their contact information if they are interested in participating in a follow-up interview. The online survey system will not save IP addresses. All data will be stored electronically on a password-protected network drive that is only accessible to the researcher. Data on the drive is automatically backed up on a daily basis. No data will be collected from participants to choose to exit the survey before submitting. Data for this study will be stored for three years after the completion of data collection, and then will be destroyed or fully deleted.

Rating Scale

Based on your own experience, and in terms of your own aspirations to an SSAO role, please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
I am confident that I have the skills necessary to be successful in an SSAO role.					
I am comfortable talking about my strengths.					
I am comfortable talking about my weaknesses.					
When someone compliments my work, I feel that they value my contributions					
When someone compliments my work, I feel that they are being honest and truthful.					
When someone critiques my work, I lose confidence in my abilities.					

Based on your own experience, and in terms of your own aspirations to an SSAO role, please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
I currently have healthy boundaries between work and home.					

If I were in an SSAO role, I would have strategies for maintaining healthy boundaries between work and home.					
If I were in an SSAO role, I would have to sacrifice my personal time in order to be successfully in my role at work.					
I feel it is necessary to pause my career advancement in order to care for my family.					
My family is supportive of my desire for career advancement.					
I often opt out of additional work responsibilities or activities which may help me advance my career, due to family obligations.					
I could relocate to pursue a career advancement opportunity.					

Based on your own experience, and in terms of your own aspirations to an SSAO role, please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
I have felt at a disadvantage in a job search because of my gender.					
I have a female mentor who supports me in my career aspirations.					
I have a male mentor who supports me in my career aspirations.					
I believe that I have been paid less than someone of					

a different gender for the same or similar work.					
I believe that I have been paid more than someone of a different gender for the same or similar work.					
I have negotiated for a pay raise and been successful.					
I have attempted to negotiate for a pay raise and was not successful.					
There have been occasions when I have worked harder than someone else to be valued equally.					
At my institution, women are expected to be social organizers of events.					
At my institution, administrators have the same role expectations regardless of gender.					

Open-ended Question

Is there anything else about women's aspirations to SSAO roles that should be considered, or would you like to expand on any of your responses from above?

Demographics

Do you identify as a mid-level student affairs professional?
- o Yes
- o No

With which gender category do you identify?
- o Female/Woman
- o Male/Man
- o TransMale/TransMan
- o TransFemale/TransWoman
- o Genderqueer/Gender Non-Conforming
- o Prefer not to answer

With which racial or ethnic groups do you identify? (select all that apply)
- o American Indian or Alaska Native
- o Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin

- o   White
- o   Asian
- o   Middle Eastern or North African
- o   Black or African American
- o   Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- o   Another category not listed (please fill in)
- o   Prefer not to answer

How many years have you worked in student affairs?
- o   Less than 1 year
- o   1 – 4 years
- o   5 – 9 years
- o   10 – 14 years
- o   15 years or more

How many years have you worked in your CURRENT role?
- o   Less than 1 year
- o   1 – 4 years
- o   5 – 9 years
- o   10 – 14 years
- o   15 years or more

Which title best matched your current position?
- o   Assistant or Associate Vice President
- o   Dean
- o   Assistant or Associate Dean
- o   Director
- o   Assistant or Associate Director
- o   Coordinator, Assistant Coordinator, Manager

Which category best describes your current institution?
- o   4-year public, non-profit institution
- o   4-year private, non-profit institution
- o   2-year public, non-profit institution
- o   For-profit institution

Do you aspire to a senior student affairs officer (SSAO) role?
- o   Yes
- o   No
- o   Unsure

If yes, in how many years from now would you like to achieve an SSAO role?
- o   Within 1 year
- o   In 2 – 4 years
- o   In 5 – 7 years

o   In 8 or more years

What is your highest level of education completed?
Certificate
- o   Associate's Degree
- o   Bachelor's Degree
- o   Master's Degree
- o   Doctoral Degree
- o   Do not have a degree
- o   Other

What is your age range?
- o   18 – 24
- o   25 – 34
- o   35 – 44
- o   45 – 54
- o   55+

What is your family status?
- o   Single
- o   Married/Partnered
- o   Divorced/Separated
- o   Widowed
- o   Prefer not to answer

What is the age of your youngest child?
- o   I do not have children
- o   0 – 5 years
- o   6 – 12 years
- o   13 – 17 years
- o   18 – 22 years
- o   23 years or older

This research study includes an interview phase to learn more about women in mid-level student affairs roles who aspire to SSAO roles. If you are interested in participating in a 45-60 minute interview, please include your contact information below.
Participant Name:
Participant Email Address:

Appendix B

Phase 2 Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me a little about your student affairs journey. What brought you to this field, and what types of roles have you held? What is your current role?
2. What interests you in becoming a senior student affairs officer (SSAO)?
3. What hesitations do you have, if any, about the prospect of being an SSAO?
4. If you have already applied for SSAO roles, how far have you gotten in those search processes? (Follow up – did you get any feedback from the hiring committee about why you didn't advance in the search? And/or For what reasons do you think you did not advance in the search?)
5. How has your gender identity influenced your career path or choices? (Probe – were there opportunities available to you based in part on your gender? Or opportunities that were unavailable to you based in part on your gender?)
6. Within your department, or at your institution, how does gender play a role in the division of job duties, if at all? Can you give any examples? (Probe – are there duties that are typically assigned to males; typically assigned to females? Are duties assigned based on title/role or by gender?)
   a. In the initial survey you completed, one of the statements that participants were asked to respond to was "At my institution, administrators have the same role expectations regardless of gender." And 2/3 of respondents disagreed with this statement. If administrators at your institution have different expectations based on gender, can you provide some examples of this?
7. Can you describe your leadership style? What characteristics do you exhibit as a leader? Can you provide an example?
8. Research indicates that there are leadership traits that tend to be associated with males, and others that tend to be associated with females. For example, male leaders may be described as ambitious, aggressive, self-confident, decisive, or independent. Female leaders may be described as collaborative, nurturing, cooperative, helpful, or concerned with the welfare of others.
   a. In what ways, if any, have you had to adapt your leadership style during your career?
   b. What criticism or negative comments have you received about your leadership style, if any? Examples?
9. In the initial survey you completed, one of the statements that participants were asked to respond to was "There have been occasions when I have felt that I have worked harder than someone else to be valued equally." 91% of participants agreed with this statement. If this applies to you, can you describe a time when you remember feeling this way?
10. What does institutional support of women leaders look like to you? (If you could create a program at your institution that encouraged women to enter leadership roles, what would that look like?)

11. Is there anything else about your experience as a woman in student affairs that you would like to share?