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# The Leadership Self-Identity of Women College Presidents

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# THE LEADERSHIP SELF-IDENTITY OF WOMEN COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to explore the concept of leadership self-identity in a particular population of formal leaders—women college presidents. Using narrative inquiry, the research examined the following: how these women describe and define themselves as leaders, what personal attributes they believe allow them to be leaders, their past and future career intentions, how their relationships with others influence their leadership self-identity, and the stories they tell about themselves and leadership. Participants were asked questions designed to reflect their core identity and personal narrative, and to describe their career and relationships. Common themes that emerge include: how they work with others, themselves as leaders, professional intentions and planning, presidential longevity, mentors and mentoring, their networks of support and the importance of communication and language. A clear picture of the leadership self-identity of this group of women college presidents emerges from the study and their understanding of themselves as leaders reveals the complexity of leadership. Leadership self-identity develops as a holistic concept that integrates five critical components: authenticity, leading through relationships, composing a life, balance, and learning. Only the self-understanding inherent in character and authenticity can enable a potential leader to integrate the components of leadership self-identity. As such, it presents significant implications for how leaders are identified, selected, educated, and trained. The electronic version of this dissertation is at OhioLink ETD Center, www.ohiolink.edu/etd.

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# Chapter I: Introduction

## *Background of the Study*

> College and university presidents lead complex organizations in an environment of increasing pressures from a diverse group of constituencies. While they do not lead alone, they are central to the well-being of their institutions and higher education as a whole. They are simultaneously expected to provide intellectual leadership, embody institutional values, and shape institutional policy. (American Council on Education, 2007, p. xi)

The leadership role of college president requires finesse, balance, courage, intelligence, a clear sense of purpose, and the skill to advocate for higher education. "Presidents have come to find themselves holding the positions of CEO of a corporate enterprise, mayor of a multifarious polity, and academic leader of an intellectual community—all at the same time" (American Council on Education, 2007, p. 1). The role of college president is challenging, demanding and varied, and of key importance to the vitality of the system of higher education in the United States and, therefore, its society.

As the number of women leaders in higher education has increased, so has their visibility. Women college and university presidents have been front-page news recently, from the installation of Drew Gilpin Faust as the first woman president of Harvard University to the suicide of Denise Denton, the first openly lesbian chancellor in the University of California system. Although still remarkable, women college presidents are slowly becoming less of a novelty.

The American College President Study, conducted by the American Council on Education, reports that, in 2006, 23 percent of American college and university presidencies were held by women, up from 10 percent in 1986. While the overall number has increased, the rate of the increase has slowed in the past decade. With 45 percent of senior administrative staff and faculty positions in higher education being held by

women, women remain under-represented as presidents.

Women are more likely to lead community colleges and less likely to lead doctoral universities. Overall, the length of service of a president has increased in the past 20 years, from 6.3 years in 1986 to 8.5 years in 2006. Women presidents have been in their current position for less time, an average of 7.7 years, compared to 8.8 years for their male counterparts.

The most typical route to the presidency is from a position of chief academic officer or provost. “The proportion of presidents who were aged 61 or older grew from 14 percent in 1986 to 49 percent in 2006, suggesting that many institutions will lose their presidents to retirement in coming years” (American Council on Education, 2007, p. viii).

> Taken together, the findings on age and career path suggest that—as the presidency has become more complex—institutions are increasingly selecting leaders with a great deal of experience in senior executive roles in higher education. This cautious approach to hiring may limit opportunities for younger leaders, women, and people of color. (p. ix)

Demographic trends clearly point to increased vacancies at the presidential level. Leaders of the future will need to reflect the diversity of the students, faculty, and staff. Filling these vacancies will require creativity, the identification of future talent, an openness to recognizing different faces of leadership, and a willingness to embrace the changing demands of our educational system. The more that can be understood about educational leadership, from the skills and behaviors needed to be externally effective, to the self-knowledge and self-awareness necessary for personal fortitude and internal coherence, the more options will be available for potential future leadership.

## *Overview of the Study*

The purpose of this research study is to explore the concept of leadership

self-identity in a particular population of formal leaders—women college presidents. This study is based on the assumption that, to be able to be effective in a formal position of leadership, a person must perceive him or herself as a leader. While recognizing the power of informal, influential leadership roles, this study is limited to women holding the formal, titled position of university or college president.

> The way people see themselves is so basic to how they behave and yet so "invisible" because it is such an internal and often privately held process. Yet many of the activities of individuals in organizations—and certainly of leaders in organizations—are motivated by how people perceive themselves and how they hope to have others perceive them. (Hall, 2004, p. 173)

A leader's perception of self, distinct from the perception of her by others, is leadership self-identity. Much of the research on leader identity, however, focuses on how a leader is perceived by, and therefore influences, followers. Rather than a leader's conception of herself as a leader, this research is concerned with responses to leaders as an indicator of effectiveness, and is not included in this study of leadership self-identity. However, there is some acknowledgement in the literature "that the self and identity perspective may also be fruitfully applied to understand leadership effectiveness from the angle of leader (i.e., rather than follower) self-conception" (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2005, p. 498).

Leadership self-identity is a subtle and complex concept. It is a self-construction of experiences and self-knowledge that develops over time. One of the challenges of exploring leadership self-identity is that it may be called other things (i.e., self-knowledge, self-concept, mind-set), or it may be discussed implicitly and not labeled at all.

> The term "self-identity" is composed of two countering notions: "self" (*ipse*), that which is the opposite of otherness and strangeness; and "identity" (*idem*), that

> which remains the same, the extreme singular, the opposite of change. The idea of self-identity holds the two notions of difference and sameness in tension. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 146)

The research questions guiding this study are: How do these women describe and define themselves as leaders? What personal attributes do they believe allow them to be leaders? What have been their career intentions, in the past and for the future? How have their relationships with others influenced their leadership self-identity? What stories do they tell about themselves and leadership?

## *Methodology*

This dissertation is an exploratory, narrative inquiry and used interviews to gather data. Polkinghorne (1995) notes that, "Interviews appear to be the most often used source of storied narratives in contemporary narrative inquiry" (p. 12). Describing the analysis of narratives, Polkinghorne says, "researchers collect stories as data and analyze them with paradigmatic processes. The paradigmatic analysis results in descriptions of themes that hold across the stories or in taxonomies of types of stories, characters, or settings" (p. 12). In addition to the stories in common, I also looked for the unique narratives that emerged from the interviews.

A purposeful sample of women college presidents in their first presidency was chosen as participants in this study. Because the first year of a presidency can be consumed with figuring out what the job entails and sorting through the priorities, I chose women who are in at least the second year of their presidency. In an effort to place reasonable boundaries on this small sample group, I limited the participants to women with no more than six years in the position.

The voices of the participants, telling their personal stories in their own words, are vital and hold the essence of the study. Because the focus of the study is the women's perspective, I only interviewed them and not colleagues or family members.

### *Researcher Positioning and Interest*

As a woman with over 20 years experience in the field of higher education, I am an insider familiar with the culture and structure, and yet an outsider to the position of president. I am also of the age and generation of many of the women I interviewed. This positioning allowed me to have more intimate conversations with the participants than perhaps a younger person or a male from outside the profession.

A few years ago when I was beginning to define the research area for my dissertation study, I was drawn to Mary Catherine Bateson's (1989) *Composing a Life*, a narrative study of five women, including a college president. Bateson describes the process of composing a life as one that, "involves a continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present, remembering best those events that prefigured what followed, forgetting those that proved to have no meaning within the narrative" (pp. 29-30). In describing the practice of composing a life, Bateson uses words such as creating, shaping, inventing oneself, defining, improvisation, search for meaning, choices, combining, pioneer, designing, and identity. "Because we are engaged in a day-by-day process of self-invention – not discovery, for what we search for does not exist until we find it – both the past and the future are raw material, shaped and reshaped by each individual" (p. 28).

The concept of composing a life resonated for me as it put words to the complexity and improvisation I had witnessed in the lives of women. I was curious to

find a comparable conceptual basis to understand the creative process, self-perception, and motivation behind women's perception of themselves as leaders. Composing a life was my entre into this journey of exploration of leadership self-identity in the lives and experiences of women.

I was also drawn to Bateson's narrative method of inquiry as it mirrors my preferred style of inquiry. "I interview because I am interested in other people's stories. Most simply put, stories are a way of knowing" (Seidman, 2006, p. 7). Stories, and the stories of women leaders in particular, convey knowing and learning in a powerful way. This is how I learn about the experiences of other women and, in turn, learn about myself. Hearing the stories of women leaders and the composing of their leadership self-identities is how I hope to learn about myself as a leader. Reflecting on her experience shadowing four women leaders, Helgesen (1995) notes,

> And so I am grateful that I had a chance to observe the women in this book in action before my own life handed me more responsibilities. Inspired by their example, I have been able to meet challenges greater than I could have imagined. (p. xxiv)

I aspire, with my research, to provide such a transformative experience, for myself, and for the readers of this study.

### *Context for the Future*

A focused study of the leadership self-identity of women college presidents has not been conducted and this research is intended to fill that gap. This dissertation is an exploratory study to understand the concept of leadership self-identity in a small sample of participants—there is no intention to generalize the findings to a larger population.

This study is an example of Shakeshaft's (1987) fourth stage of research on women in education (i.e., an exploration of how women describe their experiences and

lives as they are studied in their own terms). This type of research, according to Shakeshaft, can then lead to a questioning of how theory must change to include women's experiences (stage five) and effect a transformation of human behaviors in organizations (stage six).

A clarification and strengthening of the concept of leadership self-identity as a result of this study could provide the basis for exploring other populations of leaders in the future to ascertain commonalities and differences across the leadership spectrum.

### *Organization of the Study*

Without an existing body of literature upon which to base my study, I had to define and create a relevant body of literature. I have drawn on the existing research in disparate pockets of the literature in the areas of leadership self-identity, identity and leadership development, women college presidents, women in higher education, women and management, and women's identity. I asked my research questions within each of these pockets of literature to uncover the academic traditions upon which I base my study.

In Chapter 2, I present the relevant literature on the subject of the leadership self-identity of women college presidents, beginning with the research on leadership self-identity and the leadership literature on identity and leadership development. I then present the relevant literature on women college presidents before expanding the discussion to include women leaders in higher education, women and management, and finally, women's identity.

Chapter 3 is a review of the relevant methodology literature, beginning with a discussion of why this study is best served with a qualitative design. Narrative inquiry is

a focus of the chapter, including the appropriateness of interviewing as a method of gathering data, a discussion of the pilot interviews and participants in the study, and an overview of the narrative analysis used in the study.

Chapter 4 describes the findings from the interviews conducted with women college presidents. After describing the participants in the study and the analysis of the narratives, emerging themes are organized within the leadership self-identity components of core identity, career, relationships, and narrative. The voices of the participants are presented for them to tell their stories in their own words.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of the findings and what they reveal about the leadership self-identity of this sample group of women college presidents. Five critical concepts of leadership self-identity are discussed: authenticity, leading through relationships, composing a life, balance, and learning. Where appropriate, the relevant literature from Chapter 2 is brought back in for consideration, along with the findings from the study.

# Chapter II: Literature Review

## *Organization of the Literature*

This chapter reviews the literature that informs my study of the leadership self-identity of women college presidents. The literature comes from journals ranging from *The Journal of College Student Development* to *Leadership Quarterly*, and from recent dissertations to personal memoirs, all of which offer pieces of useful research. But, because no single body of literature defines this subject, I chose disparate, relevant literature to form an aggregate and coherent picture of leadership self-identity among women college presidents.

Six bodies of literature are addressed: (a) leadership self-identity, (b) identity and leadership development, (c) women college presidents, (d) women in higher education, (e) women and management, and (f) women's identity. Four aspects of leadership self-identity were recognized in the literature: core identity, careers, relationships, and narrative. The research questions were shaped to explore each of these aspects.

The first two questions (How do these women describe and define themselves as leaders? What personal attributes do they believe allow them to be leaders?) address issues of core identity—who someone is as a leader. This includes personal attributes and qualities of a leader (e.g., authenticity, integrity, values, and creativity). This leadership character includes the motivation to lead, the criteria by which one evaluates the price to be paid for leadership, and the overlap of the internal processes of self-assessment and the external presentation of self.

The third question (What have been their career intentions, in the past and for the future?) asks about careers, encompassing expectations, ambition, the perception of jobs

or a career, preparation, planning and intentionality, longevity, and succession issues. The fourth question (How have their relationships with others influenced their leadership self-identity?) looks at relationships with others, such as mentors, role models, and teachers. This also includes the relationship with self, focusing on the self-role merger, both when personal and professional identities meld and when they remain apart. And, finally, the fifth question (What stories do they tell about themselves and leadership?) addresses narrative. Narrative is both internal and external, content and process. A woman college president both constructs and communicates an identity through the use of narrative and the stories she chooses to tell.

The bodies of research build upon and complement one another as a picture of leadership self-identity emerges from the literature. By presenting the literature in the same sequence of my discovering it, the concept of leadership self-identity can unfold for the reader as it did in my own thinking.

Before proceeding, I must add a note about terminology. In the literature, *leadership identity* is used by some to mean *how a leader perceives herself* as a leader and by others to mean *how a leader is perceived by followers.* The focus of this research is limited to a leader's self-perception, and does not include any literature or discussion on how a leader is perceived by followers. The authors presented in this chapter may use leadership identity to mean leadership self-identity, the more precise term for a leader's self-perception. For purposes of clarity, I use the terminology of the literature I am citing. The reader can assume that leadership self-identity and leadership identity are synonymous in their usage in this chapter. Since this is a study of women leaders, I use the feminine pronoun, in an attempt to avoid cumbersome language.

## *Presentation of the Literature*

### *Leadership Self-identity*

The research on leadership self-identity centers around two key studies (Hiller, 2005; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005) and two others (DiPaolo, 2004; Turnbull, 2004) with a more limited focus. Hiller (2005) and Komives, et al. (2005) have conducted research specifically on leadership self-identity, providing useful frameworks and models for broader application. DiPaolo identifies leader identity as one component in studying the impact of a student leadership development program. Turnbull provides an interesting sidebar to the discussion with an examination of the relationship between time and leadership identity.

Hiller (2005) introduces leadership self-identity as, "The way we think about ourselves as leaders and what we believe leadership to be are important guides of subsequent thoughts and actions in the leadership domain" (p. iii). In Hiller's research, leadership self-identity, "the self-identity of an individual in the leadership domain" (p. 9) and an orientation toward leadership, what one believes leadership to be, are examined among a sample of undergraduate students and medical center employees.

Hiller (2005) looks at three primary influences of leadership self-identity: (a) past leadership experiences; (b) personality (core self-evaluation, motivation to lead, and self-monitoring); and (c) the self-matching of personal traits to those associated with leadership. Past leadership experiences include the quantity and level of challenge of experiences, as well as the quality of any resulting feedback and intensity of the experience.

Personality broadly includes core self-evaluation, motivation to lead, and

self-monitoring. Core self-evaluation encompasses a self-appraisal of confidence, worth, and agency, along with self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, and locus of control. The motivation to lead includes the calculation of the cost of taking on a leadership role and the sense of duty or responsibility to do so. Self-monitoring is "the extent to which individuals observe, regulate, and control how their 'self' is presented to others" (Hiller, 2005, p. 13). And pattern matching refers to the perception that one's traits and behaviors match those one associates with leadership.

The results of the study find that leadership self-identity dimensions are most highly correlated with the quality of previous leadership experience and an active motivation to lead. Those individuals with leadership experience, a desire and duty to lead, a positive sense of self, and who consider themselves to have the traits of a leader, are able to present themselves appropriately for the situation and are likely to see themselves as leaders.

Hiller's (2005) study is both enhanced and limited by its quantitative design. The measurable dimensions of leadership self-identity, although derived from a sample of undergraduate students, can be applied to any leadership arena. The strength of a quantitative design, in its ability to define and measure, is limited in that it is unable to capture the richness of description and personal experience of a qualitative study.

Hiller's (2005) dimensions of leadership self-identity focus on the individual's concept of self and orientation toward leadership. Komives, Owen, et al. (2005) focus on the creation of that leadership self-identity and provide a model for its developmental process, as it is developed in relation to others, within the context of a relational style of

leadership. Using a grounded theory methodology, they study thirteen college students who have been identified as exemplars of relational leadership.

The study identifies five categories of developing a leadership identity: (a) developmental influences, (b) developing self, (c) group influences, (d) changing view of self with others, and (e) a broadening view of leadership. Developmental influences can include adult influences, peer influences, meaningful involvement, and reflective learning, and these influences may change over time. Developing self is the personal growth of developing self-awareness, building self-confidence, establishing interpersonal efficacy, applying new skills, and expanding motivations that also changes throughout the development cycle. Group influences include engaging in groups, learning from membership continuity, and a changing perception of groups. A changing view of self with others includes being engaged as a dependent (member or follower) or independent (positional leader) group participant and there is a developing and changing view of oneself in relation to other people. A broadening view of leadership is the stage where leadership becomes integrated into the construction of the participants' personal identity.

The authors used this research to develop The Leadership Identity Development (LID) model as an application of the grounded theory of LID (Komives, Mainella, Longerbeam, Osteen, & Owen, 2006). This integrates the process of identity development into a stage-based model arriving at the final stage of integration and synthesis. This is "a time of continual, active engagement with leadership as a daily process—as a part of self identity" (Komives, Owen, et al., 2005, p. 607).

Also addressing leadership identity from a student leadership development perspective, DiPaolo's (2004) research on the impact of student leadership education

includes leader identity as one of the leadership tracks he considers. The self-selected participants in this longitudinal study are six white males, 20–22 years old, members of the same fraternity, who attended a summer institute for leadership. The emergent themes include image of leadership, self as leader, socialization, styles of leadership, therapeutic aspects of leadership, acquisition and congruence of role, curricular impact, the fraternity, developmental life cycle, and crucibles of leadership. The crucible experiences range from an alcohol crisis in the fraternity, being removed as a fraternity officer, major confrontation with football coaches, to the death of a father.

The study is narrow in focus and shallow in its findings. The participants express traditional examples of leadership traits by which to compare themselves and identify crucibles as examples of their limited leadership experience. DiPaolo (2004) admits the challenge of this research in the men's attribution of their leadership learning and how to acknowledge the learning from the program. The more time that passed after attending the institute, the less weight it was given in their leadership development; it was seen as growing up and maturing.

The relationship between time and the development of leadership identity is examined by Turnbull (2004) in her study of retiring executives and their perception and experience of how time shapes and challenges self-identity. She recognizes different forms of time: cyclic (organizational), interactive (social or group), and self (personal). These forms of time are stratified, with cyclic ranking above interactive and interactive ranking above self. The study reveals the choices, conflicts, and contradictions presented to these executives by their perceptions and experiences of balancing the demands of, and needs for, different forms of time. For example, because their past leadership identity

shaped their ambitions, some participants present a contradiction between a need for more self-time and a desire to go back to their previous leadership identity, an identity that was reinforced by cyclic-time. Career paths are often seen as developing along linear clock time. Turnbull (2004) views identities to be "embedded in both the physical and social experience of time" (p. 822). The participants in the study are constantly balancing the competing demands on their time by family, friends, colleagues, career, and organizational expectations. "The social construction of time is a powerful and evolving discourse that regulates both self-identity and organizational identity" (p. 822).

*Findings.* The research on leadership self-identity addresses the first two research questions concerning leader core identity and personal attributes of leaders. Although minimal, this research provides definitions, parameters, and vocabulary with which a framework for a broader discussion can be constructed. Hiller (2005) defines leadership self-identity and identifies the influence of past leadership experiences, personality (core self-evaluation, motivation to lead, and self-monitoring), and the self-matching of personal traits to those associated with leadership, and creates a method of measurement. His structure can now be transposed into a qualitative study as a starting point to flesh out breadth, depth, and thick description. Komives, Owen, et al. (2005) and Komives, Mainella, et al. (2006) offer a leadership identity development model and describe the developmental process of constructing a leadership self-identity. Leadership experiences, relationships, and developing a sense of self are key contributors to the developmental process. DiPaolo (2004) provides a snapshot of leader identity in college males as part of a larger research topic.

Turnbull (2004) offers a refreshing coupling of leadership identity and time. From

the perspective of leadership identity, the perception and experience of time is a dimension that is not mentioned elsewhere in the research literature. I find this noteworthy, particularly because time seems to be so important for leaders and for women. We read about how leaders spend their time and with whom they spend it. We read about women facing the challenges of balancing time and conflicting demands, taking time out from their career to have a family, spending more time in relationship with colleagues and subordinates (Bateson, 1989; Conway, 2001; Helgesen, 1995; McKenna, 1997). Leaders are seen as spending time differently than managers; men are seen as spending time differently than women. How does all of this coincide with the time on an organization's life cycle? Time and leadership identity may provide an interesting facet for future research.

*Identity and Leadership Development*

Within the current management and leadership literature, identity is often linked with leadership development. Topic areas include: self-awareness and identity; personal identity and adaptability; identity and cognitive structures; social identity; identity construction and self-concept; authentic leadership encompassing self-concept clarity, self-knowledge and person-role merger; narrative and life-story; and executive identity. These studies provide an important identity vocabulary for defining specialized areas where identity and leadership overlap. The linking of identity and leadership in these studies suggests the importance of further research on leadership self-identity.

The research on identity and leadership includes authors (Hall, 2004; Lord & Hall, 2005; McCarthy, O'Connell, & Hall, 2005) that focus on the first two research questions of leadership core identity with some attention paid to the importance of

relationships. It also includes authors (Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Sparrowe, 2005) that expand the focus to include the role of narrative as it relates to identity and leadership development.

Hall (2004) recognizes the importance of identity and leadership with his identification of self-awareness (identity) and adaptability as *metacompetencies*, with the ability to help one develop new competencies. “It is the person’s sense of identity that, by definition, helps her evaluate herself. It tells her how she fits into her social environment and it tells her about her uniqueness” (p. 154). A description of a person’s identity could include aspects such as social identity (membership in certain groups), organizational identity, family identity, work and career identity, values, personal identity (their unique qualities), and accuracy of self-perceptions. Identity changes and develops over the course of a career, life transitions, and key experiences, as one integrates various sub-identities while building a personal network and relational support. “Thus, we see the two facets of self-awareness, the internal (recognizing one’s own inner state) and the external (recognizing one’s impact on others.) Self-awareness is one element in the development of the person’s identity” (p. 155). According to Hall, a strong sense of identity is critical for a leader to be successful.

McCarthy, et al. (2005) write about leadership in times of crisis and substitute personal identity for self-awareness as the first metacompetency, while retaining adaptability as the second. These metacompetencies help to explain the complexity of a leader’s need to be able to draw on internal reserves and self-awareness in times of crisis to know how to respond and behave appropriately.

McCarthy, et al. (2005) provide a list of the behaviors associated with identity and

adaptability. Identity behaviors include self-assessment, self-correcting, self-evaluating, acting on personal values, and being open to criticism. Examples of adaptability behaviors are varying one's personal leadership style to be appropriate for the situation, being open to new and diverse people and ideas, and being comfortable with change.

The balance of identity and adaptability, what the authors call *I/A balanced leadership*, "is a useful lens for understanding leadership more broadly, especially in times of great stress, and we believe these lessons and reflections will be useful to researchers wishing to probe leadership complexity" (McCarthy, et al., 2005, p. 466). Reflection, balance, managing paradoxes and change are part of the adaptive leadership equation. Reflection, "actively studying one's capabilities and behaviors, is an essential component of identity awareness and a key leadership development ingredient" (p. 467) and balance, "to be able to employ this balanced leadership style, the leader must be a balanced person" (p. 468) are components of adaptive leadership. "Another aspect of the interdependence of adaptability and identity is that an adaptive leader must be willing to change himself, as well as the organization" (p. 473). Change and learning are also core components of the adaptive work of leadership that Heifetz (1994) proposes.

Lord and Hall (2005) present a theoretically-based model of leadership skill development based on research in cognitive science. Identity is central to their leadership skill development model as one's skill level advances from novice to intermediate to expert. Along with skill development, a concept of identity also develops from an individual level to relational and collective identities.

This developmental process is reminiscent of Komives, Mainella, et al.'s (2006) model of leadership identity development, beginning with a focus on the self and

expanding to include others at a group level, and then overarching values and principles. Stages of developmental complexity are reminiscent of Kegan's (1994) orders of consciousness. As the cognitive operations develop from data to inference to formulation and reflection upon formulation, the claims on the mind also increase in complexity from categories to cross-categorical structures to complex systems and trans-system structures. Hiller's (2005) concept of self-regulating is seen in Lord and Hall's (2005) comment that, "One would expect high self-monitors to develop richer implicit theories to guide social perceptions because of their greater social orientation and greater sensitivity to feedback from social cues" (p. 608).

Ruderman and Ernst (2004) focus on context in their work on social identity of leaders. In a complex business environment, in addition to skills and styles, leaders must understand their social identities, their membership within certain groups, and the implications of this membership. It is important for leaders to develop their social identities to gain a greater appreciation for the diversity of viewpoints held by different groups, as well as to understand how they may be perceived by others.

Bridging the gap between the first group of research (addressing questions of leadership core identity and relationships) and the second group of research (including narrative in its questioning), Kohonen (2005) expands the concept of social identity to look at leadership identity construction within the context of international business assignments. From a leadership perspective, living and working in a foreign culture, embarking on both the outward and inward journeys of an international assignment, the relational and contextual components of personal and social identities are both stable and changing. One's personality and sense of self are stable, even as new situations and

cultures may require an adjustment of one's self-presentation. The self-evaluation and self-monitoring components of core identity allow a person to adapt, reshape, and balance her identity through these periods of transition. While one's core identity may not change, its ability to evaluate and monitor itself allows for adjustment with experience. The construction of leadership self-identity is a developmental, reciprocal learning process. A change in context may impact how a leader perceives herself and a leader's ability to evaluate and monitor herself in different contexts allows her to be authentic and effective.

International assignments require that managers be able to balance allegiances to both home and host countries, as they balance both local and global identities. Identity and career are related as they try to make sense of the experience as part of both their identity and career path development. Self-knowledge and personal values are part of the narrative developed to organize the experience into a coherent form.

> They are simultaneously authors of their self-narratives, and the narrative figures and actors of those narratives. Through constructing the autobiographical narrative, a person is fulfilling the coherence principle of the self. In giving oral narratives people make their personal, idiosyncratic experiences socially understandable. (Kohonen, 2005, p. 27)

Sparrowe (2005) and Shamir and Eilam (2005) link narrative and authentic leadership. Narrative, as a way of organizing experience, lies at the core of Sparrowe's (2005) article on authentic leadership, which uses Ricoeur's hermeneutic philosophy to link narrative and identity. The "narrative is a bridge between what is lived and what is told" (p. 426) and narrative identity portrays "the 'whys' of one's life—if not by means of a 'causal' explanation, then through an accounting of how these events are related" (p. 427).

Sparrowe (2005) suggests “that the ‘inward’ path of self-awareness that leads towards authenticity is a narrative journey in autobiographical memory” (p. 431). Authenticity, being yourself and using your own voice as a leader, comprises four features: (a) the importance of self-awareness; (b) consistency in core self; (c) self-regulation and consistency; and (d) authenticity and moral leadership, dependent upon one’s purpose being moral. “Authenticity cannot be meaningful if the self is empty of character, but it cannot be real if it ignores the dynamics of lived experience. It is the narrative self that unites character and self-constance” (p. 430). Relationships are critical in making the connection between the authentic leader’s self-concept and the authentic leader’s associations with others. Narrative, character, and authenticity are added to the vocabulary of leadership identity.

Shamir and Eilam (2005) focus on the construction of the life-story in the development of the authentic leader. Authentic leadership is dependent upon a leader’s ability to make meaning of life experiences, her self-knowledge, self-concept clarity, and person-role merger, and the prominence of the leadership role in her self-concept. Development as an authentic leader may be promoted through the development of a self-narrative, a life-story, a process of making meaning of one’s life. Shamir and Eilam posit that authentic leaders “are more likely than inauthentic leaders to find the inner strength and internal compass to support them and guide them when dealing with their challenges. This is our first ground for associating authentic leaders with leader effectiveness” (p. 400). Therefore, continuing with the correlation between authentic leaders and leadership identity, a leader with a clearly defined, strong leadership identity will be more effective than a leader lacking such an identity.

Klenke (2007) offers an identity-based model of authentic leadership in which the role of the self is viewed through the lenses of self-identity, leader identity, and spiritual identity. In her model, the self-identity system comprises self-awareness, self-efficacy, self-liking, and self-congruence. The leader identity system comprises leadership self-efficacy, leader reputation, and leader prototypicality and the spiritual identity system comprises self-disclosure, self-transcendence, and self-sacrifice. She believes self-identity is multidimensional and uses the terms self, self-concept and identity interchangeably. She uses the construct of leader identity to bridge "individual characteristics of self-identity along with group-oriented aspects of collective identity" (p. 80). These two systems of self-identity and leader identity combine to form what I am calling leadership self-identity.

Most of the articles in this section have focused on leadership development and how a particular theory or model may be used to help develop people as leaders. Friedman (2006) proposes a Total Leadership Program with the pedestrian purpose of enhancing personal capacity and business results. He is the only author in this subsection who uses the term *leadership identity*, as he spells out the three aspects of leadership identity or mind-set.

> Authenticity, being real, is about being yourself wherever you are, wherever you go. It is seen in leaders who act in ways that are consistent with their core values. Integrity, being whole, is about fitting together the pieces of your life so that it has coherence and consistency. Creativity, being innovative, is about having the will to learn continually while helping others to do the same, questioning traditional assumptions and experimenting with how things are done. (p. 1292)

Authenticity, integrity, and creativity—three aspects of leadership identity—are also aspects of character and core identity. Although somewhat surprising to be found in a

promotional article on a Total Leadership Program, the connection is drawn between leadership identity and character.

Friedman (2006) also makes the connection between leadership identity and teaching. Participants in the program enhanced their own learning by assuming teaching roles, "both as coaches to future participants and in telling the story of their leadership journey to others in their organizations and in other domains of their lives" (p. 1293).

*Findings.* Vocabulary surfacing from the management and leadership literature on identity and leadership addresses the first two research questions concerning leader core identity and personal attributes of leaders. This vocabulary includes: authenticity and authentic leadership, personal identity, self-awareness, and adaptability; self-concept clarity; social identity; reflection and balance; creativity and integrity; and character. Internal and external components and journeys are described as facets of identity awareness and development. Developing a self-narrative and personal voice and the role of teaching are also recognized as part of leadership identity.

These studies focus heavily on core identity aspects of leadership self-identity, using vocabulary such as self-awareness, adaptability, authenticity, personal values, and integrity. Leadership is seen as occurring within context. Relationships, such as personal networks of support, reflection, balance and person-role mergers are mentioned, but not examined in depth. For the first time, narrative is a represented theme, particularly in concert with authenticity. Leadership experience and career issues are not explicit themes in this literature, although, considering the audience, they may be assumed.

*Women College Presidents*

The growing body of literature on women college presidents encompasses

personal narratives and memoir, studies focusing on the lived experiences of small groups of women presidents, empirical studies targeting a particular topic area, and large-scale studies looking at trends and themes. Some of the work takes a broad view of issues, systems and organizational culture, generational considerations, and cultural differences. Others have a pinpoint focus on a particular topic or segment of the population such as mentoring, women of color, community colleges, and educational and family backgrounds.

*Overview of the issues.* Two of the classic pieces of literature on women college presidents provide bookends on a decade of experience. Sturnick, Milley, and Tisinger's (1991) *Women at the helm: Pathfinding presidents at state colleges and universities* is an edited collection of essays of women's perspectives on the job of the president. Brown, Van Ummersen, and Sturnick's (2001) *From where we sit: Women's perspectives on the presidency* is the result of a series of roundtable discussions of women college presidents hosted by the American Council on Education's Office of Women in Higher Education.

Sturnick, et al. (1991) state, "An even more compelling reason for this book: many of us were concerned that the histories of our personal and professional experiences were not being recorded, that once again women's history was being lost" (p. vii). Essay topics include: staying power and multiple presidencies, mentoring, career preparation, networking, focus, fund raising, being the first woman president at an institution, the differences of urban and rural campus environments, government relations, minority recruitment of students and faculty, and negotiating the financial package.

Brown, et al. (2001) are looking "to both assess the status and challenges facing these leaders [women presidents] today, and develop a plan to meet the most important

leadership priorities for current and prospective women presidents" (p. 3). In doing so, they focus on "five critical areas: working with boards, special challenges and opportunities posed by the "gender factor," staying power, identifying and mentoring talented women for presidencies, and creating a climate for success" (p. 4).

The roundtable participants at the heart of the study stress the importance of career longevity, staying power, and mentors. They "insist that women must think strategically about their careers and actively seek mentors" (Brown, et al., 2001, p. 9) and career longevity "ranks higher in importance than sustaining a particular presidency" (p. 10). They also recommend that presidents "develop a network of powerful "explainers," allies who can offer solid advice, not merely moral support" (p. 10) in addition to mentors. And once again, "Not only must the president be omnipresent, but she should also look good while doing it, too. Some participants wonder whether men worry about what they are going to wear to events" (p. 6).

Second presidencies are addressed— in particular the challenges of continuing to stress one's personal life, along with the fact that women often assume difficult presidencies from which it can be a greater challenge to position themselves for another institution. "Women who want to move on to another presidency must, from the beginning, view the presidency as a career, not an end to a career" (Brown, et al., 2001, p. 12). The small numbers of women in a second or third presidency may be indicative of women viewing a presidency as a singular opportunity in their career, rather than a step along an intentional path of advancement.

*Career paths.* Susan Madsen (2008) studies women university and college presidents, examining the perceptions, experiences, and influences related to their

learning to lead and becoming leaders. She finds that,

> Successful women leaders (unlike many men leaders) did not intentionally look for leadership positions. Instead they emerged by working hard, performing to the best of their abilities, responding to encouragement by others to apply for new positions, and accepting offers of increased responsibilities and promotions" (p. 143).

Influential individuals, often men, lend encouragement and advice throughout their careers. Continuous learning and development are more important than formal leadership positions. Their career paths are nonlinear and unstructured. "They intentionally looked for opportunities to learn what they didn't know rather than looking for ways to show what they could do" (p. 184).

Over half of the women in Madsen's (2008) study never held a tenured faculty appointment and none officially focused their career path towards a presidency. The idea emerged as "they seemed to *fall into* new and more challenging positions" (p. 142). Touchton, Shavlik, & Davis (1991) also notice that,

> Few of the women college presidents in all sectors have "always had a goal" of being a college president. For most of them, and particularly those in public institutions, becoming a president was a goal that evolved as they moved ahead in their careers. (p. 8)

This is echoed by Wagner (1991), the first woman president in the California State University System. "Until I became a college president, I had never seriously considered such a career" (p. 16). Women first thinking of becoming a college president when the opportunity is presented to them, or falling into the role unintentionally, is a key theme.

A college presidency, the qualifications for the job, the career path in and out of the position, and how it fits into a career plan or development strategy is unclear and open for interpretation. It may be particularly challenging for women. Recognizing that women may be short-sighted in their career aspirations helps to explain why they may not

consider college presidencies. “Mentors can help these women by planting seeds that would empower them to seek college president appointments” (Brown, 2005, p. 660).

*Mentoring relationships.* Mentoring, is a recurring theme in this body of literature. The importance of having and being a mentor is mentioned by almost every woman college president interviewed. Their mentors include both men and women. Additionally, studies have focused on the importance and role of mentors and aspects of the mentor relationship.

Vaughan (1989), in his study of female community college presidents, highlights the importance of mentors and role models, and encourages both male and female presidents to be mentors to those coming along behind them. McNeer (1983) looks at mentoring stages, a student being mentored by a faculty advisor, and a new faculty member being mentored by an experienced faculty member. Selingo (2005) believes mentoring is the best preparation for a presidency. Brown (2005) conducts a qualitative study of mentorship and the female college president and concludes, “Mentorship and multiple mentoring relationships are invaluable in advancing women through the ranks of higher education administration and for increasing the number of female college presidents” (p. 659).

*Narratives of women presidents.* Within the literature on women college presidents are memoirs of women who have served in the role, offering first-hand accounts of their experiences. The narratives are informative and offer a container within which the author, and reader, can make meaning of the experience. Jill Ker Conway’s (2001) memoir of her experience as the first woman president of Smith College addresses multiple aspects of leadership self-identity, without using the term. Bornstein’s (2003)

memoir and Blevins' (2001) ethnographic study are more limited in scope.

Written 15 years after leaving the position, Conway (2001) writes a compelling story of her journey, personally and professionally. She writes a treatise on her leadership self-identity without ever referring to it as such. The memoir spans the period of time from her being offered the position to her leaving ten years later. Aspiring to a "creative-cum-public life" (p. 4), when offered the presidency in 1975, Conway considers the changes it will mean for her and her husband's personal life, and the public role and voice it will require from her. Stepping into the position she admits,

> I'd been able to imagine the books and the libraries, the laboratories and the squash courts, but not the often rowdy, mostly cheerful, and energetically political young women who peopled them. And I certainly had not been able to imagine the political pressures, both internal and external, that constantly flowed around and within any program to advance women's knowledge base. (p. 40)

Conway (2001), a self-described shy person who had previously hidden behind an academic role, realizes that it will not be possible to hide in the role of the president, "who in any one day must be teacher, manager, financial and investment expert, entrepreneur of knowledge, strategist, magistrate, and builder of warm and collaborative relationships with faculty, students, alumnae, trustees, media, and government regulators" (p. 61). She talks about how much she learned in the position and what that learning asked of her, from the faculty politics to the fundraising challenges to the energy on campus of a community of women scholars of all ages.

> These great meetings along the campaign trail forced me to think harder about who I was and what I was bringing to the job. It was no longer a matter of the right scholarly footnotes. The question had become what emotional range and power I could muster to call out the best from this large and distinguished alumnae body. And there was no escaping it. (p. 68)

Conway (2001) understands the risk of becoming engulfed by an institution and the delicate balance of self and role. “From the day I arrived in Northampton, I was on guard against the presidential trap of merging self and institution so completely that there seemed no life outside the role” (p. 89). She is both caught up in the excitement of projects on campus, and deliberately renovates a property with her husband for their retreat. She shares her academic background and theories, stories of her upbringing and adult life, the rewards and challenges of being a president, her passion for women’s education, and places her time at Smith within the broader context of her life’s learning.

> We are all transformed by the institutions we lead and by the experience of final decision making, however large or small the span of authority. The role and the tasks that go with it require a degree of self-scrutiny that most of us, female or male, rarely undertake. The person who sits at the point where many contending interests clash, and has to decide how to manage the conflict in a way that serves the greater public interest, is educated and changed by the experience. (p. 125)

Bornstein (2003) also writes about her time as a president of Rollins College, although she places her story within the context of a leadership theory of legitimacy. She reviews literature, conducts interviews, and administers a survey to present a theory and framework of legitimacy, and then uses her experience as an example of the theory. In the process she presents five factors that influence presidential legitimacy (individual, institutional, environmental, technical, and moral), six threats to legitimacy (lack of cultural fit, management incompetence, misconduct, erosion of social capital, inattentiveness, and grandiosity), and four factors necessary to implement change (presidential leadership, governance, social capital, and fund-raising).

Bornstein’s background is in fundraising and she says, “I had never contemplated a presidency until a faculty member from one of Florida’s universities nominated me for one. The possibility, although remote, intrigued me” (2003, p. 63). She shares personal

reflections from her journals over the years, tells stories of how she handled her predecessor's presence on campus, introduces us to generous donors and the details of a successful capital campaign, and tells about the projects she got involved with on campus and how she overcame her corporate image in an educational environment. She presents a picture of her life as president as an example of her leadership theory of legitimacy, focusing on what she does and is able to accomplish more than her sense of herself as a leader. This differs from Conway's memoir that is grounded in her perception of herself as a leader within an academic tradition, including the personal questioning, vulnerability, and learning that come with the role of president.

Blevins (2001) presents an ethnographic narrative of seven women community college chief executive officers in an article published in the *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*. Blevins is one of the seven women, from whom we can learn, "how they came to their positions as chief executive officers, the challenges and joys of that work, and the legacies they hope to leave" (p. 503). The focus is on the community college president and,

> exploring the meaning of their roles and the roles of those they serve, for educating the uninitiated in the mission of the community college, and for reinforcing the value of the mission to the lives of community college students past, present, and future. (p. 503)

The findings are presented thematically: becoming president, challenges of the work, positive experiences, and legacies. Individual stories are told, the participants are quoted, and a picture is painted without an attempt to summarize or compose a universal story. These are loosely assembled vignettes of women presidents sharing inspirational stories about their experiences. They give the flavor of a series of snapshots of women dedicated to their communities and their students, wanting to make a difference and leave

things better than they found them. Conway (2001) and Bornstein (2003) define and project a sophisticated concept of legacy, including endowments, investment strategies, and admissions positioning; Blevins' article highlights the importance, to any college president, of legacy and wanting to make a difference.

*Leadership core identity.* Madsen's (2008) section on ethics, honesty, and openness speaks to the power and importance of women leader's core identity. She quotes one of the women describing her sense of a personal core.

> I think that leadership cuts so totally to the core of an individual's character and personality. We should try to identify one's character and who they really are instead of their leadership style or philosophy. . . . After this interview today I would hope when you leave you will know who I am in a way that you wouldn't if I just answered some well-defined questions in a very detailed and deliberate manner. These kinds of questions and responses will not tell you who I am or what my character is all about. Universities hire leaders for the crises. In a crisis we all go immediately into that core of who we are and what our values are. We can't help it. It is just a human thing that happens. In a crisis you've got to be sure a leader has enough substance in his or her core. If the core is weak, you are not going to have a leader. If that core is not one that is whole and can move with very deliberate actions, you're going to be in trouble. (pp. 254-255)

Placing core identity within an organizational context, Chandler (1991) discusses the personality-gender-style relationship, the expectation that a women president will be an advocate and mediator for women's and minority concerns, and the issue of personal appearance. She talks about addressing large groups and being "self-conscious about what I would say and how I would look saying it" (p. 26). This, in comparison to her male colleagues, and the "difference between needing only a blue suit and clean shirt versus clothing and accessories for daytime, night-time, dress, sport, and in-between" (p. 27).

The leadership role of president, for a woman, spans a breadth of concerns from personal appearance to being able to separate oneself from the role. "To be a successful

president one must learn to bear criticism, even if it is unfair, and to learn from criticism when it is on target. It is not easy, and it is not fun, but it is essential" (Kenny, 1991, p. 60).

Exploring the leadership challenges of women college presidents, Jablonski (1996) compares a president's perceptions of her own leadership style with the perceptions that some of their faculty have of her leadership style. She is interested to learn if the two differ and, if so, why. Jablonski finds that the presidents believed they used participatory and empowering styles of leadership emphasizing collaboration, participation and open communication, whereas the faculty found them to be hierarchical, entrepreneurial, and task-oriented. She speculates a possible reason may be that the women presidents presented themselves as who they aspired to be, rather than who they actually are. The same could be said of the faculty.

Argyris and Schön (1974) allow for the incompatibility between how a person thinks she will act in a particular situation, an espoused theory, and how she actually does act, a theory-in-use. The person may be unaware of the inconsistency. This may account for the discrepancy between the perceptions of the presidents and their faculties. Argyris and Schön also caution that constructing a theory-in-use from observing someone's behavior, in this case the faculty observing the president, produces, "constructs [that] may be inaccurate representations of the behavior they claim to describe" (p. 7). A study based on the perceptions of two, possibly conflicting, parties and the speculation and interpretation of the researcher is problematic.

Jablonski (1996) goes on to place the findings, and her interpretations, in a larger cultural and organizational context.

> My observation of the presidents and the faculty members in this study is that they developed expectations about leadership and gender over their lifetimes. Cultural, social, environmental, and organizational influences on the individual development of each president appeared to be primarily traditional. They had male role models, male boards of trustees to report to, and many male faculty leaders to deal with. In theory, the presidents espoused generative leadership, but their colleges' governance structures, committees, and boards of trustees could not support such a model. (Conclusions and Speculations section, paragraph 3)

*Women of color.* The literature on women college presidents also includes research focused on particular topics, such as women of color. Turner (2007) writes about three women of color "firsts," the first of their gender, race, and ethnicity (Mexican American, Native American, Asian Pacific/Asian American) to be president of their institutions. The women talk about the duality of their lives and balancing their personal identity with that of their institution. For example, although one may act appropriately for their culture and as a woman, being polite, waiting to speak, and speaking gently, this may be interpreted by the dominant male culture as indicating a lack of leadership skills. Conversely, one woman, in an effort to advance her career, applies for an open presidency, knowing she will not be chosen. To lessen the consequences of shame within her culture, she explains her actions and intentions to her husband for his understanding. The women presidents, although pushing toward institutional goals, value the cultural identities of their communities and show, "how their own identities meld or match with that of their campus and the populations it serves" (p. 30).

These women are validated by their families and recognize the power of storytelling, theirs and others' experiences. They learn from the stories of the lives of others, particularly other women of color. Mentors and relationships are pivotal and they, in turn, feel a responsibility to mentor others. They describe their leadership styles as team-builder, facilitator, and matchmaker with a focus on vision and values, access to

educational programs, and community service. They are motivated to make changes to improve their communities and provide opportunities for others.

Waring (2003) is interested in how race and gender influence a conception of leadership. She interviews twelve African-American female presidents to explore the effect of social class and educational background on the women's views of themselves as leaders and the role it may play in motivating them to accept positions of leadership.

Although reluctant at first, the women were encouraged by others to take on the role of president. They chose to do so because they believed they could have greater influence from the formal position and felt themselves capable, personally and professionally, of taking on the challenges. Relationship building, listening, and understanding what others need, is one of the dimensions of leadership presented. The other is the task dimension, focusing on skills such as decision making and communication. These women exhibited both dimensions of leadership.

Lindsay (1999) looks at the role of equity, diversity, and affirmative action from the perspective of four African-American women university executives and the pivotal role they play in effecting change. Exploring the women's careers, educational equity, hiring practices, recruiting, and campus climate, a responsibility to create change is an overarching theme. In addition to effecting change at the policy and programmatic levels, these women feel philosophically responsible to do so, based on historical effects of racism and sexism and economic disadvantages of their student populations.

*Role of the president.* The process of making meaning of the role of the president and understanding the symbolic nature of the position is indicative of the complexity of the role. Bensimon (1991) addresses the meaning of presidential leadership,

> Although it is true that presidents may not have a great deal of authority to influence the academic curriculum, or the vagaries of the market, or the sudden whims of the legislature, or the meddling of statewide coordinating agencies, presidents can and do choose what to pay attention to and what to ignore. That is one way they invent reality. (p. 79)

Presidents have the ability to define and focus the conversation, a more subtle and perhaps effective form of influence than the traditional bold and decisive style of leadership. Understanding the symbolic nature of leadership, Bensimon (1991) continues,

> Presidents who do not understand that much of leading is the *management of meaning* and the *interpretation of confusing events* often overlook opportunities to influence their campuses. When faced with unusual occurrences, it is important not only to respond with rational solutions but also to be aware of the symbolic responses that are likely to affect the campus. (p. 80)

A president is a leader of an organizational culture, while also being a member of that culture with its symbols of vision, values, myths and stories, ritual, ceremony, and metaphor.

*Findings.* The literature on women college presidents highlights themes such as: relationships with others, as mentors or members of a network of support; relationship with self in balancing self and role; the importance of mission and values as drivers of change; and longevity and career planning, whether intentional or not. Balancing multiple identities, storytelling, and self-role merger are themes that surfaced in the previous section on leadership identity.

Leadership core identity is evident in the literature in themes such as character exhibited in a crisis, values driving one's work, and honest self-assessment as a leader. It also includes the presentation of self, and a recurring mention of physical appearance. Core identity may be viewed within a particular organizational or social context. This is

where issues of gender and race belong, as well as the balancing of personal identity with that of the institution, and an emphasis on values-driven community service.

Career issues such as career preparation, longevity, and legacy are highlighted in this literature. A pattern begins to emerge of women saying they had not intended to become a president—the opportunity presented itself, they fell into it, or they were nominated by someone else for the position. They view a job as a chance to learn and develop, rather than an intentional step on a career path connected to future opportunities.

Relationships are strongly represented in the literature, particularly in the importance of mentoring. Networks of support and relationship building, with faculty or the community at large, are talked about. This is the aspect that houses one's personal life and the constant balance between it and the demanding role of president, and the tension between self and role, and the ability to separate oneself from the role. Reflective learning also resides here.

Narrative, in the case of memoir, is both vehicle and content. There is also mention of the important role of storytelling and women finding their public voice. It is in this literature that, for the first time, we hear the voices of women college presidents, talking about the issues and what is important to them.

As leadership does not occur in a vacuum, the environment plays an important role in leadership dynamics. It may be an institutional, social, historical, cultural, or political environment that offers a mirror to these women to gauge their effectiveness in the situation and it is where the balancing of multiple identities occurs.

The body of literature on women college presidents encompasses a wide range of

issues and addresses the breadth of the questions guiding this inquiry of leadership self-identity.

*Women in Higher Education*

The literature on women in higher education builds upon that of women college presidents, providing breadth and detail on issues raised previously. And again, leadership self-identity is addressed without being specifically named.

A landmark piece of research on women's leadership self-identity in higher education is Astin and Leland's (1991) study of three generations of women leaders in education and community service. The 77 women studied are grouped by generation, allowing the authors the ability to organize their findings according to generational differences.

Astin and Leland (1991) ask "What has given these women the strength to overcome discrimination, harassment, and rejection and to lead a movement? Where does the assurance and belief in self derive from? Where does this caring and passion for causes come from" (p. 41)? Experiences and values are molded by historical influences, "a powerful force that shapes leader behavior. Personal experiences also play a powerful role in shaping core values that motivate people to act" (p. 66). The authors note the importance of family, role models, mentors (often men), educational backgrounds, and key experiences of these women and how they may vary by generation.

The in-depth self-assessment by the individuals studied gives personal and insightful glimpses into these women and their self-perceptions. The women were asked to rate themselves on personal characteristics such as self-confidence, adaptability, autonomy, perseverance, self-discipline, physical appearance, creativity, ambition,

risk-taking, assertiveness, kindness, initiative, curiosity, loneliness, and spirituality. We get a sense of these leaders as individual women, while also seeing how patterns emerge within historical periods.

Addressing leadership attributes, Astin and Leland (1991) recognize,

> The notion of leaders as special people prompts us to want to identify the unique qualities that characterize them. . . . While there are no traits that will guarantee successful leadership in all situations, certain general attributes appear repeatedly—for example, physical vitality and energy, intelligence, courage, confidence, and flexibility. (p. 125)

Describing themselves, these women leaders use words such as decisive, assertive, articulate, willing to take risks, independent, strong, loyal, intuitive, and resourceful. "Looking at these leaders' self-descriptions, one is impressed with their high level of self-esteem. They acknowledge liking themselves and being self-accepting. They are not modest about their intellectual abilities" (Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 127). Astin and Leland point out that, "Teaching is essential to the identity of these women and how they go about making a difference by transforming individuals and institutions" (p. 123). This identification as a teacher is one that will surface again in other studies.

Astin and Leland (1991) address women's leadership self-identity as self-knowledge and personal attributes shaped by personal and historical influences. Their experiences and relationships with role models, mentors, and as teachers have shaped their lives.

Tedrow and Rhoads (1999) and Glazer-Raymo (1999) focus on the organizational culture, and how it in turn defines leadership self-identity. The organizational culture is experienced as instrumental and male dominated, forcing women in leadership positions to discover themselves and their leadership style in an inhospitable climate.

Tedrow and Rhoads (1999) look at women's experiences in community college leadership positions and ask, "Do organizational barriers exist that limit women's ability to enact inclusive ideals when they enter higher education's senior level administrative positions" (paragraph 6)? Thirty senior-level women administrators in the community college system are interviewed regarding the processes they used in constructing a leadership identity within an organizational culture, and the role of gender within the administration. "The study found that senior women community college administrators largely constructed their leadership identity as a response to organizational expectations and norms as defined by typical male instrumental roles and behaviors" (Findings section, paragraph 20). The strategies for responding to such an environment span a continuum: *adaptation* (trying to fit in by using an instrumental style of leadership), *reconciliation* (relying on both instrumental and relational styles of leadership), and *resistance* (using a relational style of leadership while challenging existing structures within the organization). Within each of these preferences, leadership identity, communication style, and gender issues are considered.

The authors believe that to change the lives of women, especially in leadership positions, a transformation of the organizational culture is called for; it is not just a matter of hiring more women. Their focus is on the implications for future organizational change rather than the personal leadership identity development of women leaders in education.

> The negative consequence is that women spend a good deal of time and energy simply trying to survive, when they should be thriving. Thus, the ultimate concern raised by this study is as follows: How can community colleges create organizational environments in which women's ways of leading are fully embraced? (Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999, Resistance section, paragraph 10)

Glazer-Raymo (1999) takes a critical feminist perspective of the power structures and status of women in the academy. She believes that "women's problems are systemic, value laden, and pervasive" (p. 147) and "the institutional culture of most universities is not compatible with the needs and concerns of women in academia" (p. 187). She addresses the myth that women prefer teaching and service to research and scholarship within a male-dominated system.

> Playing by the rules of the game remains the dominant behavioral expectation for both men and women, and as long as these rules are made by men, women will continue to find glass ceilings and other barriers obstructing their progress to the academic vice presidency. (p. 153)

Glazer-Raymo (1999) recognizes the challenges women face, particularly without established networks of support. "Those without informal networks of support often find themselves stymied as they near the top of the administrative hierarchy, where promotions are more likely to be based on trust than on performance" (p. 154). Because the work environment has not changed to accommodate women, they are forced to continue to struggle to balance their dual roles professionally and personally. They are caught in a career-inhibiting bind.

Hartnett (1994) focuses her study on relational leadership and women community college presidents. Using a grounded theory approach and conducting thirteen interviews, a theory emerges,

> to explain the role played by relationships in the process of re-labeling the self as leader and acting accordingly. Societal stereotypes required women to deconstruct their existing construct of leadership, then reconstruct it in their own terms. The central organizing principle was relationships. (Abstract section, paragraph 3)

These relationships are with role models, mentors, family members, friends, and followers. Some of the research questions asked, particularly those relating to leadership identity, are:

> What experiences contributed to a woman president's construction of leadership and the labeling of the self as leader? (p. 9) How did each participant come to label herself as a leader? What experiences did she use to label herself a leader? If a discrepancy arose between her beliefs about leadership and her self-image, which would be altered? (p. 60)

According to Hartnett (1994), this first generation of women presidents grew up in a society that provided only a male model of leadership. This model and meaning of leadership was not relevant for them. "In order to make sense of their own experiences, these women were forced to deconstruct the meaning of leadership as society defined it, retaining those parts that fit their own lives and rejecting others" (p. 65). Key experiences in this process are childhood experiences with leadership, a strong female role model, a mentor, and a focus on relational aspects of leadership. "They had to confront internal messages about their ambitions which conflicted with societal norms about male leadership; so it is not surprising there is a certain schizophrenic quality to notions of leadership held by these women" (p. 66).

In reconstructing a holistic, relational model of leadership, the study finds that "women's experiences as wives/lovers, mothers, daughters, and sisters are as powerful an influence on their leadership as being the high school quarterback is on traditional leadership of a male" (Hartnett, 1994, p. 73). As one president in the study says, "If I could rephrase your question before I answer, rather than 'did I know I was a leader?' what you should ask is 'When did I <u>accept</u> the fact that I was a leader'" (p. 62)?

Positioning theory (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999) offers another lens through which to view this study. Positioning is "the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts and within which the members of the conversation have specific locations" (p. 16). People can position themselves and be positioned by others, and how a person is positioned effects how she is perceived by others. If positioned in a subservient role, her actions will be perceived as weak or needy. If positioned in a dominant role, her actions will be perceived as strong or competent. The women in Hartnett's (1994) study had to reconstruct a model of leadership that could include them and within which they could be seen as leaders, by themselves and others. Through relationships and making sense of their experiences within this new leadership model, they are able to deliberately position, and present, themselves as leaders.

Tedrow and Rhoads (1999), Glazer-Raymo (1999), and Hartnett (1994) raise important questions about the effect of an organizational culture, particularly a hostile culture, on the development of leadership identity. This could lead one to question: Is the higher education environment more or less hostile as an organizational culture? Are there examples of institutions of higher education that have deliberately taken on this issue, to change the culture to be more open and accommodating of a variety of leadership styles? Within higher education, is there a difference in the cultures of private and public, two- and four-year, research and non-research institutions? Although interesting and worthy of further inquiry, these questions are beyond the scope of this study.

*Findings.* The literature on women in higher education focuses on historical influences, societal influences, and organizational culture. A sense of identity is seen as

being constructed within a particular time in history or in response to hostile, male organizational cultures and expectations. The organizational culture is viewed as not being conducive to women's relational needs and concerns and, as a result, women in academia are struggling rather than thriving.

The core identity of leaders is highlighted in a study that asks women educational leaders to rate themselves on personal attributes such as self-confidence, physical vitality and energy, intelligence, courage, confidence, flexibility, and self-esteem. The results are even more informative when viewed within the historical context of the women. In another study, women are asked about the label of leader and when they accepted themselves as leaders.

Relationships are again seen to be important, with family members, role models, and mentors; teaching is also mentioned. A quality of relationships presented in this literature is the relational aspects of leading, such as sharing power, building coalitions and community development. Key leadership experiences are offered, whereas career issues are not represented specifically in this body of literature.

As in the previous section on women college presidents, leadership self-identity comes alive in the stories women tell about their lives and how they talk about themselves as leaders. They talk about falling into opportunities without intending to become formal leaders. They talk about balancing the complexity of their lives. They talk about themselves as teachers. And they talk about the strategies they have used to overcome the obstacles along the way. Narrative is embedded in the literature, without necessarily being recognized.

*Women and Management*

I chose to look at literature on women and management when Susan Madsen (personal communication, November 22, 2006), whose research on women college presidents has been discussed earlier, suggested that I look at Hennig and Jardim's (1978) work. Citing the need to look broadly for relevant literature for her research, Madsen found correlations between Hennig and Jardim's findings and her own. This section is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of the literature on women and management. It is an opportunity for me to explore briefly how leadership identity is handled in another professional arena, which may confirm or expand upon the findings within the other bodies of literature presented here.

Hennig and Jardim's (1978) seminal work is a study of 25 managerial women who attained top management positions in business and industry by the early 1970s. The focus is on their managerial careers, about women in a male culture, and the importance of informal relationships. It is a management world; the word *leadership* is not used.

Comparing men to women in corporate management careers, Hennig and Jardim (1978) point to a difference in mind-set and self-concept. Men expect to work, develop patterns of winning, risk and flexibility, and have a long-term perspective of a career. "Women separate the two issues completely: a job is in the here and now and a career is an intensely personal goal which the individual alone can judge whether she has achieved" (p. 33). Women lack the strategic dimension of a long-term objective and place their emphasis on individual self-improvement to determine advancement—jobs and skills—rather than on the organizational culture. It is believed that women will marry and be supported by their husbands in the future.

These women often come to their career decision late in life with a sense of passivity and feel the need to justify and balance their career roles with the typical woman's role. The study,

> sought to understand their self-concepts, their self-ideals and finally in the career years, the behavioral styles which emerged from their perception of themselves and the roles they played. . . .Self-concept referred to the picture the person held of herself at the time, who and what she thought she was. Self-ideal referred to what she thought she would like to become, what she really hoped to become. (Hennig & Jardim, 1978, p. 91)

They are constantly looking for their place, somewhere between traditional women's roles and traditional men's roles.

Entering the workforce, they focus on technical skill and competence and have relationships with their bosses similar to their relationships with their fathers. The bosses are teachers and supporters, the women are their students and helpers. Believing career and marriage to be an either–or choice,

> they avoided having to come to grips with themselves as women. They did not attempt to deny that they were women, rather they avoided any confrontation with the reality that they were, because this might have affected their ability to live with the priorities they had set for themselves. (Hennig & Jardim, 1978, p. 163)

Highlighting the focus on management rather than leadership, and a passive sense of careers, "Yet none of them could recall ever thinking of themselves as future presidents of their companies. They saw themselves as achieving responsible middle management positions and at the time that seemed more than enough" (p. 152).

At a time of career maturity, many of these women marry and no longer separate their sense of being a woman from career achievement. As they integrate their selves and their lives, they came to the decision "to look and act like what they were – women. Their own ideas of an appropriate role for women did not change. What changed was their own

view of themselves in the settings in which they worked" (Hennig & Jardim, 1978, p. 171). This highlights the schism within leadership identity between one's self-perception as a leader and how one is perceived within the organizational culture.

Curious to see what more recent research exists on leadership identity for women and management, I found two other perspectives on the topic (Sebrant, 1999; Olsson & Walker, 2004).

Sebrant (1999) takes a feminist perspective looking at the patriarchic hierarchy of healthcare. Within the gendered system of healthcare, Sebrant is interested in how the construction of gender and leader identity is affected by the predominance of women in the field.

Sebrant (1999) distinguishes between relationships based on identity and relationships based on interest. Relationships based on identity are built around interpersonal relationships and social interactions and are often developed by women within their family relationships. Relationships based on interest comprise a transaction or exchange and are seen as more rational and developed by men in their working lives. Even within healthcare organizations populated by women, the technical rational culture dominates; there is no place for a "nursing identity" within a managerial role. "The female perspective, including responsible rationality, does not seem to have affected the leadership style in any significant way" (p. 157).

Sebrant (1999) is talking about positions within the organization, influence, and leadership styles. As women bring their female ways into positions of power, new organizational structures will form and as working life is reframed, more opportunities for women will be created.

Olsson and Walker (2004) examine women executives' construction of career identity, exploring the self-representations of career identity of 30 senior women executives in New Zealand. The women feel they must be competent managers *and* women as they manage multiple identities in a male corporate culture, constantly identifying and differentiating themselves, both as women and in relationship with men. Many women focus on skills as a way of belonging. "This identification with the role of executive resolved the inherent paradox of female identity in a world of corporate masculinity by positing a gender-neutral context and/or by downplaying gender as a factor in career positioning" (p. 246). Often women choose to distance themselves from less successful women by denying the existence of a glass ceiling, and some identify with supportive men and mentors.

The women in the study identify themselves as women within a male managerial culture and are looking for a way of belonging in that culture. The identity is that of a female manager, not as a leader, with potential for the future.

This literature is primarily about management rather than leadership, focuses on career within a male culture, and recognizes the duality these women leaders face with the conflicting roles of woman-as-manager and woman-as-woman. The language of identity ranges from mind-set, self-concept, and self-ideal to construction of a leadership identity and leadership and gender identity. Leadership for the women in these studies is all within an organizational context.

Whereas Hennig and Jardim (1978) and Olsson and Walker (2004) studied women managers in the business world, and Sebrant (1999) studied women in healthcare, Helgesen (1995) is, "concerned not with *corporate* women, but with women leaders" (p.

18). Eagly and Carli (2007) and Ruderman and Ohlott (2002) also focus on leadership within the sphere of women in management.

Helgesen (1995) compares her study of four women leaders to that of Henry Mintzberg and his 1968 study of five executives and the description of what a male manager did. Helgesen's findings of the women leaders in her study show that they: worked at a steady pace, with small breaks scheduled throughout the day; did not view unscheduled tasks and encounters as interruptions; made time for activities not directly related to their work; preferred live action encounters, but scheduled time to attend to mail; maintained a complex network of relationships with people outside their organizations; focused on the ecology of leadership; saw their own identities as complex and multi-faceted; and scheduled time for sharing information. Their lives are also complex and well-integrated.

Helgesen (1995) allows the women in her study to speak for themselves and their experiences of discovering their identity and voice. One woman describes herself at the time of her divorce.

> I had no emotional resources to deal with what happened. All my values and beliefs were ripped apart. Also, I felt as if I had no *identity*: what was I if I wasn't a wife and mother? For a while, I lived in the Valley of the Damned. I was waiting for something to come along and fix my life. Then it began to sink in: my kids were depending on me—I couldn't sit and wait, I had to fix my life myself. (pp. 124-125)

She proceeds to build an identity, a leadership identity. "I was very deliberate about it. I looked on building self-esteem as a task. I had to construct a whole adult personality out of what felt like nothing" (p. 125).

This woman was able to build a personal and professional identity that was true to herself and effective in the marketplace. Another woman in the study, in finding her

voice that was different than what she thought others wanted to hear from her, was able to unleash her creativity and potential. Identity and voice, mindfully honest and individual, are qualities of an effective leader and a leader in relationship with her community. Helgesen (1995) offers the circular web, with the leader in its center, rather than a traditional hierarchical structure, as a more appropriate venue for this relational practice of leadership. “But a voice cannot be a voice unless someone is there to hear it; it finds its form in the process of interaction. Thus voice may be defined not just as a vocal instrument, but as a mode of communicating information and, more subtly, sensibility.” (p. 223)

Once again, the metaphor of leader as teacher is offered. “There is an aspect of teaching that accompanies authority as it flows from the center of the web. The process of gathering and routing information, of guiding relationships and coaxing forth connections, strikes an educational note” (Helgesen, 1995, p. 56). When asked what she does as a president of a company, one woman leader responded, “It’s a hard question. In a way, we don’t do anything specific. But what we do is knit everything together” (p. 197).

In contrast to Helgesen’s image of a web, Eagly and Carli (2007) offer the metaphor of a labyrinth, as they look at why there are few women in powerful leadership roles and what changes would make it possible for more women to assume leadership positions. They replace the metaphor of the glass ceiling with the labyrinth for women navigating the complex, circuitous journey to success. Recognizing the dual demands of leadership and gender, Eagly and Carli offer two principles to empower women in the navigation of the labyrinth’s path: “to combine exceptional competence with warmth and

friendliness and to build social capital on the job" (p. 181). Social capital includes relationships with colleagues at all levels within and outside the organization, participating in networks, and engaging with mentors. They also recognize the challenge of multiple roles and balancing work and family responsibilities.

Ruderman and Ohlott (2002), interested in the issues concerning managerial women, focus on, "the changing contours of life—choices and trade-offs, the forces that influence decisions, and the strategies successful women use for constructing meaningful and fulfilling careers" (p. 2). The themes that emerge are: authenticity, connection, controlling your destiny, wholeness, and self-clarity. Authenticity is understanding one's priorities and emotions and being able to articulate them. An alignment between inner values and outer behavior results in an integrated self; for women this translates into bringing their full selves to work. Connections with family, friends, colleagues, and community are expressions of how, "Women develop themselves in the process of building, maintaining, and nurturing the important relationships in their lives" (p. 39).

Controlling your destiny, or agency, is needed to make things happen, resolve difficult situations, move towards goals, and negotiate the political climate. Wholeness encompasses a general satisfaction with life and an acceptance of self, "the integration of all parts of the self into a sense of identity" (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002, p. 112). Self-clarity, "knowing who you are and how you fit into the world" (p. 136) allows you to go beyond self-awareness to include a realistic self-assessment and a systemic perspective of the world.

Ruderman and Ohlott's (2002) findings correspond to the leadership self-identity aspects of core identity, career, relationships, and narrative. Authenticity and self-clarity

reside within core identity, a person's character and how she interacts with her world. Controlling your destiny is encompassed within career, in taking directed action in fulfilling a professional plan. Connections are relationships, with individuals, teams, networks of support, communities, and mentors. Wholeness is the balance and psychological well-being that underlies one's sense of self. To understand the development of these themes and envision the future, the authors recommend writing a narrative of your life story for reflection and illustration.

*Findings.* Themes emerging from the research on women and management include a core identity as a manager rather than leader, an often harsh duality of choices and roles, trying to balance multiple identities, and the importance of both formal and informal relationships. The women in Hennig and Jardim's (1978) study never intended to become leaders or presidents of their companies. They balance the dualities of either/or, passivity/intention, self-concept/self-ideal, being a manager/being a woman, and having a job/career. They focus on strengthening their technical skills and doing a good job, without a vision of an overarching career path. They have fallen into opportunities for advancement, rather than intentionally pursuing a professional goal. These women also had to rebel against traditional expectations of women and balance the duality of woman as professional and woman as woman. The women in Sebrant's (1999) study distinguish between relationships of identity and relationships of interest, with a glimmer of hope to the ways women in positions of influence can change the organizational culture. The women in Olsson and Walker's (2004) study are caught in the paradox of identification and differentiation as they deliberately construct a career identity.

Viewing managerial women within a leadership context provides greater insight into their sense of themselves as leaders. Helgesen's study of women leaders in business adds a complex and multi-faceted leadership self-identity, the strength of voice, narrative, the role of teacher, and the key component of being in relationship with community to the discussion. Ruderman and Ohlott (2002) address the concern of how to be a woman leader, with authenticity, connection through relationships, controlling your destiny, wholeness and balance, and self-clarity. These studies of women and management span the period of 1978–2004 and have a seemingly timeless relevance.

*Women's Identity*

In reviewing the relevant literature for a study of the leadership self-identity of women college presidents, it seemed important to include a section on women's identity. Personal identity is a basic underlying aspect of leadership self-identity, whether explicitly noted or implicitly assumed. Highlighting some of the issues addressed in the women's identity literature offers another lens through which to view leadership self-identity. This literature emphasizes the holistic, integrated and relational nature of women's identity and roles with an emphasis on voice and language.

Focusing on women's constructing themselves as leaders, Curry (2000) presents the concept of the *leader persona*, a feature of identity that is guided by an individual's meaning systems. "The leader persona is bound up in an individual's process of becoming" (p. 20). A leader persona is built over time as one moves, "successfully through life experiences, taking from them insights that seemed to serve them well. Those experiences represented opportunities to explore ways of being, ways of managing, ways of understanding, and ways of constructing meaning as life unfolded"

(p. 45). The layers of self-discovery and trial-and-error build an integrated identity, as the process of constructing a leader persona allows a woman to come "to know herself as a leader" (p. 52).

Understanding the construction of the leader persona "serves as the basis upon which we can build an understanding about why some of us are willing to assume formal or informal leadership roles and others are reluctant to do so" (Curry, 2000, p. 22). A woman "must harbor beliefs that she is capable of leading" (p. 40) to be able to assume a leadership position. From their life experiences, the women in the study constructed their social and leadership roles.

The discussion of the construction of a leader persona is reminiscent of Bateson's (1989) concept of *composing a life*, the shaping and creation of our lives through improvisation, "discovering the shape of our creation along the way, rather than pursuing a vision already defined" (p. 1). The crafting of a life requires balancing conflicting demands, living with ambiguity and integrity, and honoring multiple commitments.

Bateson's (1989) comments inform a discussion of leadership self-identity. "All the issues of identity and presentation of self are complicated by the need to provide intelligible role models, for college presidents are supposed to project not only policies but lifestyles" (p. 26). Composing a life addresses life holistically "as an improvisatory art, about the ways we combine familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations, following an underlying grammar and an evolving aesthetic" (p. 3). Bateson even goes so far as to say that, "Being a mommy is part of being a good president" (p. 141).

These themes of integration, experience and meaning are echoed in Josselson's (1987, 1996) work on women's identity.

> Identity in women cannot be simply named, for it resides in the pattern that emerges as a woman stitches together an array of aspects of herself and her investments in others. A woman is, then, *not* a "this" or a "that" (mother, lawyer, wife, secretary, etc.), for these can only be pieces of herself. A woman is how she weaves it all into a whole, articulating herself in the world with others and simultaneously making private sense of it. (1996, p. 9)

Josselson (1996) echoes Curry's (2000) concept of leader persona. "The *experience* of identity is one of meaningful continuity over time and place. We recognize more and more what it means to be who we are, rather than someone else" (p. 28). Identity is the bridge between past and present, internal experience and external culture, and change and continuity. Competence, connection, revision and doing something meaningful in their lives are integral aspects of identity. "Communion, connection, relational embeddedness, spirituality, affiliation—with these women construct an identity" (p. 191).

Sometimes the construction of an identity is a reconstruction in response to changes over time. McKenna (1997) looks at mid-career women of the baby-boom generation at the point that they realize work is no longer satisfying and must now redefine themselves and their concept of success. "The issue here is the conflict itself, the tear between a life built around who we thought we should be as career women and who we have become in the process of our lives" (p. 15). Expecting to be wives and mothers and professional women they adopted a male definition of success. "Now, instead of getting our identities from men or family, we get them from business cards, thus giving our professions an enormous psychic hold on our lives" (p. 124). After decades of working under these expectations, these women found that who they had become and

who they wanted to be in the future is not who they had been or aspired to be. To relinquish any part of their professional identity creates a crisis in that it also diminishes them as individuals, requiring a redefinition of success.

*Emphasis on narrative.* Voice and language are key components of women's identity; they are also the vehicle of expressing that identity. Gilligan's (1993) seminal work in the early 1980s on women's identity formation and moral development is based on the assumption, "that the way people talk about their lives is of significance, that the language they use and the connections they make reveal the world that they see and in which they act" (p. 2). This is at the core of leadership self-identity, how a leader perceives herself as a leader and how she uses language to describe this identity to others. Voice is essential as "a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds" (p. xvi).

Gilligan (1993) makes the connection between voice and relationship. "To have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act" (p. xvi). Voice, relationship, identity, interconnection and inclusion spin together to form a web. "Thus in all of the women's descriptions, identity is defined in a context of relationship and judged by a standard of responsibility and care" (p. 160).

Recognizing the need for research specific to women's experiences, Gilligan (1993) points to Freud's theories of human development as actually being theories of male development, assuming similarity between the genders. When women's development was then different from the theory, it was seen as a failure. "Among the

most pressing items on the agenda for research on adult development is the need to delineate *in women's own terms* the experience of their adult life." (p. 173)

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) focus on women's ways of knowing and the development of self, voice, and mind. "We examine women's ways of knowing and describe five different perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority. We show how women's self-concepts and ways of knowing are intertwined" (p. 3). They interviewed 135 women, students and alumni of traditional educational institutions and informal educational settings (parenting programs), to understand their experience as learners and the corresponding changes in self-concept and relationships with others. Women from the parenting programs were included because, "by listening to women talk about mothers and mothering, we might hear themes that were especially distinctive in the women's voice" (p. 13).

They go on to apply their understanding of the ways of knowing to the educational environment. In designing programs for women, they propose beginning with the questions: What does a woman know? What does a woman need to know? They answer,

> A woman, like any other human being, does need to know that the mind makes mistakes; but our interviews have convinced us that every woman, regardless of age, social class, ethnicity, and academic achievement, needs to know that she is capable of intelligent thought, and she needs to know it right away. (Belenky, et al., 1986, p. 193)

The role of leader as teacher is a recurring theme. Belenky, et al. (1986) present a metaphor of a connected teacher as a midwife, someone focused on relationship rather than separation. The midwife works in relationship with the student to give birth to

knowledge and understanding. “Teaching can be simultaneously objective and personal” (p. 224). Women’s ways of knowing inform us about ourselves, as well as inform our work in serving other women.

Language and self-expression are important aspects of women’s identity issues. A number of studies identify women’s discomfort with the label of leader as, “women are less likely to label themselves as leaders even as they take charge in organizations and contribute to social change” (Cynkar, 2007, p. 67). Although often framed within a feminist context, “Many approached the discussion of feminist leadership by denying that they were leaders” (Suyemoto & Ballou, 2007, p. 40), the sentiment carries over to women and leadership in general.

> But some leaders become leaders almost ‘accidentally’ through their contributions. Their intention is to contribute to moving toward the goal, but there may be no inherent desire for ‘leadership’ per se. These leaders may be more likely to see themselves as influencers, collaborators, or contributors. (Suyemoto & Ballou, 2007, p. 41)

The label of leader has negative connotations within minority cultures. “Many of these leaders [diverse women] appear to be uncomfortable identifying themselves as leaders because of negative associations with individual use of dominance and hierarchy.” (Sanchez-Hucles & Sanchez, 2007, p. 216).

In her study of 60 women leaders, Erkut’s (2001) goal is to generate knowledge to help increase the representation of women in top leadership positions. The findings of the study reveal “institutional rather than individual roadblocks to women’s success, the importance of tenacity and optimism in pursuing one’s passion at work, and the increasing value placed on a democratic and people-oriented style of leadership” (p. 3). Erkut also finds traditional words of leadership, such as power, leader and success, to be

problematic for some women. She identifies those women willing to use the traditional vocabulary, but with varying levels of comfort in doing so, *adapters*. *Resistors* do not want to use this vocabulary because it does not represent their experience. “Thus, we have identified a problem with the language used to describe leadership, which is not a leadership problem but a language problem of representing what feels authentic” (p. 70). Power was the most problematic label, as it was seen as meaning power over rather than social power or power with. “Being a leader sounded presumptuous to them, as in putting one’s self first and above all others who have contributed to make things happen” (p. 72).

An unexpected finding of Erkut’s (2001) study is the use of maternal language and an appreciation for maternal and sibling roles as metaphors for leadership, and as training for leadership roles. “What we found in these leaders’ use of mothering metaphors is the exact opposite of sociolinguists’ depiction of ‘mother’ as powerless” (p. 76). “Just as men have used military and sports metaphors to talk about their leadership, so women leaders in these strongholds are talking about it with words from their lived experience as women” (p. 82).

Erkut’s (2001) study highlights a shift in the language of leadership to be more inclusive and descriptive of a variety of lived experiences. For women, it is an opportunity to integrate their personal and professional identities into a single vocabulary.

> It appeared that, at least among women who have reached top levels of leadership, there is a level of comfort that allowed them to bring a more integrated sense of being a woman and a leader to their work. This is a positive development that contrasts with many anecdotal stories of women feeling the pressure to leave behind their motherhood and other aspects of being a woman when they enter the world of paid employment. (p. 87)

Narrative is both the methodology and the focus of Bensimon’s (1989) study of presidential leadership. She uses a feminist lens to reinterpret an earlier narrative analysis

of two college presidents' definition of leadership. The original study had concluded that the female and male college presidents' definitions of leadership were not gender-different. Now, however, through a feminist perspective, they are significantly different.

> The main point of divergence between the two definitions is that Wittman's [man] rests completely on the potential of the leader—on his visionary capacity, his ability to set goals that will seal the fate of the organization. Her definition achieves an integrative quality, while his reinforces the idea of leadership as differentiation and separation between the leader and the led. His view of leadership is more instrumental; he is an agent of organizational transformation. Hers is more expressive: She cares about the reality of the institution and is therefore open to the possibility of being transformed by it. (p. 153)

The woman's identity as a leader is relational, based on connections and an ethic of responsibility and "originates in a conception of the university as a human organization and implies that the basis of academic leadership is the union between leader and the university" (p. 153). This language of connectedness actually shapes the identity of the leader.

The ramifications for the different leadership self-identities and how they are expressed becomes clear as Bensimon (1989) asks why feminist thinking has not been applied to the study of academic organizations. Noting that women have not been the interpreters of academic organizational life historically, she concludes by expressing a fear of marginalization,

> both for the women we write about and for ourselves as women writing on a topic that is predominately male. In bringing Allison Franz into the mainstream discourse on leadership there is a risk that because she does not speak the normative language of leadership, she will be dismissed. As I studied her definition of leadership I asked myself, 'Why is it so disturbing to explain her stance of responsiveness? Why is her approach so much harder to describe than Douglas Wittman's?' The answer is obvious. The language used to express her stance of responsiveness is associated with woman's role as nurturer. I feared that because she speaks a language that reflected values associated with women, she

> would be trivialized. And that by placing her side by side with Douglas Wittman and revealing how differently she defines leadership, she would be misunderstood. (p. 155)

Bensimon gives voice to a price to be paid for insightful, feminist analysis of women's leadership identity, how it is expressed, and how it is interpreted.

*Findings.* Themes emerging from the research on women's identity include: finding one's voice is a developmental process and vital for self-expression as a leader; how people talk about themselves and make meaning is important; the roles of professional and mother are interwoven; our inner and outer worlds are connected in our identity; our concept of knowledge informs how we live in the world; relationship, voice, and identity are part of the intricate web of leadership; and teacher is part of a leader's identity.

Leadership core identity is intertwined with a women's identity, because women explore themselves as individuals and as women in search of their authentic selves. They are also holding themselves up to and comparing themselves to a primarily male conception of leadership. They are focused on making meaning of their lives and experience while they construct an integrated identity that is inclusive of the various domains and career expectations placed upon them. This identity is relational, recognizing the need for balance of and the strength of relationships. The literature on women's identity presents the complexity of identity construction and development as it spans both the inner self and the outer environment.

In particular, this research emphasizes the power of giving voice to the women's experience through narrative, both in the topic areas being studied and by quoting the participants verbatim. Hearing the voices of the women participants is refreshing,

liberating, intimate, and informative. It is also pointed out that there can be a price to be paid for exercising one's voice or examining too closely the power of language.

### *Conclusion*

The literature I have gathered falls into six categories that form a picture of leadership self-identity among women college presidents: (a) leadership self-identity, (b) identity and leadership development, (c) women college presidents, (d) women in higher education, (e) women and management, and (f) women's identity.

Drawing from the literature, leadership self-identity comprises: core identity, including character, personal attributes, self-evaluation, matching one's leadership traits with an ideal of leadership, self-monitoring and personality; leadership experiences and the meaning made of them; career paths and intentions; relationships with others; one's ability to reflect and balance a sense of self and role; and both the content and process of narrative.

Narrative is a key aspect of my research in that it is the container within which the study is held, and it is the vehicle that carries the study. Telling a story is about both the telling and the story. With the exception of the first section on leadership self-identity, narrative is prominent in the literature. If it wasn't the focus of the study, it was a method of delivering the study. I had expected narrative to be a major theme within the women's identity literature, as it was. I was surprised to find it such a strong theme within the identity and leadership development literature, which I consider to be more traditional and male-focused. I interpret this to mean that narrative can be the organizing force of an inquiry into the leadership self-identity of all leaders. "The stories people tell about themselves will differ according to how they want to 'present' themselves" (van

Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 25). How they see, and present themselves, as leaders, their leadership self-identity, is contained within their personal narrative.

I find it surprising that leadership self-identity has attracted little research. It may be because it requires an interdisciplinary approach, as seen by the breadth of the literature cited from the fields of education, psychology, leadership, and sociology and from a broad range of sources spanning leadership journals, memoirs, and publications targeting a particular population. Kegan (1994) points out that the different literatures do not talk to one another. "All these people are trained in different professions, each with distinct identities, modes of analysis, heroes and heroines, and ways of framing the questions that need answering" (p. 6). A topic such as leadership self-identity, a multi-faceted phenomenon, requires a crossing of discipline boundaries in conceptual thinking, the gathering of resources, and the interpretation of the findings.

Calling for future research on authentic leadership, Klenke (2007) recognizes the challenges posed by a concept "difficult to define and even harder to measure" (p. 88). She sees a need for the continued development of theory and research to provide authentic leader typologies of behaviors, and suggests narrative analysis as a useful methodology. The concept of leadership self-identity, lacking a unifying theoretical base, faces similar challenges and could benefit from a similar path of future research.

I recognize that this is a difficult topic to study. Others have chosen to research more clearly definable areas, such as the effect of influential people and past experiences on leadership development, typical career paths of leaders in education, and the effect of mentoring on future leaders. Although important pieces of the leadership puzzle, these

individual studies miss the larger, complex, and, ultimately more revealing leadership picture.

Perhaps the time has come for a study on the leadership self-identity of women college presidents, knitting together all that has been learned from the breadth of research cited in this chapter. Until now, women in leadership positions may not have been willing to make themselves, and their leadership, vulnerable to such an inquiry. If they felt their leadership was tenuous or they had doubts of their legitimacy, they may not have felt safe enough to express anything other than a strong and secure sense of self. As women assume more positions of formal, visible leadership and strengthen the networks of support to reach out to future leaders, this type of study becomes more possible and seemingly advantageous.

This understanding of leadership self-identity, emerging from the assembled literature, becomes the basis for the interview protocol for this research study. In the next chapter, the narrative methodology required for this inquiry, the protocol for interviewing participants, and the method for analyzing the data are discussed.

# Chapter III: Methodology

## *Purpose*

The purpose of this research study is to explore the concept of leadership self-identity in a particular population of formal leaders—women college presidents. Through narrative inquiry, with interviews as the data gathering method, the leadership self-identity of the participants is explored through the telling of their leadership stories. The main areas of exploration include: How do these women describe and define themselves as leaders? What personal attributes do they believe allow them to be leaders? What have been their career intentions, in the past and for the future? How have their relationships with others influenced their leadership self-identity? What stories do they tell about themselves and leadership?

## *Qualitative Inquiry*

This research study employs a qualitative strategy of inquiry as it: is based on the belief that reality is constructed, focuses on the participants' perspectives on the topic of study and their search for meaning, takes place in a natural setting, relies on rich narrative description, is concerned with process rather than behavior, and will utilize inductive data analysis (McMillan & Wergin, 2006). This study is based on the notion that, "Qualitative researchers are interested not in prediction and control but in understanding" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 4).

The topic of leadership self-identity is explored as it is constructed and understood by the individuals participating in the study. "Qualitative research is not simply learning about a topic, but also learning what is important to those being studied" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 15). Their personal narratives will provide the entry into

understanding their experience of leadership and concept of themselves as leaders.

### *Narrative Inquiry*

I am drawn to narrative inquiry for this study for the same reasons Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) describe researchers making the *turn to narrative inquiry*. The relationship between the researcher and the researched is interactive and, as a result of their interaction, both will learn. I expect to learn and change as a result of my dissertation research, and I expect the participants will also gain from the experience. Numerical data are unable to convey the nuance of human experience, and therefore words and stories are data suitable for this qualitative inquiry. My study focuses on the particular, specific experience of a small group of participants, rather than being concerned with a generalized grand narrative. It will also embrace narrative knowing, an acceptance of alternate ways of understanding human experience. Narrative inquiry embraces the connectedness of experience. "What fundamentally distinguishes the narrative turn from 'scientific' objectivity is understanding that knowing other people and their interactions is always a relational process that ultimately involves caring for, curiosity, interest, passion, and change" (p. 29).

Based on Bruner's types of cognition, Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes two types of narrative inquiry: paradigmatic and narrative. The paradigmatic type gathers stories for its data and analyzes the data into categories and themes. Paradigmatic analysis "results in descriptions of themes that hold across the stories or in taxonomies of types of stories, characters, or settings" (p. 12). The narrative type gathers events and happenings for its data and analyzes the data by producing explanatory storied accounts. These researchers "collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or

configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories (for example, a history, case study, or biographic episode)" (p. 12).

My research is a narrative inquiry of the paradigmatic type. I explore the concept of leadership self-identity using the personal narratives of women college presidents as data, and conducting a thematic analysis of the data. "The paradigmatic analysis of narrative seeks to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data. Most often this approach requires a database consisting of several stories (rather than a single story)" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 13). Additional qualities of narrative inquiry that fit the goals of my study are: a focus on the experiences of the participants, the researcher situating herself in the space of inquiry, the processes of constructing a personal narrative, constructing an identity, and making meaning of both.

Basing their work in narrative inquiry on the work of John Dewey, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) agree that "examining experience is the key to education" (p. xiii). Experience is both personal and social and happens in context. "The term *experience* helps us think through such matters as an individual child's learning while also understanding that learning takes place with other children, with a teacher, in a classroom, in a community, and so on" (p. 2). For the purposes of my study, the sentence can be altered to read: The term *experience* helps us think through such matters as an individual leader's construction of her leadership self-identity while also understanding that this meaning making process takes place over time, with colleagues and in self-reflection, in an institutional setting, in a community at a particular point in time, and so on. "Experience happens narratively" (p. 19) and is at the core of this inquiry.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) talk about a three-dimensional narrative inquiry

space. The dimensions are: temporality (past, present and future), the personal and the social (interaction), and place (situation). Within this inquiry space, the researcher is looking backward and forward, inward and outward, while located in place.

> As we worked within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, we learned to see ourselves as always *in the midst*—located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social. But we see ourselves as in the midst in another sense as well; that is, we see ourselves as in the middle of a nested set of stories—ours and theirs. (p. 63)

I situate myself in such a three-dimensional inquiry space in my research study. I ask participants to reflect on themselves as leaders now, at the time they decided to become a college president, and in the future as it relates to legacy and succession. They talk about their leadership experiences, and how they made meaning of those experiences, personally and within a cultural, social, and historical context. The point of reference is their current role as president, and the interview takes place in their office.

Narrative meaning, as expressed through the structure of personal narratives, makes narrative inquiry particularly appropriate for a study of identity. “A number of psychologists view the construction of a personal narrative as central to the development of a sense of one’s self, of an identity” (Mishler, 1995, p. 108). The construction of a personal narrative is integral to the construction of a leadership self-identity.

> We achieve our personal identities and self concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 150)

Personal narratives are the vehicle for the thematic thread in the construction of self-identities. “Individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to

claim identities and construct lives" (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). In this manner, narrative inquiry is both content (the personal narratives and that which is being studied) and process (the method of study, hearing and gathering the stories as they are told) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### *Interviews*

Data were gathered through the process of conducting interviews. "Interviews are particularly suited for studying people's understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world" (Kvale, 1996, p. 105). A written form of data gathering, such as questionnaires, would add a layer of distance between participant and researcher and compromise the flexibility and individual nature of face-to-face conversation. "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone's mind, to gather their stories" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). I was excited to sit down with these women leaders and explore together how they see themselves as leaders. I was curious to see and hear how they present and express themselves and view the conversation as being inherently gratifying.

"Narrative inquiry is a profoundly relational form of inquiry" (Clandinin, 2007, p. xv). The interaction between researcher and participant is unique for each researcher, each participant and each specific telling of the story by the participant to a listening researcher. The face-to-face conversation also allows for a deeper level of exchange and understanding.

> Those who collect personal narratives, unlike historians who work with archival materials, can ask informants what they mean by what they say. Language used in

> an interview can be scrutinized—"unpacked," not treated as self-evident, transparent, unambiguous—during the interview itself as well as later, in the analysis of interview transcripts. (Riessman, 1993, p. 32)

Rather than using the terms participant and researcher, Reissman (1993) uses narrator and interpreter, to highlight the inherent tension of voice and ownership of story. Narrative inquiry is an interactive relationship of participants and researchers in a process of telling, interpretation, and retelling stories. Interpretation and presentation give rise to the questions: Whose story is being told and whose voice is being used? The participant's or the researcher's?

The researcher is a storyteller and the story is co-authored "either directly in the process of an interviewer eliciting an account or indirectly through our re-presenting and thus transforming others' texts and discourses" (Mishler, 1995, pp. 117-118). The researcher chooses how she will use her voice: as an authoritative voice, interpretive and separate from the participant/narrator's voice; a supportive voice, bringing the participant/narrator's story forward to be heard; or an interactive voice, examining itself as in an autoethnography (Chase, 2005).

In my dissertation research, I use an authoritative voice, distinguishing my voice from those of the participants as clearly as possible, while embracing the inherent tensions of separation and interactivity. In this paradigmatic type of narrative inquiry, it is the participant/narrator's story being presented by the researcher/interpreter. I analyzed the participants' narratives thematically and use their voices when reporting the findings of the study. In other types of narrative inquiry, where the researcher is using the participants' narratives as the basis for writing a new narrative, the boundary between stories and voices can be more difficult to find.

*Pilot Interviews*

In the summer of 2007, as part of a required independent learning project for the Antioch University PhD in Leadership and Change Program, I constructed and tested the interview protocol for my dissertation research. Focusing on the topic areas of the guiding research questions—core identity, career, relationships and narrative—I created an interview protocol for use in a study of women college presidents. Categories of questions include: leadership, asking her to describe herself as a leader and those whose leadership she admires; personal attributes, those that contribute to her leadership and those she needs to develop; leadership self-perception transition, when she first thought of becoming a college president; and now in the role of president and looking forward. I worked with a mentor, Dr. Sumru Erkut, to craft the questions that would elicit responses that were descriptive and insightful of the respondent's sense of herself as a leader.

To test the protocol, I asked two women college presidents I had met through a regional network of women leaders in higher education if they would be willing to participate in a pilot interview. Both women responded quickly and enthusiastically that they would. An ethics application was submitted to the doctoral program's Institutional Review Board and was approved. The first interview was conducted in the participating president's office. The second interview was conducted in my office for the logistical convenience of the participant as the interview had been rescheduled a number of times due to her travel schedule. Each interview lasted approximately 75 minutes, was audio-taped, and then transcribed by a professional transcription service. After reviewing the written transcript for accuracy, a copy was sent to each participant, as promised.

The interviews revealed findings consistent with the literature. For example, neither woman had engineered a career path intentionally leading to the position of president and they both stressed the importance of mentors and role models. This verification that I was on the right path encouraged me to go deeper. Questions were added to the protocol about the term *leader*, career disappointments, succession planning, and presidential legacy. The revised interview protocol is included as Appendix A. I found the participants to be forthcoming with their answers and did not require prompting. Each woman asked me at one point to clarify a question, as they wanted to be sure to answer what I was asking.

### *Participants in the Study*

The participants in this study are a purposeful sample of women college presidents who meet the following criteria: they have been in their current presidency for a minimum of two years and a maximum of six years; they are in their first presidency; and they are president of a private, liberal arts institution or a campus of a state university system. The rationale for these selection criteria is that a woman in her first year in a presidency is still trying to figure out the job and its demands and responsibilities. Once this process begins to smooth out in her second year, she may be more able to reflect on herself as a leader now, in the past, and in the future. In the interview, I asked participants to reflect on their leadership primarily at a number of times in their career—the present, the time at which they decided they wanted to be a college president, and future considerations such as longevity and legacy. I set a limit of six years in the position because I didn't want participants to be too far removed from the time they chose to be a president and assumed the role. The maximum of six years is arbitrary, but I needed to

limit the sample population and a five year span of time in the position seemed reasonable.

The selection criteria of the institution type was an attempt to choose participants for whom the job of presidency is somewhat comparable. The two ends of the spectrum of institution type, community colleges on one end and elite and large research institutions on the other, have been omitted. This is due to a belief that the job of president at those institutions, and perhaps the types of women who would chose and be chosen for those presidencies, could be so different from other institution types as to make any comparison impossible. Presidents of community colleges work within a governance system focused on the local community, its politics, finances, and issues. Presidents of elite and large research institutions, due to the size and/or structural layers of the system, may be isolated from the campus community. Presidents of non-elite, private, liberal arts institutions and presidents of a campus of a state university system, however, have roles similar to one another, particularly in the areas of fundraising, politics, and in relation to faculty, students, and local communities.

The intention of the study is to explore the concept of leadership self-identity in a small sample of women college presidents, not to generalize the findings to a larger population. I had received a list of college presidents from The American Council on Education's Office of Women in Higher Education and drawn up a preliminary list of potential participants who met the selection criteria of years in the position and institution type. I then began inviting women college presidents in New England and Mid-Atlantic States to participate in the study. I attempted to balance the number of woman leading private institutions and those leading public institutions, but it was not reasonable to try

to balance the number of years in the position, within the five year time frame already established. No attempt was made to select according to other criteria, such as age, race, religion, or socioeconomic background.

These women college presidents are busy executives and, as I learned during the pilot interviews, it could be challenging to schedule interviews with them. I also expected a degree of self-selection on their part; those interested in the topic and supporting research on women's leadership may be more likely to find the time to meet with me. I conducted pilot interviews with two women and found them both to have given considerable thought to women's leadership issues, to be interested in speaking with me about them, and to be curious as to what I learned in the course of my research. These women presidents have written dissertations themselves and many of them seem to be willing to reach out to women researchers in higher education coming along behind them.

I conducted interviews until I satisfied the criteria of sufficiency and reached the point of saturation of information, when "the interviewer begins to hear the same information reported. He or she is no longer learning anything new" (Seidman, 2006, p. 55). Kvale (1996) places this number of interviews at 15, plus or minus 10, "due to a combination of the time and resources available for the investigation and of the law of diminishing returns" (p. 102). Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the term redundancy, rather than saturation, for such studies where "the criterion invoked to determine when to stop sampling is informational redundancy, not a statistical confidence level" (p. 202). I expected to reach saturation at the point of interviewing 12-15 participants, and reached it with the 12$^{th}$ interview.

### *Narrative Analysis*

As a paradigmatic type of narrative inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1995), I analyzed the narrative data thematically, looking for categories, connecting threads and patterns, and themes within and across each participant's narratives. Although I have knowledge of the research literature and have guiding research questions for this study focused on leadership self-identity, it is important that I "come to the transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text" (Seidman, 2006, p. 117). Beginning by reading the transcripts and marking what was of interest to me, and working back and forth with the data in an iterative manner, I began to code the transcripts. I engaged in content analysis of the interview transcripts, coding and organizing the data according to the guiding research questions and topic areas of leadership self-identity—core identity, career, relationships and narrative. Although I expected patterns and themes to emerge within these topic areas, I also needed to remain open to other, unexpected themes emerging from the data. This is a process of description, analysis and interpretation (Wolcott, 2001), calling for judgment on the part of the researcher.

I worked with a response group, two other students in the doctoral program, to have them check my coding and interpretation to be sure that it made sense to them. Whenever possible, I used the words or phrases of the participants in the coding process. I used NVivo software for the organization and coding of the interview transcripts.

There are some tensions within thematic analysis of which I am aware. There can be a desire to fit the data cleanly into the identified themes in what is called narrative smoothing (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Sarbin, 1986). It is important to retain and note

the inconsistent or contradictory narratives, the outliers and surprises (Miles & Huberman, 1994). There is also what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) call tension at the reductionist boundary. In narrative inquiry it is possible to pull themes from the analysis without reducing them to generalizations.

### *Narrative Truth*

Narrative truth differs from other truths, such as scientific or mathematic truth, in that it cannot be proved or triangulated.

> Life stories are subjective, as is one's self or identity. They contain "narrative truth" (Spence, 1982, 1986), which may be closely linked, loosely similar, or far removed from 'historical truth.' Consequently, our stand is that life stories, when properly used, may provide researchers with a key to discovering identity and understanding it—both in its "real" or "historical" core, and as a narrative construction. (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, p. 8)

The participants in my study are self reporting, telling their stories. Their stories are forms of self-presentations; they are choosing what to include and what to exclude. The participants may intentionally deceive themselves and/or the researcher.

> When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they *are* revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past "as it actually was," aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences. (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 261)

The narrative truth of experience, interpretation and the claiming of an identity is the essence of narrative inquiry.

### *Generalizability, Versimilitude, Trustworthiness, and Validation*

This dissertation research is an explorative study to understand the concept of leadership self-identity in a small sample of participants; there is no intention to generalize the findings to a larger population. A strengthening of the concept of

leadership self-identity as it emerges in this study could result in transferring it to another population in the future for further exploration.

Taking into consideration the qualities of qualitative data, narrative truth, interpretation, and the fact that "narrativization assumes point of view" (Riessman, 1993, p. 64), verisimilitude, validation and trustworthiness are key issues in evaluating narrative research.

Versimilitude is the appearance of truth or reality and is more appropriate in narrative research than a test of scientific validity. Validation comprises persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic use. "Persuasiveness is greatest when theoretical claims are supported with evidence from informants' accounts and when alternative interpretations of the data are considered" (Riessman, 1993, p. 65). In presenting the findings of my study I let the voices of the participants speak for themselves. This presentation of the findings, along with my interpretation and analysis of the findings, allows the reader the opportunity to form their own interpretations of the data and compare their interpretations with my analysis. In my analysis it was important to remain open to alternate, and perhaps conflicting, interpretations of the data.

I sent each participant a transcript of the interview for her review and, at the time of writing up the study, any quoted material from the interview in context. This addresses the correspondence aspect of validation. I was mindful, and checked myself, as to the coherence of themes within the texts, the structure of the narrative, and what it indicates about the participant's sense of identity. The seeding of future studies and applications addresses issues of pragmatism.

> Validation, the process through which we make claims for the trustworthiness of our interpretations, is the critical issue. 'Trustworthiness' not 'truth' is the key

> semantic difference: The latter assumes an objective reality, whereas the former moves the process into the social world. (Riessman, 1993, p. 65)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) ask the following question to determine trustworthiness: "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of" (p. 290)? Trustworthiness then leads to the pragmatic aspect of validation.

"What narrative inquirers gain in the proximity to ordinary lived experience and the scope of their considerations, they, at times, sacrifice in certainty" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 46). Narrative data cannot be taken out of context; it is relational and temporal. The challenge for those of us engaged in narrative inquiry "is less one of achieving the highest possible grade of epistemic clarity and is instead how to integrate ethical and epistemic concerns—how to put knowledge in the service of enhancing human experience" (p. 46). It seems particularly appropriate that a study of leaders' concept of themselves as leaders be evaluated on the merit of how the knowledge produced can inform our understanding of leadership.

### *Limitations of Study*

This study is limited by the sample size of participants which does not allow the findings to be generalized to a larger population. It is an exploratory, qualitative study, producing narrative data for analysis and interpretation. Narrative inquiry is, by its nature, interpretive and subjective.

The basis for this research is my conception of leadership self-identity and the guiding questions I have constructed to explore it further. Although grounded in the literature and experience, it is not a protocol that has been tested and verified by the

research of others. The strength, and limitation, of this study is my intuition, skills of interpretation, and judgment, as is the case with all narrative inquiry.

I see this as the beginning of a line of research on leadership self-identity. As such, this study is limited in that it is freestanding and, although it has been influenced by the work of many others, it may serve as a foundation for future research.

# Chapter IV: Findings

## *Participants in the Study*

The participants in this study are a purposeful sample of women college presidents who meet the following criteria: (a) they have been in their current presidency for a minimum of two years and a maximum of six years; (b) they are in their first presidency, and (c) they are president of a private, liberal arts institution or a campus of a state university system. Working from an American Council on Education list of college presidents, I identified a convenience sample of women presidents fitting the selection criteria in New England and Mid-Atlantic States.

Requests to participate in the study were sent to the identified presidents via email, and a letter with the same message was mailed at the same time. I followed up with a phone call to those who did not respond. Eighteen presidents were invited to be interviewed—12 accepted the invitation, three declined saying that their schedules were too full, one was not available until after the interview period, and two did not respond to the written invitations or my follow up phone calls.

An attempt was made to balance the number of presidents from private and public institutions; of the 18 presidents invited, ten were from private institutions and eight from public institutions. Twelve interviews were scheduled and conducted between March and May, 2008. With the twelfth interview, no new themes emerged, an indicator that redundancy had been reached and the data gathering phase was completed.

Table 4.1 shows the age and year in office for each of the twelve presidents interviewed for this study, along with the type and Carnegie classification of their institutions.

Table 4.1

*Participant Data and Institutional Profiles*

| President | Age | Year in office | Institution | Carnegie Classification |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| President 1 | 58 | 4 | Public | Medium four-year |
| President 2 | 59 | 2 | Public | Medium four-year |
| President 3 | 67 | 6 | Public | Medium four-year |
| President 4 | 60 | 6 | Private | Small four-year |
| President 5 | 58 | 2 | Public | Medium four-year |
| President 6 | 63 | 4 | Public | Very small four-year |
| President 7 | 63 | 2 | Private | Small four-year |
| President 8 | 64 | 5 | Private | Small four-year |
| President 9 | 59 | 4 | Private | Very small four-year |
| President 10 | 57 | 3 | Private | Special focus institution |
| President 11 | 51 | 2 | Private | Small four-year |
| President 12 | 51 | 4 | Public | Very small four-year |

The participants fall into the following age categories: Two are between 50–54 years old, five are between 55–59 years old, four are between 60–64 years old, and one is between 65–69 years old. Four presidents are in their second year in office, one is in her third year, four are in their fourth year, one in her fifth year, and two are in their sixth year in office. Six women are presidents of private institutions and six are presidents of public institutions. Classified by the Carnegie Foundation, three institutions are very small four-year, four are small four-year, four are medium four-year, and one is a special focus institution. All institutions are not-for-profit.

Ten presidents came up through the faculty into administrative leadership roles, one came up through higher education administration, and one came from outside the Academy into the presidency. Nine presidents came to their institutions as president and one moved from one campus within the state system to another campus to assume the presidency. Two were interim presidents of their institutions before the permanent appointment and both of those institutions were in a financial crisis at the time.

The ethnicity of the participant pool includes one Latina, one African-American, one Middle Eastern president, and nine Caucasian women. Four are the first women presidents of their institutions and one is the first Latina president.

### *Interviews*

All interviews took place in the office of the president, were audio taped, and sent to a professional transcription service for transcription. After proofing the written transcript I sent it, as promised, to the president for her review.

Because I was interviewing to redundancy, the point at which no new codes were generated, interviews were coded as the transcripts were received from the transcription service. Interview transcripts were loaded into NVivo software where I also entered my field notes from each interview, a journal of the coding process, and kept a general journal of the research project.

With the initial invitations to be interviewed, I requested a 75-minute appointment. From the pilot interviews, I knew that interviews ran an hour or slightly longer, and this would allow time for settling in and wrapping up. I wanted to be sure to finish in the time allotted. After the first two interviews I found that the actual interview,

audio tape time, was just under 60 minutes, and learned how skilled these women were at time management and moving from one appointment to another. Recognizing that a one-hour appointment was sufficient, and the more typical scheduling block, I confirmed subsequent interviews as needing one hour of time.

The interview protocol served as a guide for each conversation and the major questions were asked of every participant. Due to the flow of the interview some questions from the protocol were not asked of any participant. Although they may have been answered to some extent in response to other questions, I did not ask the following questions in the protocol of every participant: how she came to see herself as a leader, major influences that impacted her sense of herself as a leader, a time she was disappointed in her career or as president, and how social expectations of women impinge upon her and her presidency.

After each interview I sent a thank-you note to the president and then sent them a copy of the interview transcript when it was available, typically within two weeks of the interview. After writing up the findings of my study I sent each president a document of quoted material in context for their approval.

### *Narrative Analysis*

As presented in Chapter 3, the interview questions were designed to explore components of leadership self-identity that had emerged from the literature: core identity, career, relationships, and narrative. These four components of leadership self-identity served as theoretically derived codes and formed the basic structure of the data coding. At the beginning of the coding process, I made parent nodes (general categories at the top of the coding hierarchical structure) of each of these components, and then organized

child nodes (more specific categories grouped under parent nodes) marking the responses to the various interview questions. Under the child nodes, I created in vivo codes, in the words of the participants. This process allowed me to see the general patterns that were emerging, while also seeing the detail and language of the responses.

After coding each interview, I printed out the coding structure, highlighted the new codes, and reflected upon the emerging picture in my coding journal. The highlighting of the new codes was a visual representation of the growing data. It also served as the focus for my ongoing treatment of the data, seeing the similar answers of participants, emerging themes, and things I wanted to look for in subsequent interviews. I noted in my journal the themes I saw and questions they raised, along with notes as to how I was coding particular ideas. I saved each of the lists of codes generated after every interview which, in conjunction with my journals, serves to document the coding and analysis process. With the coding of the twelfth interview, no new codes were generated and no new themes emerged from the data; redundancy had been reached.

A tension emerged during the coding process. When new codes were generated from the responses of a participant I felt a need to then go back to all previous interviews to look for the new codes. I addressed the tension in two ways: I sent a response group (two other doctoral students), my complete NVivo file, including coding structure and interview transcripts, for them to check my coding to be sure it made sense to them and that I was consistent in my coding. Also, after completing all twelve interviews I went back and reread each transcript and its coding to pick up any nuances of coding that had evolved over the course of the interviews. With these two measures, I felt confident of my coding and its organization as I began analyzing the data.

Using NVivo software, I was also able to merge codes, move codes (nodes) around into different groupings, and try out different scenarios with the data to determine what made the most sense. The findings are organized by the four components of leadership self-identity and the themes that emerged within each component.

## *Findings*

The findings of the study are presented within the leadership self-identity components that emerged from the literature: core identity, career, relationships, and narrative. Within each component, the data are organized into themes. The themes within core identity are: (a) working with others, (b) self as leader, (c) service to the institution, (d) self-assessment, (e) presentation of self, and (f) learning and teaching. Within the component of career, the themes are: when they first thought of becoming a president, intention and planning, and longevity. Within the component of relationships, the themes are: mentors, role models and teachers; the senior team; families; networks of support; balance; and self-role merger. And within the component of narrative, the themes are: communication and language, and voice.

These themes are common to all participants. While the emphasis or priorities may vary from one woman to another, their stories are similar and form a coherent and cohesive picture of the leadership self-identity of this group of women college presidents.

In analyzing the data I considered the categories of age, number of years in the position, and type of institution for relevance. The few instances where participants' responses varied according to their age are noted. Otherwise, no examples of one group responding differently from another group were found.

*Core Identity*

The emerging themes of core identity include: working with others, self as leader, service to the institution, self-assessment, presentation of self, and learning and teaching. The women presidents see themselves as leaders in context and in relationship with those around them. They talk about change, vision, values, their strengths and challenges, and making a difference. They understand their role of representing their institution and serving its needs. They tell stories on themselves and admit mistakes they have made. Learning is a theme that runs through the data; these women are in the business of learning and it is their passion.

*Working with others.* The participants all talk about themselves as leaders in relationship with others, using words such as team, colleague, facilitator, and building consensus. They are connected to those with whom they work, which includes a broad range of constituents. President 8 refers to the connectedness of her role, "I think that probably my role is to ensure that what we are doing at this institution, that everything we are doing is connected and therefore to generate a sense and assurance of connectedness that things fit together." Another president clearly states, "I have a role within a team" (President 5). President 12 sees herself as the connection between her internal and external constituencies, "I serve as the translator to the outside world what goes on here on campus, what the values are, and what we are capable of doing. I translate to the campus because they are largely insulated." These leaders believe in working with people, in teams, building relationships, building consensus, and moving forward in a coordinated effort.

> I like people. I like people a lot. I like to be with people and I really enjoy teams. I certainly will work alone individually if needed, and sometimes it's the only right

> way to work. But if I can bring a team together, and we can enjoy the experience together and feel the success of the process, I think that's the best. I like to laugh and I like to be in an environment where people are enjoying the company of others with good progress towards a goal, because then I think they come back ready to be on your team again. (President 1)

> I think you need a faculty leader, you need a Union leader, you need a faculty senate leader, you need a student leader, and all of these people are leaders in their own right, and they are the team of leaders that lead the University with you. Without them, you can't lead. And I think sometimes people forget that there's a lot of building relationships. (President 2)

> In an administrative position you have to work a lot with people and make sure that you establish good communications, good relationships, and really work most of the time building consensus around the certain issue and sometimes, if necessary, make some difficult decisions. (President 10)

> . . .[referring to an article written about leadership as] leading from the messy middle. And it talked about the role of the President is to hold the center. . . .to understand what the core values of the academic institution are, what the academy needs to be about, and then to allow students and faculty and trustees sometimes to move closer and further away from that. But that you, as the President, are the person holding the center of the University. I think people think of [leadership] more hierarchically, typically. I see myself as holding all these constituent groups together, moving, aligning them toward the movement forward of the University. . . . It doesn't feel like you are out in front, but it more often feels as if I'm in the middle of people trying to help direct them in the right way that I want them to go for the University. (President 7)

*Self as Leader.* In describing themselves as leaders, the presidents speak about who they are, what they value, what they do, and leadership in general. Many of the presidents talk about themselves as change agents in their leadership role.

> I guess I see myself as a transformational leader not a transactional one. And I think that for many institutions, but particularly for the small private college like ours, tuition dependent college, you have to establish and maintain a culture of positive change. And that positive change has to be directed and led by the President. So, therefore, you have to be able to galvanize the community around a change agenda and have them embrace it. And so that means really keeping everyone energized and focused and aware that that has to happen. Also, even though consensus and collaboration and transparency are very important at institutions like ours, people really do look for a leader with a certain vision and identity relating to that vision to be that change agent. (President 11)

> The faculty that I think are the future of the University keep telling me, "Don't back off, don't slow down. This is great, this is good energy." There are people who have said, "Wow, this is too much change" and the Board, it's hard for them. But I feel my obligation is to the students and to this junior faculty we are bringing on. And I've got to create the future for them. And if it takes short term pain and anxiety for people that can't deal with ambiguity, I'm willing to let that be for now… …because I've got to keep my eye on the future. (President 7)

> I'm in a situation, and not just this institution, I believe especially public higher education itself is in a situation where operating as we operated 20 or 30 years ago is no longer possible. We have to take more risks; we have to move faster; we have to be more flexible. And that suits me. I love change. I get bored very easily. (President 12)

Vision, values, integrity, and trust are character traits represented by these women, and that they look for in others.

> I don't think great visions are built by one person. I think you have ideas and people in a good organization, people help you shape that vision and that's what good leadership to me is: allowing people to help you shape your vision. (President 2)

> I have enough vision for everyone in the state and enjoy that. I'm told by those that work for me that they just don't have that and I say, "Fine I've got enough, we'll share." So that piece of the job is very comfortable, that's very much a piece of my self identity. (President 12)

> And everything is so interwoven and that's part of what you are doing, that's part of why it's complex. But it means that if you can work from consistent values with colleagues you trust, it is not going to be a painful process. (President 5)

> I try to lead with integrity, with transparency, with honesty, because I think at the end of the day if people trust you and they feel that even if the answers aren't what they want to hear, or if they don't like the direction you are going in, or they don't like what's happening in the institution. If they feel that the leader is trustworthy and honest then that is one thing. If the leader is not trusted and not respected for the honesty then there isn't a feeling that I'm getting a fair shake. (President 9)

> I think ethics is so important in this day and age, especially where you see so much misuse of public goods and properties, and also so much mistrust because of the actions of people that in many cases are less than honorable. And so I think the President really sets the standards for ethical behavior. And that in my mind means not only following policies and procedures, but being aware of situations where there may be a perception of something that is inappropriate. It may not be

> against policy but it sure doesn't make a lot of sense. So I think a strong leader has to be very ethical and, in doing so, really set the bar for other people to follow. (President 6)

Building on the themes of working with others, being change agents, and valuing integrity and inspiring trust, the participants list among their strengths as a leader: communication, creativity, decision making, problem-solving, humor, listening, identifying with others, and making connections. For example, one president says, "Communication isn't just what I say, it's what you hear me saying" and "But I guess I think I'm stronger at articulating, given time and space to think, in written and prepared and semi-prepared remarks, than I am thinking on my feet. I can listen on my feet" (President 4).

> I think a strong leader is one who is able to communicate effectively both orally and in writing. Now, that being said, I'm much better in writing than I am orally. Because in writing I have a chance to sit back and to wordsmith and think about it and I swear there are times more often than not that I leave a meeting and think, "Why didn't I think of this? Why didn't I think of that?" And in writing you can do that. (President 6)

> I tend to be a good listener, I think. Oftentimes we become full of ourselves, and that's not good. I like to sit back and to listen to what other people are wanting. And sometimes I may not jump in as quickly as I should. (President 3)

> And at the same time I think I have a lot of compassion for students so I can talk to them and listen to their input and act upon things that are necessary to be done. So I think looking at the compassion on one hand, and on the other hand looking at the networking which helps me learn more about the trends that are happening in industry…and again helps me lead the institution in the right direction. (President 10)

And at the same time, a sense of humor is part of the women's sense of themselves. "I was joking with a group of people a couple of weeks ago, that I know they get to laugh at that, but I still see myself as the Young Turk" (President 5). "I admire humor an enormous amount. And I admire a certain amount of humorous

self-deprecation" (President 8).

> I really can laugh at myself and I joke with the staff. We laugh in the meetings. Sometimes I'm in a faculty meeting or a department meeting and I'll say something funny. They are surprised but I do, I do have a good sense of humor. I'm not afraid to laugh or tell a joke or pick up on something funny, or if someone says something funny, to laugh with them. And I think that that makes me more real to people. That comes easily. (President 2)

When asked if they would describe themselves using the label of leader, the women have a variety of answers. The two younger presidents easily accepted the label: President 11 answered, "Yes" and President 12 answered,

> It is one that I would use to describe myself, although it has taken me… about 50 years to realize that. I'm very much an introvert and thus don't naturally think of myself that way. So yes, it is a term that I would use to describe myself.

Responses from the other presidents varied. "So I guess I'm comfortable with the term. But it is not the term that I would naturally apply to myself and what I do" (President 5). "Yes, I think I am a leader, Yes, that's an interesting thing to say. I don't say that often but …if you asked me I would say yes, I lead my University" (President 7). "I don't think it's a word I use very much and it would be hard for me to put into words exactly why I don't, but it's not the way I describe myself" (President 8). "I guess, rather than by saying it, I'd rather think of actions that I should follow so that becomes recognized by others and I don't have to say it" (President 6).

> Well, the good and the bad is I think the label gets tied to the word president just by association. People just assume that if you are the president, part of that is being a leader. So inasmuch as I am a president, I guess I'm a leader. I am very comfortable, though, not necessarily being in the leading mode. (President 1)

> It's interesting because I never use the word leader in the same sentence as college President. Because I do believe, and it's probably not true for all CEO's, for all leaders in an academic setting you've got to be a colleague. . . I know that I'm the leader because people would describe me that way but I don't describe myself that way. (President 2)

> If you want to be a college president you have to learn how to use it [the word leader]. You have to use it in interviews; trustees have to have a clear sense that you are comfortable with that word. (President 4)

*Service to the institution.* Another theme that emerged in the women's concept of themselves as leaders is serving their institution and the privilege they feel in doing so. President 1 sees herself as, "an individual who puts the good of this institution and the welfare of students' success first."

> The institution, and its future and its security, is your first priority. It's not about you, it's about the institution. I've seen presidents who make it about them. They always fail. . . But even it if it means sometimes sacrificing some popularity for the short-term you just have to be okay with it. (President 11)

> I know what a privilege it is to do what I do. I'm aware that the decisions that I make impact peoples lives and it is a privilege to be in the position where people entrust that to you. (President 5)

When asked what they would like their legacy to be, the women all speak about their institutions, and if they speak of themselves personally it is in relationship to the institution. Tied in with their legacy is the ability to make a difference in the lives of their constituents, as in "I'm here and while I'm here I want to make a difference" (President 7). Common responses to the question of legacy are: "The legacy that I want to leave is that this is a first rate academic institution that has protected access for people from modest backgrounds" (President 2) and "I'd like people to say that I was a person of integrity and good for the institution. But I don't need for anything more specific than that" (President 8) and "But I would also like to leave the institution with more self confidence" (President 12).

> I don't think much about legacy. That's one of those things that so many people ask and I don't think about it. I…I truly do not think about it. . . . I would rather have it [my legacy] be that this is a person who came in and who wanted to do a good job and one who … knows she doesn't know how to do everything and that

> it's not just this one person but there are a group, a lot of people, who have worked together to the better good. (President 3)

> Another thing I would like to have brought to this institution is a healthier attitude toward change and some mechanisms for being more open to change, more innovative. I want this institution to endure another 150 years and unless we get out ahead of problems we won't. So to make it a more proactive institution. (President 4)

> I don't know that I need for people to sort of hearken back fondly on me as a person, in fact if they even forget who I am. . .I don't care. I would like to know that the institution, first of all has survived, and it is successful beyond where we are now and that I have had something, or a lot, to do with it. (President 11)

> We have our commencement on Sunday and each one is like the first one. And it brings tears to my eyes because I see these students that you groom from the very beginning as freshmen and they grew, not only academically but socially. They are very highly skilled professionals, and also well-rounded citizens and future leaders. That's just thrilling. I think being a president of a university is a big privilege, because you really can make a huge impact on the lives of your students. . . I think it's a great, great thing to be and do. I know it requires a lot of time, but again I enjoy what I do. And I think that's the important thing, you have to love what you do, no matter what you do, no matter what the job. . . . because that's how you are going to make the best contribution. (President 10)

*Presentation of self.* Understanding the importance of how they present themselves as leaders and how they will be perceived by others as leaders, the presidents are all aware of and deliberate with their personal appearance. "I am conscious about the way I look. I think it's important" (President 2). She also notes the practical aspect that she is often having her picture taken and wants to be prepared. The women's answers range from the unfairness of being judged by appearance and that men can just put on a suit, to seeing it as a hobby, to understanding that they are a "living logo" (President 1) of the institution. "I think my theater background always taught me that one has to costume for the role and so I've always thought I've been aware of that. So yeah, I think you have to dress and look like a leader" (President 11).

> There is also a difference between how I dress when I am on campus and when I'm off campus. A lot of times if I'm on campus I'll, especially if I know I'm going to be interacting with students or with faculty, I'll wear jeans, tennis shoes, I've got tennis shoes on today. I learned pretty quickly not to wear a suit, for example, if I'm going to be on campus. So I intentionally dress down. . . I intentionally show up at athletic events and different student activities almost dressed as a student and it has been very clear to me that they respond well to that. If I'm off campus I'm dressed up a good bit more. (President 12)

> I started teaching when I was 20. I taught seniors in high school. I was going to work to make sure that there was a logical demarcation between me and my students. And what I discovered was that clothes and how I looked made that much easier. When I turned 21 my students assumed I was turning 30 and I did not correct their misperception. So I think that's been it. When other people as teachers were perfectly comfortable in cut-offs that has never been who I am. So I don't think there is a substantial difference in my being a president in that, that's what I was as a professor. (President 5)

> Coming from a different culture, we were all used to dressing up and looking professional. I'm so used to wearing suits and trying to be put together. The only thing that I say that is not fair, when you look at the genders, I have to get up an hour earlier to do my hair and my makeup [she says with humor]. (President 10)

> Some people see the institution through me, as the President; it's the position. And I would not want to be rag-tagged; no one's going to do that. But I wouldn't want to do something that would be detrimental to the institution that I represent. (President 3)

> Physical appearance. Wow! I personally think it's important, because I think that, oftentimes, people will form opinions based upon what they see and if what they see isn't particularly pleasing, then that not only carries over to you as the President but, in some cases, can move over to the rest of the institution. (President 6)

Cultures and wardrobes change from one region of the country to another. "One of the interesting cultural changes from the West where we came from, is that they get so much more dressed up here, you know. Geez, they put on their big girl clothes a lot" (President 1). When moving from a southern climate to New England, one president bought winter outerwear, including boots. She found out that they were not the usual boots for the region; people recognized her as being from somewhere else by her fancy

boots. “I tried to walk the line of looking enough like everybody that I would be accepted but also looking enough like a person of authority that I would get a little respect from them” (President 7). She also found out that grooming carried over to her automobile.

> I try to be more careful about my grooming than I was even as a Dean, because I thought if I didn’t have meetings I could get away with, and I realize that I can’t. And my car has an institutional license plate, so I have to get the car washed; I can’t have a dirty car. I was at a club here and somebody said, “I saw that was your car, what happened it’s so dirty? And that’s your university on the license plate. I knew it was you.” So I realized that people are judging everything. (President 7)

Two presidents tell humorous stories on themselves and their clothing mistakes, both of which were reported in the student newspaper.

> Indeed if I had spent the time I’ve spent shopping and getting my hair cut and trying to fit in a manicure, reading, writing articles, you know I would accomplish more in my life. I actually think it is a huge issue for women. I get pleasure out of clothes and fabric. I really like fabric and color as you can probably tell. So I tried to turn it into something that’s almost a hobby. But the funny story that I share with a lot of people is that a year ago I had a wonderful opportunity in the fall to appear twice on national television talking about my institution. . . So the instructions that I got from our media consultants were very specific about clothes, and I didn’t have anything that fit the bill. You are supposed to wear a dark, but not black, conservative suit with a collarless neckline, no patterns. Nothing I had was appropriate. So I went and bought this perfectly nice dark purple jacket and I actually bought two outfits. But that was the one I was most comfortable in and I wore it for both of these occasions. I didn’t even for once, I think a lot often about “Did I wear that outfit the last time I met with that group?” But I didn’t think about that. I packed whatever wouldn’t wrinkle. Sure enough, in the student newspaper a week later. . . [in a humorous list] of the top ten reasons to worry about the institution’s endowment, reason number was two was that the President has to wear the same outfit every time she appears on national TV. I was just, I was laughing but I was also really caught up short. The one time I didn’t worry about it I got caught for wearing the same thing. (President 4)

> I mean the day I wore the turquoise stockings with the black polka dots! I should not have done it! You know it took me time to figure out that everyone was noticing. I always had done it before. This is a true story. So now, as I get dressed each morning I think, are these stockings. . .(President 8)

*Self-assessment.* The presidents' ability to assess themselves and their leadership includes an ability and willingness to question themselves, accept their own imperfection, recognize the relationship between self-confidence and making mistakes, and the importance of relying on others. Their ability to admit mistakes or shortcomings does not negate their competence and talents, but rather, "my notion of a leader is that leaders struggle all the time with imperfection" (President 4). They speak candidly of their self-reflections. "But there have been times when I've had the feeling, 'Well maybe I'm just not really smart enough to do this'" (President 8).

> I don't always have a great deal of belief in myself and I've seen this written about other women who are in leadership positions—the feeling that you are an imposter, that you really don't have the right stuff. And so I'm constantly working to understand what really I can't do, and try and be better, and just acknowledge the things that I am doing okay. I was very grateful when I started reading some more literature on women who thought they were imposters, because it was gratifying to know it wasn't just me. (President 1)

> I think the biggest thing to overcome is lack of self-confidence. I mean, and I think that comes with maturity over time, but I'm sure that as a younger woman I was not nearly as confident of myself as I am now. You overcome the fear of making a mistake; I talk openly about some of the mistakes I've made here. So, I think once one gets over that hurdle, that you don't have to be perfect, but you could be very confident that you're going to make a difference and without perfection you can still come very close to perfection. You know you can keep striving for that. But it's okay that you're not perfect, that you mess up some things or you have some misjudgments. So I think once one overcomes that then it's easier to step out there. (President 9)

> This role for me certainly entails a lot of self questioning and self doubt and frequent feelings of inadequacy. "Have I understood that correctly? Am I doing it right?" But I think that probably over the course of my now almost five years in this job I've understood something that I should have understood earlier which is that in most of the situations, most of the difficult situations I face, there isn't one right answer. And I think I spent a long time worrying that if I said this or did this that really the right answer or the right response, the right action would have been this or something else. And I think that slowly I've come to understand that's not the case. There are frequently several reasonable answers. And your job is to decide which of them you are going to go with and go with it. (President 8)

> A hot water pipe broke on campus, a main pipe that brought hot water to several areas of the campus and the dorms. The decision had to be made very quickly on whether to change the entire pipe or part of the pipe and costs were associated with that decision. The students had no hot water so we were getting pressure. I needed to get a lot of data to make that decision because it was a very expensive decision and I said, "I don't know a damn thing about pipes." That's how I felt, "How the hell, how am I going to make this decision?" I was in way over my head. And what happened in that case was that I relied on people that I respected. So I looked at it and I said I can make a judgment based on this much knowledge but I do believe those people know what they are talking about and I trusted them so that at the end of the day, that's what I did. (President 2)

In listing the areas they need to develop, they include: being more articulate, being able to delegate more, developing a tougher skin, and learning patience. Challenges of the presidency are shared, including Board relations, funding, politics, stamina, campus safety, faculty and student related issues, and loneliness. Their ability to see and express their imperfection is part of their well-rounded and multi-layered sense of themselves as leaders. The women tell of advice that had been given to them when they took the presidency, some of it was good advice they wished they had heeded.

> Other advice that people have given me, I wish that I had been able to act on some good advice. I think I was given good advice by the people who said, "Remember you have a megaphone to your lips every time you speak." That's good advice. But it's awfully hard to follow. You know sometimes you just relax. Or you say something that you meant one way and it gets picked up another way and deliberately distorted, and the fact that people do that was a shock to me. You are going to ask what rock I was living under, but the idea that people would take something you said out of context and tell you that you meant something else by it. That was a real shock to me, and yet I was advised that that would happen. (President 4)

> Well, when I took the position I heard that it was really important to stay on, be on, campus and to connect with people on campus at the very beginning, and don't let your development operations send you out on the road until you've…I ignored it and it was a mistake. I should have stayed; I should have not let that happen. But when you take a position like this, you feel as though you have a certain duty to people, and you want to keep their support because colleges like this don't operate without the material support of a lot of people. So I spent a lot of time off campus that first year. And if I had it to do over I wouldn't do it, I would have resisted that. (President 8)

> Patience. I see so many wonderful things that are happening, that could be done. People joke, "You leave campus and every time you come back other people have a lot of work to do." And I think that's true because part of my job is generating ideas and thinking of ways we could do that. And that means that things are almost never quite as fast as I would like them to be. (President 5)

*Learning and teaching.* The common threads of learning, reading, teaching and developing others run through all of the conversations. These women are leaders of educational institutions and are creating and nurturing environments of learning for their students. Teaching and developing others are integral to who they are. They are lifelong learners in a position that requires continual learning, which they embrace. "I've learned so much. I feel like I've really grown in so many dimensions and that feels great" (President 4). "I'm a quick study" (President 7). "So I had a lot to learn not only about this particular environment and its culture but also about being President" (President 8). In addition to learning on the job, two presidents speak about their experience as an American Council on Education (ACE) Fellow as pivotal to their becoming a president, four presidents mention participating in Harvard's Program for New Presidents, and one president credits the HERS Program as being a major influence in her development.

> I like the breadth of the job and I find that very stimulating rather than overwhelming. So that part of it I think I'm good at. I like research, I like athletics, I like student life. My children this weekend were saying I was a lifelong learner. I just like the fact that I'm surrounded by smart people who know more about their area than I do. And they kind of keep teaching me, so I like that. And I'm very confident that I am able to learn, so I think I don't have to know everything. . . I'm confident that I'm happy to learn a better way to do something, and I think that keeps me open. (President 7)

> So in that sense it's actually something like being a teacher. You don't want to be dictating or micromanaging people. You want them to have all of the ability to take risks, to innovate but to know, to be setting the agenda so that, in setting it in conjunction with them, so that everyone together knows where we are going and has the ability to help us get there creativity. . . .So it's a kind of energy and I used to think that as a teacher part of what I provided was a safety net. That I provided

> the structure and things within which people could take risks and create and I would be there. I was the safety net. In some ways, I'm the net that's looking at the things that are happening and trying to make sure that they happen in ways that allow us to move forward quickly. (President 5)

> I like to look at an individual's background to see what they are doing. And I like to talk with them about their own goals and what they want to make of this job and then, as they go on in their career path, what can I do to help them. (President 3)

Five women identified themselves as readers, an activity that enables reflection and an opportunity to make meaning. "I think that being a reader of literature helps you to be a reader of life. Maybe that's an overstatement but I guess I sort of believe it" (President 8).

> I spent a lot of time reading about characters and people and caring about it and finding wonder and interest in all sorts of things. So I'm very comfortable moving from discipline to discipline, idea to idea, multitasking. . . . I'm a reader, so I'm always going to find time to read and to reflect. You are doing what has to be done for the now, but you are always thinking of the long term and planning and reflecting on things. It has to be always part of the day. (President 5)

I asked each president how their academic discipline and area of expertise help to inform them as a leader. Their backgrounds range from sports physiology, allied health, and engineering to business, communications, and English. They are enthusiastic about their disciplines and speak with energy and conviction. Their answers show their ability to think and draw connections from one area to another.

> The sense of competing, the sense of challenging yourself, going out on a run, seeing a hill and just wanting to see if I could run it, if I could make that hill, those are qualities that have served me well when I've been challenged in a variety of other jobs. That staying power, these are carry-over attributes that you can use in different environments. (President 1)

> I've questioned on many occasions my background in the sciences and how that has helped, or in some cases hindered, professional progress. I think [it has] helped in terms of being prepared. You can't go in and do an experiment unless you think through what it is you are going to do, think about the outcomes that you expect. What would happen if you took away a variable. Preparedness is

really a discipline. Where perhaps it [a background in the sciences] has hindered is in the grand scheme of things applied professions are not as valued as the liberal arts and the more traditional sciences. (President 6)

I think social workers are natural communicators and people who tend to use process and are comfortable with process. And I'm comfortable with process, I'm comfortable with inclusion. I'm comfortable with a lot of talk. (President 9)

Victorian England, 19th Century England, was a time that was in incredible change and transition. People were uprooted, the lifestyles of everyone in Europe were changing radically, quickly and most Victorian novels, including people that everyone knows like Jane Austin and the Bronte's and even Charles Dickens, these are novels of social critique. . . .In a Dickens novel you can have 3 or 400 characters and you're literally immersing yourself in this little world, and you get to watch it from the outside, and you get to watch how these people work with each other. These novelists were themselves extremely empathetic and insightful and intuitive. And so it's like a lesson, it's like a little campus; you read a Charles Dickens novel and you see how all these different people on campus interact. And you realize they are all important, the street sweeper is just as important as Queen Victoria. And you see the effect that they can all have on each other and in Dickens everything always turns out perfectly in the end you know. But it's because everyone is engaged in the end.. . . That really works on campus if you can do that … If you can make the students, the freshmen, feel like he or she is just as important the Vice President of Academic Affairs you have gone a long way toward, toward good leadership. (President 12)

The need to pull those two areas together was very fruitful for me. So I was a Medievalist who said, "Wow there's this new thing going on in my field today and it's called Feminist Scholarship and I'm kind of interested in that but what does it have to do with reading Chaucer?" And when I asked that question, suddenly there was a whole avenue of inquiry open to me that came from crossing that divide. And it drove a lot of people crazy and I had a hard time finding an audience. But when I found it I had something original at that time to say. I think that's a principle I've brought to problem-solving and try to draw on, how can we bring together things that seem to conflict and learn from the perspective of the one, how to advance our thinking about the other? So it's not that being a Medievalist or feminist, but the attempt to reconcile and learn from the integration of those two fields. I can't always do it, but I look hard to say, "If this seems so remote from what I'm trying to accomplish over here, lets ask how it could, in fact, be a dialogue with". . . .If you can do that with people, if you can do it with ideas, it's a very powerful form of taking questions to the next level. (President 4)

I joked in a column once that one of the reasons that I was able to be an administrator and administrative leader is that I had met in the pages of novels so many of the people whom I would then meet in real life I already knew what to expect. (President 8)

Although not asked specifically about gender, four presidents brought up gendered aspects of their leadership identity that are worth noting.

> Being female …does and doesn't enter into it and I'm…I'm very male-oriented, always have been. I think of myself as more androgynous and in the job I tend to bring to the job of presidency what I perceive as the sort of more male characteristics of myself. And I have no way of knowing whether I have compensated in this industry and do it as a result of that. I think in this specific situation, the male provost is not feminine but he has a lot of feminine characteristics and…and he and I balance nicely. So it's a nice working combination and it allows me to really sort of branch out and…and attempt at least to operate in a non-gendered fashion. (President 12)

> I'm wondering, "Do women leaders see themselves differently then men leaders?" People in my age range in particular, I think back in the 70s and 80s you saw women, you know the power suits, and you couldn't talk about kids, and so women tried to be more like men. And I think part of the fun of being leader in an organization or in higher education at this date is …I think women bring incredible strength to the table because they are not, they just lead so differently from men. I think men are so very hierarchical and they always need a dozen assistants. I think women are much more self-sufficient and less authoritarian. I think we are more collaborative in terms of getting things done. And I think there is less ego invested in getting things done too. "Okay we have to stuff envelopes, give me some of those I'll do some." (President 11)

> But I want to know if there are ways I could be using my gender more strategically. When it comes up—the clothes issue. Is there an element of humor I should be bringing to this? Are there strengths in women's leadership that I should be, instead of trying to be gender neutral in a situation. Should I somehow be identifying and using them? I see times when I think gender is at play, but you know it's like people with race, you want to be very careful not to assume that someone is treating you a certain way. You don't want to walk around with a chip on your shoulder. So figuring out what happened there. How did I get caught up in some gender stuff and how could I have been more strategic to get what I wanted out of that situation? (President 4)

> I think particularly those of us who were not educated at a college where it's all women and it was just very natural, particularly in my generation, to defer to the guys, and I find that sometimes I have to really make an effort to make sure that my view is heard. I am not a very loud person. I'm not one who particularly enjoys confrontations, but I have found that there are times that it would be very easy for me to just step back and let the fellows shout it out. I think that's something that is really important for women leaders, to make sure that their views are fully expressed at the table. We've had a luxury here for the last year

> because we've had four women presidents and that is about to change, but it's been a different dynamic. Also when I attended the HERS workshops it was really the first time that I had been in an all female, extended educational experience and how different it felt, and how lazy you can become when you just defer to the stronger, and in some cases, male voices. (President 6)

*Summary.* In describing themselves as leaders, these women presidents emphasize the importance of working with others and being part of a team. They accept the responsibility of the role and the accompanying loneliness, and, with few exceptions, are reluctant to label themselves with the word leader. These women exhibit compassion and a sense of humor and are committed to serving their institutions. They understand that, as a leader, they are a symbol of the institution.

The presidents speak easily of their strengths and areas they need to further develop. They question themselves, accept their mistakes, and are passionate about learning, for themselves and their communities. They are teachers and scholars and role models as part of their sense of themselves as leaders. They are intellectually curious, talented, and thoughtful and embrace the change and complexity that come with leadership.

*Career*

Within the leadership self-identity component of career, the main areas of exploration are: when the women first thought of becoming a college president, the intention and planning of their careers, and longevity. I asked them at the time that they accepted the position, how long did they see themselves in the role and has that changed, and what comes next and would they consider a second presidency. The women exhibit flexibility in moving through their career paths, are interested in learning and developing,

and are comfortable with the risk involved in both stepping into a presidency and looking beyond it to the future.

*First thought.* The two extremes of when these women first considered becoming a president are represented by President 6 and President 2. President 6 first thought of a presidency when her name was put forward in nomination for the presidency she now holds, "It was not part of my career plan until it was presented to me." She is the only president who moved into a presidency in a move from another campus within a university system.

At the other end of the spectrum, 20 years ago when she was a faculty member, President 2 was approached by the Vice President for Academic Affairs. He said that he thought she had potential as an administrator and recommended the American Council on Education (ACE) Fellowship Program as a way to gain administrative knowledge and experience.

> He said, "And that administrative experience could take you to a deanship, a vice presidency, and a college presidency." And I said, "A college president, oh, I don't think so." That was my reaction. I didn't say quite that to him but I was thinking, "My gosh, maybe a dean but I could never be a college…", but that was the first time that I had even thought [about a presidency] and I rejected it.

She was accepted as an ACE Fellow that year and approached the experience as a way to see what she needed to learn to become successful in administration. "So that year gave me the opportunity to realize I had gaps, and then how would I fill them, and that's what I ended up doing" (President 2). In the process of learning and filling in the gaps, she took on more and more responsible leadership positions in academic administration, leading to her current presidency.

With the exception of the president who came to the position from outside the

Academy, the other nine presidents had similar stories. They had a traditional path from faculty member to administration and as they rose in rank and had a better view of the presidency they were intrigued. For some, a seed had been planted earlier in their career when a previous president, mentor, or in one case, a husband, recognized and pointed out to them their potential for leadership. “I was provost for about six and a half years and really it was my husband who said after I had been there about three years. ‘You know, you really should be a President’” (President 1). For most of the women, once they decided to go after a presidency it fell into place quickly; they were in the position within a couple of years.

> I don’t think that idea ever occurred to me until I was in the provost position for the year and a half. And when I got into that position I started seeing and interacting more with college presidents and…and this will sound terribly egotistical, but watching them I began to think I can do it better than that, or I would like to try that. . . . I become bored pretty easily and I think without realizing it I had become quite bored as a faculty member. . . .So once I got into the provost position and it kind of gave me a bird’s eye view of the presidency, it did begin to look very appealing to me. (President 12)

> But given where I was and it came to me, “You are really passionate about liberal arts colleges, you like to run things so you know you could be a college president some day.” But that was just a flash. . . .I’m sure it planted a seed, but wasn’t until much later. . . Then of course the real moment when I started thinking about it was as soon as I became the provost at [former institution] I started getting calls from headhunters. And I had kind of forgotten that I had ever thought about being a college president. And I remember the first time I got a call I was shocked and I said, “I’ve only been provost for a year. You are calling me to ask if I’m interested in a presidency? I didn’t even know that I liked doing this.” And so it took me a while then to respond positively to those calls. I didn’t start even thinking about it until I had been a provost for five years. Then I was motivated by the fact that I’ve done this, I’ve learned almost everything there is to learn from this, either I go back to the faculty and teach, or I go be a provost somewhere big, or become a college…then the paths were a lot clearer and there weren’t that many of them. (President 4)

> Somebody told me that women have to be, or it’s typical for women, have to be told by somebody that they could be, instead of having this realization or articulating the intention. You know it’s not until someone gives you permission

> that you can start talking about it. Well that kind of sounds like me. . . .[Outside evaluators came to campus to evaluate the college in preparation for a new president after the former president resigned suddenly]. . . The assessment of me was that, even though some hard decisions had been made at the institution, that there was considerable respect for what I had accomplished and blah, blah, blah, blah and that at the very end of that evaluation he said that I was an excellent leader and that I had the potential to lead an education of higher…institution of higher learning. And I was really flattered and stunned that he would say that I was presidential material because he is pretty much the leading authority on the College and University Presidency. And so I thought, "Wow, you know maybe he's onto something." And I started to talk to people about going back to graduate school and I thought, "Well I better finish my doctorate." (President 11)

For one president it was not the recognition of another, but rather having her talents undermined by her former president, that pushed her into applying for her current position. After a particularly difficult conversation with her former president who suggested that she was doing too much and making her colleagues look bad, she returned to her office and received a phone call from a headhunter. He was asking her again if she would consider a presidency for which he felt she was a strong candidate and, after the day she had, "And I said, 'sure put my name in.' So it was petulance" (President 7).

As these women got closer to the presidency, many of them thought that it would be something they would be interested in doing, something they could do well, and it even could be fun. "It just looked really appealing once I got to a point where I could see it…it looked like a really fun job and it is" (President 12).

> When I was a Dean and looking at the Academic Vice President's position I thought that I could do that and do it well. I felt that way and then having looked at several presidents in action, some were good and some were good sometimes and not. I mean they were all good individuals. But when you look at those in a position and then you look at yourself and say, "You know I can do that. And it might be fun to do that." (President 3)

> My thesis statement to the [doctoral program], my personal statement, the first sentence was, "I want to be a college president." But it really wasn't until Jim Fisher said it that I started articulating…it was probably in my head anyway. I said I was a VP for years and years, and I sit at the President's conference table,

> and so many times think, "You know I would have done that differently …I could do this better. . . . And I thought, "Well, maybe I could." (President 11)

> It is actually even more fun than I imagined. It really is. Because you share in so much joy. Although there maybe difficult decisions or individual meetings that are problematic I very often see people at their very best. I celebrate them when they are doing wonderful things. I am working with them on what they have achieved and how to achieve more. . . So that sense of energy and excitement and ongoing joy. Yeah, it's even more than I imagined it to be when you are actually in the position. (President 5)

> I thought it would be fun. And you know it is fun. I had bosses that a lot of times I thought were mediocre, men bosses that were not as good as often the women that they were in charge of. And I thought all of these years I've complained about this guy telling me to go sit back, you're being too strong, and quit doing so much. And I thought if I were the President there's nobody. . . I can't complain about that. I mean you have a Board that you answer to but I really could do what I want to do and I'm not … it's sort of put your money where your mouth is almost. I felt this way and there's nobody that I would be bumping up against. It's whether I could do it or not. It would be on my own merit. (President 7)

President 9 came from a career in healthcare to higher education, entering at the level of president. For her, the considerations and decision-making process was different than for the other presidents.

> I knew that I did not want to stay in healthcare; I had a job I loved and it was just I needed to do something different and the time for change. And so I made the decision that I would look for something outside of healthcare and then I had to think about what kinds of things, areas, I would want to explore. I spent some time, with some help, thinking. I knew I wanted to be in a leadership position. I like transformation, I like leadership and I knew I wanted to be in a mission-driven institution. I didn't want to go work for an insurance company which I could have done. Or work in industry or the for-profit sector. So higher education seemed to be one of those areas and I really didn't think about college presidencies. But I was talking with one of these headhunters and they said, "Your profile is a good match for a college president. But you know it's going to take, because you are nontraditional president, you've never been in higher ed, you don't have a Ph.D., you know it will probably be several years before you could land a job as a college president." So this was five years ago when I was just thinking about what to do with my life. So I'm relatively new to leadership in higher education. (President 9)

*Intention and planning.* Because the women came to the idea of a presidency at

different times, their intention and planning varied.

> But certainly twenty years ago if you had said I was going to be a college president I would have said you are out of your mind. There was just no way that was ever going to happen. (President 11)

> Because in each situation that I've had, I have not sought out the position. People have come to me. So, in fact, I've sort of built my reputation on what I've done, starting out as a faculty member committed to research and for a lack of a better phrase, "was minding my own business," and then being asked to do something quite different. But at least in the beginning thinking, "Well, I'm going to go back to what I really wanted to do," then as you get further away from that original goal and all of a sudden it becomes a new set of goals and I might say that for me what has been the most convincing feature, whether or not to go onto this new opportunity or stay where I am, has been the opportunity to learn and to grow. (President 6)

> I worked for very good leaders and I worked for not so good leaders, some people that were less competent and made a lot of mistakes and so I learned from leaders who were very successful, very good at what they were doing, and then leaders who were not so successful. So I came into this with my eyes wide open so I haven't been surprised. I haven't redefined my role as president, it's pretty much been the same, but I think because I was number two on three different occasions for long periods of time. And so you see a leader in action and you take mental notes. I want to be like this, I don't want to be like this. I want to do these things, I don't want to do these things and so it was very clear in my mind what kind of a leader I wanted to be. (President 2)

And once the decision was made, most of these women left tenured positions for a presidency, serving at the will of the Board. The choice of taking on a presidency involved risk, risking secure employment for a position they might not like or be successful in.

> It was a leap of faith. I gave up tenure at [former institution]. I don't have a tenured faculty position at [current institution]. I didn't want one. I really thought I had enough confidence at that point to think if this doesn't work out I'll find something else. But I didn't really go to…I didn't have plan B in mind. And I still really don't. It's kind of a combination of drift and planning. You plan ahead to the extent you can but you let, and drift is the wrong word, but hasn't somebody defined luck as being ready to take opportunities, and so that's how I define it. (President 4)

> I'm looking at seven to ten years, somewhere in that range, but I'm an at-will employee. The Board of Trustees could tell me, the phone could ring and they could say, "Thank you very much for your service but we don't think your skills are needed anymore." I have no safety net. I had to give up tenure from my previous institution. I couldn't get tenure here because the administration doesn't have tenure, so you're kind of swinging without a net. (President 1)

> I think there is usually a certain amount of risk in taking the job…My husband said "What if you fail at this, it will be so public?" and I said, "What do you mean?" and he said "Well, I mean what if this doesn't work. What if you fail?" and I said, "Well I don't know, I guess I'll come home." I had never thought about it. I realized failure isn't…it wasn't something I expected to happen. (President 7)

*Longevity.* When considering longevity at their institutions, some women say they will retire from this presidency, although the timing of their departure has not been determined. Others vacillate on how long they expect to remain in the position and what might come next. All the women acknowledge the position's lack of job security and the reality that things can change; there is flexibility in their consideration of the future.

One president says, "I'll have this presidency and I'll retire. I'm not here to make a mark and move on to something bigger and better. I'm very happy here" (President 2). The most concrete plan is one in which the president expects to retire in two years once the Board agrees on the extension of her contract. Four presidents mentioned coordinating their departure with the timing of the phases of major fund raising campaigns. "We are in the silent phase of a campaign so I've got to decide whether I want to stick through the whole campaign or get ready to go and move on" (President 9). Some women mention it taking longer to accomplish their goals than they had expected and adjusting their expectations once being in the position. The following quotes are ordered by the age of the president, from the oldest to the youngest.

> I'm still enjoying what I'm doing. I'm not going to go any longer than ten [years]. It could be there may be reasons that I would leave anytime between right now

having finished six and ten. I…I did make another promise though come to think about it. Our Vice President for Institutional Advancement, we are in the midst of a capital campaign, and when we were having a conversation one day and he asked, "Are you going to be here through 2010?" I told him at that point that yes I would do that. So I guess I certainly committed to him for two more. (President 3)

I certainly took this job without any intention of having another job. I mean this is what I want to do and I'm giving it my all. I'm certainly willing to stay ten years although I didn't think at the time, especially in the beginning which was very, very hard, very hard at the start. I didn't think I would last ten years. Now I'm beginning to think maybe I will. I don't know. It seems more possible than it did in the beginning. (President 8)

I think when you assume a position like this there are things that you want to achieve and particularly in my case where at this point I don't see a next position but it's the ending of an academic career. And I'd like to be able to walk away from this position knowing that I had achieved the goals that I had set out to achieve and also made it a stronger place and one that is now well-positioned to attract an external or internal, a new president, internal/external doesn't matter. But a new president that can then take it to the next level. Three years clearly was not enough. Four years is almost, but years five and six will definitely, definitely be satisfactory. (President 6)

When I came they wanted to give me a three year contract. And I was struggling because I thought they were going to ask me for five and I just didn't know about coming to [state] for five years at this point in my life. I thought "Okay, I've got to do five years." . . . When they asked me for three years I thought "Oh, I can do it for three years. I can do that standing on one foot. Three years is good." All they asked for was three years and it was very liberating because all of the moving I've done, I only have three years and by that time if I'm going to get this in place and get things going I've got to get it moving now. So I had much more of a sense of urgency because of that three year contract. (President 7)

No this is where I plan to be, long enough to be able to get things done, and to feel as though I have done good things on behalf of the institution. So I think there is a time frame that you probably know in any given position where it will feel right. But no sense of a particular time frame. No. (President 5)

Well, at first I thought five years because the average length of a presidency usually is fairly short now. You still have presidents who have been around for twenty-five years but, for the most part, terms are shorter now. But after I got in here, it was obvious that I couldn't do what I was hoping to achieve in five years because there is too much cleaning up to do. So, I'm looking at seven to ten years, somewhere in that range. (President 1)

> Well this institution has a tradition of having presidents for a long time, 15 years or so. So I came in with the idea that probably this is the institution where I can spend a long period of time and there are a lot of exciting things to do here . . .and all that sounded exciting and something that is going to take some time. So certainly I perceive it as this place is a place where I can stay for a long time. (President 10)

The question of longevity is more up in the air for the two younger presidents.

> I guess I hadn't, I haven't really thought that through completely. I think it's the general assumption here that I would stay five years or more. I think the average presidency now is less…five years or less. It's going down every year. It used to be 15 and then, if that's the mean I wish I knew what the median was because something tells me there are a lot of two year presidencies out there. Because there are certainly some that are 20+ years. But you know, is the mean and median, are they similar? I tend to think there are a lot…it's a tougher job, there is a lot of turnover. So I know that this community expects, wants, needs some continuity in presidential leadership. But I don't know that I can see myself beyond five years. I could be here, I don't know that I have ambitions to go on to bigger and better places. I'd like to see this institution advance to a greater level of wealth and security while I'm President. And that could be next year or it could be five years from now. My goals are less on time and more on what I could do in terms of building it's security. I have a three year contract. (President 11)

> I'm going to do it for another five years and then move on to another institution from which I would probably retire. Or, I can do like other presidents that I know have done and, "Okay I'm going to give it fifteen years and when I walk away from this University it's going to be a really different place. It's going to be secure, the endowment, yada, yada, yada all those things. And people will remember me as a President who really made a different here." I still am not sure which of those scenarios is more appealing to me. (President 12)

When asked if they would consider a second presidency President 8 was clear, "I think a second presidency is not a bad thing. I'm not intending to have one." Considering the possibility brought out caution and optimism, recognizing the physical and emotional stamina needed for the job.

> So I suppose I will have to cross that bridge when I come to it. If five or six years from now this place is humming along, happy, wealthy, and some larger institution contacts me I honestly don't know what I'd say except that possibly …it would really depend. (President 11)

> I think the question for me is am I too old to have one more opportunity to be a president. I would like one more chance. I feel like I have learned so much and that if I started it again I could get so much more done in the first few years. It was a fast five years. But a slow learning curve in some ways and I think if I could start again I could do it all right. I understand that's an illusion. (President 4)

> I don't think so just because it is such an intense job, it's a 24/7 job. I think I would love to be…but I love being around colleges and I love the excitement, the strategy, the tensions. You know I love all of this so it's possible, it just depends. Next year I will celebrate my 60th birthday and so if I stay here for another 3 or 4 years I'm not sure I would want to jump into the intensity of another full-time college presidency. At least that's kind of how I'm feeling now. (President 9)

Options after this presidency, in addition to a second presidency, are open. Five presidents spoke of retirement next, yet retirement does not always mean doing nothing professionally.

> The real question is what do you do after you're a president? Someone asked me once, "What are you going to do next? Are you going to be Chancellor of the system?" And I thought, "Absolutely not, that is not a fun position and you don't get to be with students." I think the real difficulty is what do you do after you've been a president? It seems like I've learned so much and it's a skill set that should be transferable. You should still continue to give back somehow. I know a lot of presidents go into consultancies and that's one idea that I haven't really thought much about. I think presidents need to think about what is next to do. (President 1)

> But maybe looking at something else after you retire from the presidency what is the next thing that you would like to do. Do you get involved in policy development, get involved in more research, how do you leverage your knowledge and experience? I don't really know the answer to that. That's not something that I've thought about and I think most of the presidents, when they come to an institution they feel they want to stay there because . . . you accepted the position because you like the institution. So, so I don't know really, I have not thought about that and my original idea coming in here was, "Well this sounds like a nice place where I can contribute a lot to positively impact students and the community." (President 10)

> My family doesn't think that I would quit. They think I'm not going to be a good retired person. They think I need another kind of employment. . . . I think this is my last, I think it's my grandkids and genealogy, but you know you don't know. (President 7)

> What I find very intriguing are positions where retired presidents have gone in and sort of helped out an institution as sort of an interim president while they are either looking for a successor or just to clean up some issues. That might be considerable… worth considerable thought. (President 6)

*Summary.* Reviewing the career component of leadership self-identity encompasses when and how these women first considered a presidency, the intention with which they made career choices, and their perspective on longevity in the role and what comes next for them, professionally and personally. For most of these leaders, as they assumed positions of greater responsibility in higher education and were able to observe presidents and see what the job entailed, they saw a presidency as possible for themselves, something they could do, be good at, and even have fun doing it. For many a seed had been planted in the past and the recognition of their potential by others was often pivotal in their development into a presidency.

The women are flexible in their thinking, and open to possibilities, as to how long they will stay in the position and what they might go to afterwards. Most of the presidents expect to retire from this presidency, at a yet-to-be-determined time when they feel their goals have been accomplished. The younger presidents, with a longer span of years ahead of them before retirement, can envision different possible scenarios—remaining in their current presidency for their careers, or moving on to a second presidency at a different institution.

*Relationships*

Developing relationships and working with others is a facet of how these women presidents see themselves as leaders. In addition, their relationships, professional and personal, with families and networks of support, and the sense of balance in their lives

and with themselves in the role of president comprise this component of leadership self-identity.

*Mentors, role models, and teachers.* The participants all recognize the mentors, role models, and teachers who have influenced their development as leaders. While the three roles vary slightly from one another, they are examples of the power of relationships to shape one's concept of leadership. They are also reciprocal; women mentioned being mentored and mentoring others, having and being a role model, and being taught and being a teacher.

Mentoring is seen as a natural element of succession planning. A common theme of these stories is a mentor recognizing the leadership potential of an emerging leader, taking the time to plant the seed of future possibility in her mind, and that leader then wanting to do the same for someone coming up behind her. It is an accepted, and perhaps expected, leadership practice. "I think mentorship is just what you do" (President 5) and "It feels very good because I think that women by our nature are mentors" (President 6). After attending the Harvard Program for New Presidents, President 9, "deliberately sought out a mentor, and I had a college president mentor," an example of the process continuing consciously.

> In my life there were key moments in time where somebody saw a spark and they acknowledged me. Without those acknowledgements, I come from a very modest background and my parents were not well educated, and so I always saw the deficits. So I needed people to see the potential and the spark. I had many people along the way that saw that and would acknowledge me for it. And that was very, very empowering. Now they didn't find me a job and they didn't say you are going to be a college president. But they, whatever work I did, they found it valuable or substantive or creative and they allowed me to hear it from them and that praise was really important. (President 2)

> But I'm becoming more aware of the importance of succession planning, and also I feel like I owe a huge debt to that President who saw something in me, kept an

> eye on me. Something that I didn't see in myself and sort of pushed me toward a goal that I would have never come to on my own. And yeah, I would love to do that for someone else." (President 12)

> I had been [at my former institution] maybe two and half years, I was pregnant with my first daughter, I didn't have tenure, [and the President] invited me to lunch. A one-on-one lunch with the president?! He said, "I just wanted to have a chance to tell you that I think you would be a good administrator some day. Not now, you need to get tenure, you are obviously having other things going on in your life right now. But someday you would be really good and here's why. You are clear, you're rational, you are…you listen to other people well but you can communicate your own ideas and so give it some thought." That was such a turning point that someone would say that to me. And I look back, and he took the time to do that, have I done that with any junior faculty? So I try. I've created a position for the special assistant to the president where I can give faculty who I think could be good administrators a chance to try working with me. And I did it out of selfishness the first time because I needed some help on a particular issue and now I'm trying to use it as a way to mentor people. (President 4)

> I do a lot of mentoring with young women. I'm a sucker anytime somebody calls me. I have a small group of young women or women that I spend time with mentoring and coaching. They will call me and we will talk about things and I feel that's part of the responsibility of being a leader and a colleague, to do that kind of thing. (President 9)

Role models play a role both personally and professionally for these leaders.

Reflecting on receiving a women's leadership award, President 6 comments,

> It feels very good because I think that women by our nature are mentors. We want to be role models for others both personally and professionally. So, I felt very good about that, and quite honestly when that term [role model] was used, I sort of melted because it really did come home to me as something that I value very much, because it's been so valuable to me to think that somehow directly or indirectly I'm passing this on to others is very important.

For some, being a role model is being a leader. Others struggle with the scrutiny that comes from being a public role model.

> I always think in terms of myself as a leader, I think of the word role model. Am I the kind of a role model that people in this institution can feel proud of when I walk into a room or when they go some place and say I work at [institution]? They want to feel good about that. (President 9)

> Not just a female president, but a gay female president. Because I, since coming out about 15 years ago and I have a partner of 15 years, we live very publically and as a professor here I really tried to be as out as I could for the gay students on campus, so many of whom come to us closeted and that sort of thing. So that was always part of my mission if you will…as a faculty member. Boy, is that politically tricky as a president. Very, very tricky. On one hand it's almost a recruitment and marketing advantage…because the number of gay students has increased since I became President; they are very proud of the fact that we have a gay President. On the other hand even though the Chancellor or the Trustees, legislators absolutely support that we have domestic partner benefits, one of the first in the country to do that, I still have to be so careful with that. (President 12)

President 3 recognizes, "I was always happy as a teacher." Teachers were often role models and one president comments on the evolution of her thinking about herself as a teacher.

> I'm beginning to not think of myself as a faculty member and it's taken a little while to get to that point. I still think of myself as a teacher and one of the things that is happening for me is that teacher and faculty member are beginning to become divorced. So the word teacher itself for me no longer means someone who stands in the classroom with students, but I'm still teaching. So that's been a kind of nice transition. And it's still very much a piece of my self identity now as I look at myself. (President 12)

*Senior team.* The presidents speak about the importance of their senior teams to their leadership. The amount of turnover since assuming the presidency varied; some turnover was natural and some was by design of the new president. In either case, these relationships are indicative of the values of the president and pivotal to the success of her leadership.

> It is actually very good to have a mixture of the people who have been here for a while because they know this institution and the ins and outs and have then some new people who bring in new ideas. So I think that's a good mixture to have. (President 10)

> But you have to have not only the expertise and the confidence in the senior team, but the most important piece is, or pieces are, collegiality and loyalty. I guess I put…I put loyalty at a very high level. You have to trust the loyalty of your Vice Presidents and I've seen it too many times where maybe three out of the five Vice Presidents are loyal and trustworthy and the other two aren't. Doesn't work. If

> you don't have a Vice President that you can trust completely you've got to get rid of that person right away. (President 11)
>
> Years ago they used to talk about presidents coming in and asking for everyone's resignation, which always has struck me as the silliest thing I've ever heard. Why would you toss away the expertise and experience that made the place the place you wanted to come to in the first place. Yeah well let's make the job initially as difficult as we possibly can. I was very fortunate and the team is still in place. (President 5)
>
> I think people do look at the team and they look at your interactions with the people that you work with. And if you don't have confidence in the people you work with, people begin to see it. Because you are second guessing them in meetings or you're undermining them, not consciously but in your actions and with your words. (President 2)
>
> …trying to create a leadership team that was diverse that didn't duplicate…Because you feel so exposed in this you tend to want people that you are really comfortable and that are going to support you. And I had to struggle against that at times and pick people that I thought would challenge and would build diversity in that leadership team. And that's hard, because I know why presidents tend to pick their old office mates…and people just around you because you do feel very exposed in this job. (President 7)
>
> It's the best team in the nation. It is just a wonderful team and I realize that strongly when I talk sometimes with other presidents. And I don't say that arrogantly, I say it to indicate that I'm lucky. I just really have fine, fine people. So one of the things that I worry about, probably I worry about on a daily basis, but that crosses my mind frequently, is what happens if so-and-so gets a job somewhere, and it's going to happen one of these days because these people are too good to stay in one place forever and you know they'll have other opportunities. But I just hope they stay as long as possible because we have a terrific team. Not only are they great as individuals, but they are great in the way they work together. And I feel just a lot of trust in them and will do anything I can to support them and I feel like they feel the same way. (President 8)

*Families.* I intentionally did not ask the presidents about their families; I wanted them to choose whether or not to bring their personal life into the conversation. If they brought up their family I then felt permission to ask follow-up or clarifying questions. Of the 12 presidents, the only one who did not mention a family at any point during the interview was the woman who came to the presidency from outside the Academy.

Ten presidents are married, one openly gay president is partnered, and one woman is divorced. Nine of the women have children, two do not, and one never mentioned her family. One president said she was glad that I hadn't asked about her personal life, even though she offered information about her family and personal life. "And I thought you would have asked about the personal life side. Frankly I was glad you didn't because I didn't think…I don't think it is as critical" (President 7).

Many women speak of their spouse as a trusted advisor, confidante, and supporter. In speaking of the support of their husbands, two women recognize a difference in that their husbands do not play the role in entertaining that the wife of a male president usually plays.

> He was supportive of me all along the way and we have a nice relationship; he's a CPA. So, he has the business perspective of the private sector but also is blessed with common sense. And so each time I would be given these opportunities and we talked it over, [he would say], "Yeah, I really think you should try it. They wouldn't have asked you if they didn't think you could do it." So, it's been good to have that kind of support. (President 6)

> And then my husband, we decided early on that only one of us could be an academic. We met in graduate school and this was in the days when jobs were closing down and we decided that really, if we wanted to live together, one of us would be the academic and one would be the trailing spouse. And since I was more willing to do the. . .the kind of. . . drudgery side of getting a Ph.D., and my husband is more creative and more independent. So he's been the trailing spouse. He has a job that can go anywhere and he deliberately sought out that work and loves it. And he has always worked part-time when our kids were growing up so that somebody was there to drive them to practice and all of that. I just couldn't have done any of it without his support. (President 4)

The strain on a family with younger children is evident. With few exceptions, the presidents' children are grown and out of college. One president is a single mother to a 20 year-old son and another president has a younger son. "We have an 11-year-old son

who has mixed feelings about this. You know it's kind of cool to say your mom's a president on the one hand, on the other a little jealous of the time" (President 11).

The pressures and methods of dealing with the stress vary among the presidents and their families.

> And I brought this up last fall when we had a panel of nine women presidents that regardless of what choice we make, there's also an association, more often than not, with guilt. I've had to take my mother to a doctor's appointment and as a result had to postpone some meetings and I feel guilty about that. And then other times, I would say to her, "I can't take you because I have this important meeting." So, here I am at my meeting thinking, "What kind of daughter am I?" I sense that other women presidents have had to do those same things. (President 6)

> I mentioned earlier that my husband was a President for a long time so I learned by the second or third year, he and I got it right. In August, we take the calendar for the next academic year and actually we do it in July, not in August. And we put all the kids birthdays, our anniversary, all the most important dates, the dates when my parents come to visit, what else, if we know someone is going to have a wedding or at least we know the month, we stick it in there at the top of the calendar. If we're going to take a family vacation, that's plugged in there. And so all of our personal dates go on there and they can't be changed by anybody. Unless the governor calls me, it would have to be an extreme crisis for me to give up a dinner with my children. (President 2)

*Networks of support.* In addition to their families, these women have strong networks of support. They may be professional associations, networks of women leaders, formal groups, or friends who provide professional advice, peer support, information to someone new to the area, or a sympathetic ear. One woman said a group of women presidents were trying to get together, "But it has been hard for us to find each other and to find time" (President 4). These networks can also help to ease the loneliness of the position.

> When I was appointed president, he called me and, in effect, gave me a couple of pieces of advice and one of them being that it is a very lonely position and you need to have someone that you can call, than you can rely upon for good advice. Not necessarily the advice that you would like to hear, but someone who can give

> you an unbiased opinion, and probably someone who has been there so they know the perspective. (President 6)

> I have some very close friends who are men although I really value my association with women, friendships with women. Just to be able to pick up the phone and… they work in higher education . . . is important because they understand particular eccentricities that you might have to deal with when you get together with them or call them up, and they know exactly what you are talking about. (President 11)

*Balance.* The word balance is one that keeps coming up in a number of different contexts. The women use it to describe the balance in their personal life, with their children, their health, balancing personal boundaries, and their positioning with others.

> I sent an email in the beginning of April last year to the community and I called it "Probability" and I said, "What is the probability that my daughter's graduation from medical school will be the same day, almost the same time, as the commencement?" I said, "It doesn't matter what the probability is. It's going to happen and I'm choosing to go to my daughter's graduation," and I pushed the send button. People said to me, "The community is going to be upset, it's unheard of." The Chancellor said, "I think you should go to your daughter's graduation" and then I got a slew of emails back from people saying we wouldn't respect you if you didn't choose your daughter's graduation. And other people said, "That's great, we believe that you made the right choice." A couple people around the edges were probably, but I think people that have families and have their priorities set right understood, it wasn't a ripple in the community. I think my private life balances me very well. I'm very clear about that. I will have no regrets after the presidency that I, but I feel that way about raising my children. They're great adults and I asked them, "Do you feel like I shortchanged you because I worked?" They said, "No, it was fun going to meetings and going to the college." (President 2)

> I have a daughter that is graduating from law school, she's 25 and I have a daughter who is a sophomore in college so I'm finally an empty-nester and actually my children have been I think a huge… I have been enormously lucky and empowered by the fact that my children are my balance, my hobby. . . I do nothing else except enjoy a terrific relationship with two wonderful daughters. And that's been lifesaving throughout. (President 4)

> And that also means I'm not going to be out every night, it means I get good sleep, and it means I exercise every day. So I try to keep my life more in balance. I have a real purpose to keep it in balance, because truly my health is dependent on it. (President 1)

> My partner and I decided when we took this, when I took this job, we took this job…that she would accompany me to a lot of off campus things that some of the other presidents' partners and spouses don't go to, just as a sort of subtle nonaggressive way to make it clear that this is who we are and we are not ashamed of this. But…but balancing, I feel like I'm always sort of pushing the envelope just a bit because I want to be as honest, have as much integrity, I want to live as openly and honestly as I can, but the line that I can't cross is to the detriment of the University. And it's hard to find that line sometimes. And I have crossed it a time or two and had to back off and apologize but…but finding the balance between what I'm willing to do as a person and what I have to do as a leader of the institution … I didn't anticipate that at all. (President 12)

> Probably the word that I try hardest to live up to is balanced. So knowing when to make decisions, be out front, make statements, offer positions, and use the bully pulpit on the one hand…and when to be inclusive and consultative to defer to others, especially in a small college setting like this where there is a huge expectation of inclusiveness and community governance, and so on and so forth. So that more and more I try to be strategic about using those two poles of leadership styles. (President 4)

That sense of balance is one these women strive for in their personal lives. The lack of time and the demands of the job are a common theme. "I don't have enough time to read, to really think" (President 9). Some women seem to find ways to reach that balance, others share tips, and others comment on the overwhelming demands of the position.

> I have a little bit more control over how much time I spend at night on the job, in other words, the time commitment outside of the eight to five day. That's not to say I don't do things at night, but I have managed my life so I'm not out every night. (President 1)

> When I come in to work I know this is work and this is not as I said, this is not my personal life. The day I leave the presidency my family will not have felt that I ignored them for ten years and never fit them in, they were second to, no. And people here respect that. (President 2)

> A couple of trustees had said to me, "Make sure that you allow yourself personal time because this type of position is one that you could work 24 hours a day and that you need, for your sake and probably for the sake of others too, you need to get away. So, don't just think in terms of the more you work, the more successful you are going to be." I thought was very important. I'm a big football fan. I love professional football and it's probably a weakness of mine too because I plant

> myself on Sunday afternoons and watch a lot of games, but also I have learned a lot from the leadership styles of coaches. (President 6)

> Something you usually lack when you get into this kind of position is the time for your personal life. . . How do you carve a space for your personal life? . . . How do you prioritize what is in your business arena, but you really don't put your private time as a priority. I think that's something that I really need to learn because what happens is you don't have enough time for your friends anymore. And you usually don't have any private life anymore. . . . I think the most important thing is to be able also to find your own time for your own activities and being able to detach yourself from time to time from what's going on at work because you have this huge responsibility this huge big picture that you are looking at all the time and all the aspects as I said not internal but external and then you forget about nurturing yourself and your family. And my son sometimes tells me, "Well you don't cook anymore." (President 10)

> One of the biggest challenges is the time commitment because you could be here 24/7 because the place never closes. You can never go home and everyone would be fine with that, except for your family. So I guess I've learned how to accept the fact that I do have to be here a lot, while also asserting my need to have my personal time. (President 11)

> I knew it would be a 24/7 position but I guess I didn't imagine that it would be quite so consuming. There is no life outside a presidency. Not in my opinion. . . . So it's a total, you are signing on for your whole life. And that probably was more than I, it wouldn't have stopped me. (President 8)

*Self-role merger.* The role of the college president is a challenging one and these presidents recognize the boundary of being in the role and the challenges of stepping out of it. President 1 says, "So inasmuch as I am a president, I guess I'm a leader. I am very comfortable, though, not necessarily being in the leading mode. And when I go home, I don't have to be the leader."

> [Speaking about the President of Harvard and the response to comments he made about the capability of women faculty.] You don't step outside the role. You're always in it. So that's been that was perhaps more than I anticipated. I think there are more politics around it too than I anticipated. (President 8)

> You have to be aware of the fact that everything you say will be stated and heard not just as a private citizen, but as a president, and by leaps and bounds it becomes the position of the institution. So I think it's a weighty responsibility even though I joke about it. I'm still very conscious of the fact that people see me

> as the institution, and not as a person. So I don't talk politics, I don't talk religion. Weather is a good topic. (President 1)

> I will tell you that the amount of support you get because people love the University. Not you personally but as the President of the University that surprised me how much I thought I would be out there having to do a lot. It's hard because you're always being judged or evaluated or I feel it is a role it's not a job, it's a role. So it's different. And I think I got that but how it was different I think is in the fact that that so many people want the University to do well and therefore help you do what you need to do well. And that was very gratifying. In some ways it's harder and in some ways that's made it easier than what I had anticipated. (President 7)

Four of the presidents identify themselves as introverts which creates challenges in how they fulfill the role of president. "I consider myself a very serious introvert which is not unusual for people in theater. It is one thing to go in and assume a role, it's another thing to be yourself" (President 11).

> I'm introverted and enjoy being alone; I would spend most of my time alone if I could. So being around other people is actually, especially with groups of people, is very tiring to me. I find in social functions I'm good for about thirty minutes and then I have to go outside and then I can come back in and do it again. So it's a very intense thing. (President 12)

> I'm shy. I hate cocktail parties. I detest cocktail parties. I'm not as assertive and aggressive as some people that I've worked for and worked with. . . So, it's okay to admit where you feel you have your weaknesses, but here are some strategies and ways that you overcome them because of the scheme of things. These are minor. Your performance is not based upon how well you socialize at cocktail parties. (President 6)

Distance and the accompanying loneliness are recognized aspects of balancing the demands of the role of president.

> I think a leader has to be willing to embrace the working alone part but at the same time not let that show to other people. A good leader is able to bring people along, to get people to work with you, to accept you as the leader. At the same time realizing that you are not one of them. (President 12)

> And part of that is distance and that again goes back to that solitary role that you have to be comfortable with. You can't get too close to anyone, and you can't let

> your hair down too much with anyone. Otherwise you lose your presidential power. So that distance is…is part of that image too. (President 11)

> Someone else told me always to remember that the people that I worked with were not my friends and so to be careful what I said to people. I take, I do that. I always remember you work with me, you are my colleague, but you are not my friend. So there is only so much I can ever say, and I'm very careful. (President 2)

*Summary.* Relationships are a critical facet of the leadership self-identity of this group of women college presidents. They value and nurture their relationships with colleagues and their senior team. Mentors, role models, and teachers have encouraged them and helped them to find themselves as leaders, and they in turn feel a responsibility to play those roles in the lives of others. Families are important and, with one exception, the women speak of them with enthusiasm, care, and recognition of the key role they play in their success and happiness. Other friendships and relationships bolster these women as they attend to the constant balancing act of their lives. Some express more frustration than others with the time demands of the presidency and its infringement on the rest of their lives. The participants also talk about stepping in and out of the role of president and how they see themselves doing managing that boundary.

*Narrative*

These women leaders tell stories about themselves as leaders and their lives as leaders; they are not telling stories that set them apart or about their accomplishments. They will even tell a story on themselves, often a humorous account of learning from a mistake. Many of the women, in describing themselves as leaders, identify as a strong communicator. They may be communicating a vision, acting as a translator for their campus, or using language clearly to share their thoughts. Language, whether oral or written, and the integrity of their word, run deeply in their academic background, play a

critical role in their everyday accomplishments, and is expressed through the quality and character of their voice in the community. The presidents understand the power of their voice and are deliberate in how they use it.

*Communication and language.* The women understand the potential of authentic, clear communication. "Of course the higher you go in the position, and the more responsibility you have, the more communication and collaboration are important" (President 10). Many of the women have an academic background in language or literature and draw upon their skill set in articulation and communication.

> My job is communication. I would guess that there are probably as many people from the disciplines of History and English as there are from, well maybe not Education, but certainly from a lot of the other fields, because part of what you do is communication. And in some cases I think it's a nice thing that lines link to my mind. That when I'm speaking to someone very often I can quote because I care about a meaningful line [from literature or History]for a situation like that. (President 5)

> I was very clear with faculty and everyone in each one of my speeches. And that's why I felt the first year my Communications Director quit, because he thought I didn't have…I didn't listen to him and it was upsetting to him. I think for the last President he wrote everything and she stood and read it, and I wanted to do this myself. But I think that communicating authentically as a leader, if people hear your voice and they hear your words, then that's how they are going to commit. And at my inaugural address I did the speech and the faculty did a spontaneous standing ovation. They stood up, and it wasn't the audience, it wasn't the trustees, I looked out it was the faculty that stood up. And I thought, "Okay, if you're in I'm in. We're going to do this." And I think that was the moment I really committed to the University. I didn't realize it before. I thought if they're willing to come on this because I described what I thought we needed to do and it was an aggressive plan. (President 7)

> I think social workers are natural communicators and people who tend to use process and are comfortable with process. And I'm comfortable with process, I'm comfortable with inclusion, I'm comfortable with a lot of talk. So it's been helpful in that sense. (President 9)

For these leaders, communication, and particularly language, requires a deliberate effort. President 4 commented, "Another challenge is remembering who you are speaking

to and what vocabulary to use. You can't use the language of the boardroom in the faculty meeting" and President 5 recognizes, "The ability to care about words is very useful." President 8 adds, "I care very much about words. I care about people. I like to think that being a student of literature sensitized me to nuances and subtleties." Trust and integrity are engendered through authentic communication.

> She [a friend with corporate experience] gave me a two-hour tutorial in how to use language with CEOs …basically, and the kind of people who are on boards, that was very different from the language that I normally used. I wasn't lying; I was just packaging my approach differently with a very new vocabulary for me. "Take it to the next level" for example, which I have never used that. What in the world does that mean? . . . It's just understanding how to use those words in a way that will communicate leadership in that context. (President 4)

> But I do feel that people want to see that in a leader. They want to feel that they can trust what that person is saying. They want to feel that they can trust that that person is making decisions that are being made from a sense of integrity. And then I think it's easier for people to accept tough decisions. (President 9)

> I fundamentally believe and I learn from good leaders that when you say something, you better mean it. And that your word in the community, and I mean not only the college community here but the people that I work with outside this community also, that your word has to have meaning. And so I, I'm very careful with what I say to people. If I say, "I'd love to have dinner with you," I mean it. If I say, "Let's have a cup of coffee," I will follow up. If I say, "We're going to commit resources," unless something happens that I have no control over, I will commit resources. If I say, "Let me help you to a young person," I mean it. I follow up on that and I will help. And I've learned from good leaders that people want to say things that people want to hear. They generally don't follow up and people don't forget that. . . . They begin to question your word and fundamentally trust is about keeping your word. So I learn from good leaders that the word is very important and keeping it. (President 2)

*Voice.* The presidential voice or the voice of leadership emerges as a theme in all of the interviews. The presidents are not talking about finding their leadership voice, but rather how they use their voice and how it is heard by others. They state that people want to hear from the president, yet they find it is difficult to think through an idea with others without them hearing it as a directive, and they can never think aloud without recognizing

the consequences. “You know so you have to be very careful on how you express yourself” (President 11). President 6 speaks about being “very guarded” and President 8 adds, “But there is a kind of imputation of motive to you so you become more circumspect about what you say and what you do.”

> What has changed is the recognition that people actually care what I think about and they care what I say. When you’re at different positions in your life, the best one I can talk about is Mom. Sometimes my kids really don’t care what I think, and they tell me that. But as soon as you become a president, I could walk into a room and say, “Blue would be a lovely color for this room” and the next thing I know, it was painted blue. So you do have to be mindful of the fact that people take what you say seriously and act on it without your intention to have an action occur. (President 1)

> Everybody is looking at you as the President. If you walk with a smile across campus then everything is going well. If you frown just a little bit, people are going to start asking themselves, “What’s going on?” And if you say something, people think if you say, “Maybe, what do you think? Maybe this will be good.” People are going immediately to think about this is what the President wants to do rather than the President was asking me for my opinion. (President 10)

> I am a very good writer so even though people will sometimes write for me something, a letter or the core of a speech maybe, I craft it to my own voice and that is very important because when I give a talk or speech, it’s plausible to people. The words are my words and the ideas are generally ideas that I can express with ease because they are my words on the paper. And I think it’s really important again that communicates to people that I am plausible in this leadership role, in the Presidency. Even if it’s a technical area and I may not have direct expertise, the words that I use are my words. They are not the words an engineer would use or a scientist. There may be technical terms, but I use them in a way that makes me comfortable. I think the other thing is that when I speak, I always pay attention to the words I use. So when someone may use a word that I think is slightly loaded I pay attention to that word, but I don’t always catch it. I mean, we all make mistakes, but generally I’m sensitive to the word and the power of the word. I got that just from teaching writing and from teaching literature all those years. I also have a lot of literary references in my head. So it’s easy to pull a quote or remember a paragraph that might be sensitively written that might make the speech a little richer. I think that because I taught writing for so long I’m not afraid to re-write things. So my letters go through multiple drafts and that I never write a letter once or read a draft of a letter once and say it’s going out. Generally, unless it’s something very short, generally it takes time and I think that was good training as an English major. (President 2)

Two presidents also remind us that it can still be difficult for women's voices to be heard at the leadership table.

> I think from the perspective of women leaders is the question of women being in situations where you are the only one, or there are not many women. And I think that that happens, you're a CEO so you tend to go to meetings where, boards where most people are male. I'm in my late fifties so you would say, well things have changed, and there are more women around the table. But you know what, it depends. I still go to meetings where I'm the only woman or there are only two of us or they don't listen to us, because the men are cutting the deal. I think this whole issue about where women find themselves as college presidents in terms of a male society that's really dominated by male leaders is really the only thing I would've added. It's still a complexity. You find yourself trying to assert yourself in ways that at other meetings you might not assert yourself. And I think there are men who are very sensitive to that and men who are not sensitive to that. It's mixed. (President 2)

> I enjoyed working with [former president] as a leader. Also having sat at the Vice Presidential table for many years still you had to really kind of struggle to get your voice heard, and especially if you were the only woman at the table. It was like forget it. But she was really good about every voice and she would stop a guy from talking and make sure if you needed to say something, and that was so liberating. I hope that I can and that I do it and can impart the same kind of sense of equality and just different management style that I found working for a woman. (President 11)

*Summary.* Communication, language, and voice are the common elements of narrative emerging from the data. These women are communicators; it is part of their identity as a leader. They are skilled at using language and believe in the power of the word. The voice of the president is heard loudly and acted upon quickly; these leaders are careful and deliberate about what they say and how they say it. This paradox of communication—that it can connect you to others while also distancing you in your role— is reflected in the narratives of the women presidents.

## *Conclusion*

The findings of this study align with the four components of leadership self-identity: core identity, career, relationships, and narrative. The participating women

presidents talk about themselves as leaders: in relationship with their constituents; as a representative of and in service to their institutions; as communicators and facilitators; as people with strengths and weaknesses, willing to make mistakes, and committed to learning, for themselves and others. Their career paths have been guided by mentors, shaped by choices for their own learning and development, and driven by the desire to make a difference. The presidency is a challenging position, requiring the commitment of time and energy and the ability to balance life within and outside the role. The developing and sustaining of relationships, personal and professional, are a focus for these women. Leading complex lives requiring balance and reflection, these women rely upon deliberate use of language in their leadership expression.

# Chapter V: Discussion

## *Introduction*

The narratives of the women college presidents interviewed for this study are similar and the emerging themes can be organized according to the leadership self-identity components of core identity, career, relationships, and narrative. Core identity themes emerging from the findings include working with others, self as leader, service to the institution, presentation of self, self-assessment, and learning and teaching. The themes of when they first thought of becoming a college president, intention and planning, and longevity are aspects of the career component. Relationship themes include: mentors, role models, and teachers; the senior team; families; networks of support; balance; and self-role merger. The narrative component encompasses the themes of communication and language, and voice. From these themes, five critical concepts of leadership self-identity emerge: authenticity, leading through relationships, composing a life, balance, and learning.

These women see themselves as leaders, although the label of leader is more comfortable for some than others. They describe themselves as collaborators, facilitators, change agents, role models and teachers. Working with others and developing relationships is a priority because they see it as effective and they prefer to work that way. These presidents perform in service to their institutions, understand that they are representative of their institutions, and feel it is a privilege to be able to make a difference in the lives of their communities. As leaders they are able to assess their deficits as well as their strengths, and they often do so using humor. Standing at the center of the work of

these leaders are learning and teaching, which are also personal values and the behaviors they model.

For most of the women, the goal of becoming a president emerged as they took on administrative positions of greater responsibility and had the opportunity to see what the position entailed. They were intrigued and thought it was something they could do and do well, and have fun in the process. A story they hold in common is that of a mentor seeing their potential earlier in their career and planting the seed of a possible future presidency. The seed is remembered upon reflection, rather than driving their career choices.

The pathways into the presidency resemble the pathways out of it. These women make choices largely by seizing opportunities that look interesting and offer learning. Risk is inherent in this pathway and is recognized without deterring the pursuit. The women have ideas about the future with few definite scenarios; they will see how events unfold and make decisions accordingly—what one president calls *drift and planning*. The mark that they want to make with their presidency will be one of leaving their institutions stronger than when they arrived, not one of self-aggrandizement.

Relationships are primary in their work lives and how they understand their work. The presidents see mentoring and role-modeling as part of their leadership role, because they were mentored and learned from role models in their development. They delight in collaborative efforts, which also present some of the true difficulties of the position. Personnel issues, Board relations, student and faculty-related issues are mentioned as some of the greatest challenges these women face as presidents.

These women are engaged in balancing—their time, their personal lives, the needs of their families, the demands of the job, and themselves in and out of the role of

president. Age and experience appear to help as they hone the management of priorities and as their children leave home, but they still all recognize the time and energy required to do the work of the president.

They value communication and language, intrinsically and as tools of leadership. The presidents recognize the power of their voice, in joining them with others and setting them apart. There is an unfolding nature to their narratives—the unfolding of their careers, their presidencies, their families and their lives.

### *Authenticity*

Although they do not use the term authentic leadership in describing themselves, the women interviewed for this study embody authenticity as described by Josselson (1996), "We recognize more and more what it means to be who we are, rather than someone else" (p. 28). These women presidents have the confidence and courage to be uniquely themselves. "We have to feel comfortable in our own skin" (President 1).

Core identity, what Hiller (2005) calls personality and Madsen (2008) presents as a personal core, is the leader's character, who she is as a person. The link between character and authentic leadership is reflected in the literature and embodied in this group of women leaders: "Authenticity cannot be meaningful if the self is empty of character" (Sparrowe, 2005, p. 430) and authentic leaders "are more likely than inauthentic leaders to find the inner strength and internal compass to support them and guide them when dealing with their challenges" (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 400). This core identity, and its effect on those around her, is expressed by President 9:

> I try to lead with integrity, with transparency, with honesty, because I think at the end of the day if people trust you and they feel that, even if the answers aren't what they want to hear, or if they don't like the direction you are going in, or they don't like what's happening in the institution, if they feel that the leader is

> trustworthy and honest, then that is one thing. If the leader is not trusted and not respected for honesty, then there isn't a feeling that I'm getting a fair shake.

Authenticity, integrity, and creativity, the three aspects of leadership identity proposed by Friedman (2006), are very present in these women. They act in a manner consistent with their core values and are innovative and experiment with new ideas. Words such as honesty, trust, integrity, ethics and transparency are common in the interviews. You have to "trust who you are and what you believe and what you do as an administrator emanates from who you are" (President 5).

Friedman (2006) includes continual learning and encouraging others to do so as aspects of creativity. These women presidents dedicate themselves to continual learning, their own as well as others'. "I've learned so much. I feel like I've really grown in so many dimensions and that feels great" (President 4). They have a high level of self-knowledge; they are capable of honest self-appraisal; they question themselves and seek input from others. "This role for me certainly entails a lot of self-questioning and self doubt and frequent feelings of inadequacy" (President 8).

Concurrent with Erkut's (2001) findings that, "among women who have reached top levels of leadership, there is a level of comfort that allowed them to bring a more integrated sense of being a woman and a leader to their work" (p. 87), these women presidents talk easily about their families and often use examples from their personal lives to further describe their leadership.

> What has changed is the recognition that people actually care what I think about and they care what I say. When you're at different positions in your life, the best one I can talk about is Mom. Sometimes my kids really don't care what I think, and they tell me that. But as soon as you become a president, I could walk into a room and say, 'Blue would be a lovely color for this room' and the next thing I know, it was painted blue. (President 1)

This integration of lives and selves also came through in the tone of the interview. As these women spoke about personal lives and families, they often used humor to express themselves, as people as well as presidents.

Authenticity may be conveyed through language and the manner in which leaders express themselves and use their voice.

> I craft it [a letter or speech] to my own voice and that is very important because when I give a talk or speech, it's plausible to people. The words are my words and the ideas are generally ideas that I can express with ease because they are my words on the paper. And I think it's really important again that communicates to people that I am plausible in this leadership role, in the Presidency. Even if it's a technical area and I may not have direct expertise, the words that I use are my words. They are not the words an engineer would use or a scientist. There may be technical terms, but I use them in a way that makes me comfortable. I think the other thing is that when I speak, I always pay attention to the words I use. (President 2)

### *Leading through Relationships*

For these women leadership means relationship—the connections with constituents and collaborative efforts. These connections are strategic, effective, and valued by the women as the way they choose to lead. "My role is to ensure that everything we are doing is connected and, therefore, to generate a sense and assurance of connectedness, that things fit together" (President 8). Leadership through relationships puts the presidents in the *messy middle*, leading from within rather than having to be positioned out in front.

The women college presidents interviewed for this study view themselves as leaders in their connections to others, as collaborators, team members, and facilitators. Relationships are the organizing principle of their leadership (Hartnett, 1994). Their job is to help students, faculty, alumni and community members succeed. These women place themselves on the team or in the middle, without losing sight of their position of

ultimate responsibility and decision making. This mirrors Helgesen's (1995) image of the leader at the center of a web engaged in a relational practice of leadership. Using similar imagery, President 5 likens her current leadership role to how she provided a safety net for her students in that she "provided the structure and things within which people could take risks and create and I would be there."

With the emphasis on leading through relationships and representing themselves as facilitators, change agents, collaborators, and team members, the women presidents in my study are not likely to use the label of leader to describe themselves as leaders. This is consistent with Cynkar's (2007) findings. The exceptions are the two youngest presidents, in their early 50s, who are comfortable calling themselves leaders. There is harshness, however, in Suyemoto and Ballou's (2007) presentation of women seeing themselves as influencers, collaborators, or contributors, without an interest in leadership per se, and having become leaders almost accidentally. The women in my study did not get to where they are today *by accident*, and their working collaboratively is a function of their leadership, not an avoidance of it.

Leadership through relationships, as presented by this group of women leaders, is a different picture of leadership than the traditional model of the heroic leader standing apart from his followers, making decisions and carrying the mantel of leadership alone. These women talk about their Vice Presidents, their Boards, consortium with other presidents, their families, strategic planning processes, and media consultants. They recognize the help and support they get, while still accepting the ultimate responsibility for the health of the institution. The paradox of their leadership is that it encompasses the compatibility of working with others and the loneliness of responsibility and distance.

Collaboration and influence are stressed; power and authority are not words these women use in connection with their leadership. The only time the word power is used is in referring to the power of the office of the presidency, not individual power.

The women also talked about relationships with spouses and partners. Of the twelve participants, nine are married, one is in a long-term same-sex partnership, one is divorced, and one is married but did not refer to her family during the interview. These important relationships with spouses—and I include the same-sex partner as a spouse—vary. One president's spouse, recognizing her talents, had been encouraging her to consider a presidency for years and made a career change to move across the country with her appointment. Another president's spouse did not move with her when she became president, which seemed to be fine with her. Some couples had negotiated who would be the trailing spouse early in their marriages and a number of spouses work independently to pick up additional family duties. Some spouses attend events, on and off campus, with the presidents, although they do not play the hostess or fund raising role that the wives of male presidents often do. Spouses often serve as sounding boards, advisors, confidantes, and are able to make professional introductions to potential Board members for the president.

The vital role that mentors play in encouraging women to seek and prepare them for college presidencies is represented in the literature (Brown, 2005; Selingo, 2005; Vaughn, 1989). So too, mentors, role models, and teachers provide some of the most important leadership relationships for the women college presidents interviewed for this study. A seasoned mentor, recognizing the potential of a junior colleague, plays a pivotal role in the career of a future college president. "I certainly had not one but two presidents

in at a former institution who made it very clear that they thought that I was talented and would support whatever I wanted to do" (President 5). "I learned from him in terms of what he had to share, but also what he didn't share" (President 6) Whether mentoring is seen as giving permission to aspire for more, engendering confidence, or recognizing talent before the mentee does, it can provide the impetus for a woman's development and success.

> In my life there were key moments in time where somebody saw a spark and they acknowledged me. Without those acknowledgements, I come from a very modest background and my parents were not well educated, and so I always saw the deficits. So I needed people to see the potential and the spark. I had many people along the way that saw that and would acknowledge me for it. And that was very, very empowering. Now they didn't find me a job and they didn't say you are going to be a college president. But they, whatever work I did, they found it valuable or substantive or creative and they allowed me to hear it from them and that praise was really important. (President 2)

Mentoring is a reciprocal process. Both mentor and mentee enjoy and benefit from the relationship and mentees go on to mentor those coming up behind them. It is important to realize that these are not formal mentor programs requiring mentors and mentees to be matched up with one another. They are informal, situational, and opportunistic encounters dependent upon a potential mentor having the interest and taking the time to reach out to recognize developing talent. Mentoring and acting as a role model has become ingrained in these women's identity of themselves as leaders and positions them in a web of relationships. "In terms of myself as a leader, I think of the word role model" (President 9).

To effectively lead through relationships requires a breadth of skills and abilities and, most of all, a strong core of self-knowledge and identity: understanding strengths and challenges; being clear about values, goals, and priorities; and recognizing when to

compromise and when to stand firm. A clear understanding of this core identity allows a leader to present herself in a consistent and integrated way to various groups, and to accurately decipher the feedback of how others react and respond to her and her leadership, what Hiller (2005) calls self-monitoring. Working collaboratively requires strong interpersonal skills, empathy, authenticity, and the ability to communicate clearly. Roles change and develop in these relationships, students become teachers and mentees become mentors.

### *Composing a Life*

The women interviewed for this study are consciously shaping their lives as they balance conflicting demands, improvise and respond to changing conditions, continually redefine and refocus their commitments, interact and adapt to complex environments, and engage in "discovering the shape of [their] creation along the way, rather than pursuing a vision already defined" (Bateson, 1989, p. 1). Their stories continue to unfold; they are constructing a leader persona (Curry, 2000) and composing their lives (Bateson, 1989).

I find Bateson's (1989) metaphor of composing a life to be more applicable than Eagly and Carli's (2007) image of a labyrinth. I agree that,

> the labyrinth conveys the idea of a complex journey that entails challenges and offers a goal worth striving for. 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. x)

This journey is true for the women in this study, but where I find the imagery limited is that the structure of a labyrinth is pre-defined, the pathways are clearly constructed, and there is one correct path to reach the exit at the other side. The labyrinth is used by Eagly and Carli to represent the external obstacles women encounter, and I am interested in the presidents' internal process of composing a life.

In addition to being a complex journey, composing a life requires creativity, imagination, and improvisation, shaping a life without pre-formed structure. These women presidents are prepared for and respond to opportunities, create lives that include professional careers and families, look for fun challenges, and embrace the process of self-invention. They assemble patchwork creations, design their lives, evolve into new roles, and shape their identities, while forming a life that is uniquely their own.

> When I got pregnant and got married [at age 19] and had babies, I took a different path. I had a scholarship for graduate school that I was going to take. You know, that would have been a very different path. I would have been in different kinds of institutions I think. This path was in some ways, I had never thought of it, but it let me explore myself. It felt very self-made, it felt more nontraditional. (President 7)

These women are composing a life rather than just navigating a maze.

The careers of these women unfold without a master plan or design. Opportunities may arise, but these women also make things happen. They are interested in learning and developing, rather than simply gaining more powerful positions. They actively engage in their careers and exercise flexibility at the same time. There are common patterns to their career paths and the individual stories bring meaning to the decisions and choices.

> It was a leap of faith [accepting the presidency]. I gave up tenure at [former institution] and I don't have a tenured faculty position here. I didn't want one. I really thought I had enough confidence at that point to think, if this doesn't work out I'll find something else. But I didn't really go to…I didn't have plan B in mind. And I still really don't. It's kind of a combination of drift and planning, I find. You plan ahead to the extent you can but you let, and drift is the wrong word, but hasn't somebody defined luck as being ready to take opportunities, and so that's how I define it. (President 4)

Other studies of women college presidents report nonlinear career paths (Madsen, 2008), the lack of intentionality in pursuing a presidency (Touchton, et al., 1991; Wagner, 1991), and women's lack of strategic thinking about their careers and a presidency

(Brown, et al., 2001). The women in my study resemble the presidents in Madsen's study in that they pursue a variety of paths to a presidency, their careers can be nonlinear, and they make career choices based on opportunities to learn and develop. These participants, with one exception, have not spent decades deliberately pursuing a presidency, nor do they see their current position as a stepping stone to a bigger and more prestigious presidency.

It is important to recognize the historical context of these studies and the change in social values regarding women's careers over time. Writing three decades ago, at the dawn of the second women's movement, Hennig and Jardim (1978) present a comparison of men and women in management and their different attitudes towards careers. The implication is that if women want to be professionally successful they need to adopt a male attitude towards their careers by setting a goal early and striving for advancement. In this gender duality, risk and flexibility are ascribed to men in their careers. My findings are in stark contrast. The women in my study take risks, especially in choosing to become a college president and accepting the tenuous nature of serving at the pleasure of the Board. Taking risks and making personal and professional choices in an ever-changing environment requires flexibility and adaptability.

The women in Hennig and Jardim's (1978) study are seen as passive, focusing on the job and individual self improvement rather than a career path, and therefore viewed as not being serious about their careers. They remark that they don't think of themselves as future company presidents, and the implication is that they aren't really capable or qualified anyway. The women I interviewed have a history of focusing on each of their

jobs to learn as much as they can and serve their institutions. Although they may not have set a goal of a college presidency early in their career, they are definitely not passive.

In their careers, the women presidents I interviewed have chosen interesting, challenging, and even fun opportunities that were a chance to learn and do something new. Like the women in Waring's (2003) study, they felt they were capable of taking on the challenge of a presidency and took the position to be able to have greater influence. Once deciding to pursue a presidency, the women in my study were not looking for just any presidency. They were seeking a good fit between their stage in their career and the developmental stage of the institution. A number of women describe coming to campus during their interview and the enthusiasm coming from members of the community and realizing that this is where they belonged.

> I think it's a question of fit. I went from meeting after meeting [during the campus interview process] and enormously liked and respected the people I met. And felt that I would enjoy working on their behalf. I think there was a sense of shared values with an institution and a sense of how people treat each other. (President 5)

The creative act of composing a life is expressed by the women in this study in how they make career choices, in the past and in the future. They have the confidence to take a risk and seize an opportunity, and they are flexible and able to respond to changing conditions. They invest emotionally and focus on what they want to accomplish for their institutions, and many are finding that it may take longer to accomplish those goals than originally expected. They look to do what is best for the institution, and are adaptable to stay longer to finish a capital campaign or step aside sooner for new leadership and a new direction. Their expectation for how long they will stay in the position changes as they complete some projects and others take longer to finish than

projected. Serving at the will of the Board, the presidents need to be comfortable with the tenuous nature of their employment.

> The Board of Trustees could tell me, the phone could ring and they could say, "Thank you very much for your service but we don't think your skills are needed anymore." . . .so you're kind of swinging without a net. (President 1)

The confidence, creativity, risk-taking and adaptability that were engaged in composing the pathway into the presidency will also shape the pathway out of the role. Many of the women say they will retire when they leave their presidency, whenever that is. When pressed about retirement, for some it means retiring from a full-time commitment, but they might consult, write, serve on boards, or other professional engagements. "I certainly took this job without any intention of having another job" (President 8). They will create the next phase in their lives when the time comes. A few women commented that a second presidency would be attractive in that they would be starting out already knowing so much, but they were quick to say that they would not seriously consider another presidency. President 10 wonders what comes after a presidency. "Do you get involved in policy development, get involved in more research, how do you leverage your knowledge and experience?" It is difficult to predict how the future will unfold for this group of women leaders and it would be interesting to follow up with them in ten years to see how long their presidency lasted and what they chose to do afterwards, how the story of composing their lives continues to unfold. It would also be interesting to see if their concept of themselves as leaders changes after leaving the highly visible and formal role of college president.

As the ability to create in and respond to the surrounding environment is inherent in composing a life, there may be an historical element to be considered. Women at

different times in history may compose their lives differently. Astin and Leland's (1991) study of women leaders provides a generational context for this discussion of leadership self-identity. Astin and Leland designate three generations of women leaders in education as *Predecessors, Instigators, and Inheritors*. The women in my study would comprise a new category, the next generation after the Inheritors. Like the Inheritors, the women I interviewed highlight the role of mentors and friendships with other women, describe themselves as facilitators and problem solvers, and embrace collective efforts. They share a leadership model based on clarity of values, listening to and empowering others, doing your homework, and scholarship and teaching. The women leaders described by Astin and Leland sound like the women I interviewed, with their attributes of "physical vitality and energy, intelligence, courage, confidence, and flexibility" (p. 125).

The Inheritors, "were mentored to become sustainers of the women's movement and the feminist cause" (Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 40). The women's movement is not a focus of my study and it did not surface in the interviews, so I cannot comment on the feminist viewpoint of my participants. A number of participants did mention instances of being the only woman at the leadership table and subtle gender challenges. One third of the participants in my study are the first woman president of their institution and I would expect that percentage to decrease with each subsequent generation.

The women presidents in my study are in the process of composing their lives: "life as an improvisatory art, about the ways we combine familiar and unfamiliar components in response to new situations, following an underlying grammar and an evolving aesthetic" (Bateson, 1989, p. 3). They are shaping their lives and careers at a particular time in history, theirs, the institutions', and the culture. They are challenged

"to develop solutions to problems that don't seem to have an obvious answer" (President 11). Without a blueprint or map to guide them through this complex environment, the art of balancing competing interests and roles is a facet of the composition.

### *Balance*

The balance these women seek goes beyond balancing personal and professional lives and time commitments. They also weigh when to step in and when to hold back and let a colleague try something on their own; they understand that self-confidence and making mistakes are compatible; they serve both as a team member and make the difficult decisions as a leader; they can embrace their own weaknesses as well as strengths without losing competence or credibility; they know that language can divide as well as unite; they accept that leadership includes loneliness and distance as well as connection and praise. Balance, for them, becomes a dance of integration and living with paradox.

The literature on college presidents often mentions the strain of the demands of the role on an individual's personal life, which is then a factor in many women choosing to not pursue a second presidency (Brown, et al., 2001; Sturnick, et al., 1991). Although the women presidents I interviewed shared the challenge of balancing their personal and professional lives and competing demands, they seem to enjoy the challenge. The more mature the president, the more at ease she seems with balancing her personal needs with the demands of the professional role. This may be due to a number of factors: her current age and stage of personal development; the outside demands of her stage in life, such as ages of children and familial expectations; and the age at which she assumed the presidency. Two presidents interviewed assumed the position in their late 40s and early

50s, four became president in their mid-50s, and six stepped into the role in their late 50s and early 60s. Family demands vary according to the age at which a woman assumes a presidency. President 11, one of the youngest interviewed for this study, says, “We have an 11-year-old son who has mixed feelings about this. You know it’s kind of cool to say your Mom’s a president on the one hand, on the other a little jealous of the time.” President 1, who falls into the more mature group, waited until her youngest child was in college to pursue a presidency. The different circumstances and choices of these two presidents represent the breadth of experience of the women in this study; they may also represent a generational shift. The sample size of this study is too small to make generalizations to the larger population of women college presidents. It would be interesting to look at the trends of the age at which women are stepping into the role and if there is a trend toward women becoming presidents at a younger age than in the past. It would also be interesting to note whether male presidents follow a similar trend.

Two aspects of leadership self-identity recognized by Hiller (2005) are self-role merger and the personal cost of assuming a leadership position. Both of these balancing aspects emerge from the findings of this study. The role of president is all-encompassing and these women understand that, as presidents, they lose the ability to speak or act as a private citizen. “It’s a role, it’s not a job, it’s a role” (President 7). When they speak it is as the voice of the institution and when they act it is on behalf of the institution.

> I think it’s a weighty responsibility even though I joke about it. I’m still very conscious of the fact that people see me as the institution and not as a person. So I don’t talk politics, I don’t talk religion. Weather is a good topic. (President 1)

President 8 comments about the consequences of another college president’s widely publicized remarks:

> What happened to Larry Summers was that he forgot for a little while that the President of Harvard can never not speak as a President of Harvard. . . . You don't step outside the role, you're always in it.

In assuming the role of president and losing the ability to speak as an individual rather than as an institution, these women must be diligent in their self-censorship and how they present themselves publicly. The amount of energy required to maintain the role is apparent as they talk about needing to be careful about what they say and how they dress.

The importance of physical appearance of women leaders emerged from the literature (Brown, et al., 2001; Chandler, 1991) and has been a controversial topic recently with a female candidate for President of the United States. The women in my study accept the importance of their self-presentation as the *living logo* of their institution and may even mention how much easier it is for a man to put on a suit and tie and be ready to go. President 10 says with humor, "The only thing that I say that is not fair when you look at the genders: I have to get up an hour earlier to do my hair and my makeup." These women do not waste time bemoaning the injustice. It is what it is, there is a reason for it, they have found a style that works for them, and they move on.

The most poignant example of a president balancing self and role is a young president who recognizes her naiveté.

> I hadn't anticipated how tricky it would be to be a gay President. . . I feel like I'm always sort of pushing the envelope just a bit because I want to be as honest, have as much integrity, I want to live as openly and honestly as I can, but the line that I can't cross is to the detriment of the university. And it's hard to find that line sometimes. (President 12)

This is an added level of complexity in that she is not only watching herself, as others are, as a president and as a woman president, but also as a gay, woman president. She mentions having a gay, woman president as a colleague and role model, a clear example

of the importance of having role models of people similar to ourselves in gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and ability. It would be interesting to speak with President 12 again in ten years to see if the balancing has become easier.

Although always expected to be in the role of president publicly, these women leaders balance playing the demanding presidential role, without being consumed by it, with maintaining a personal sense of self with authenticity and humanity.

> I am very comfortable, though, not necessarily being in the leading mode. When I go home, I don't have to be the leader, although I do find sometimes I tend to take a leadership role in projects, much to my family's dismay, only because I tend to be well-organized. (President 1)

It is with family and friends, their networks of support, where the role of president can be dropped. "I think my private life balances me very well. I'm very clear about that" (President 2). "I do nothing else except enjoy a terrific relationship with two wonderful daughters. And that's been lifesaving throughout" (President 4). Time away from performing as a president may be spent relaxing and enjoying family, restorative activities which may be active sports or quiet reflection, or conferring with colleagues for advice and support. Relationships help them find their balance.

> You need to have someone that you can call, that you can rely upon for good advice. Not necessarily the advice that you would like to [hear], but someone who can give you an unbiased opinion, and probably someone who has been there so they know the perspective. (President 6)

> I've never really felt in over my head in a sense that I've had colleague presidents. If an issue came up I've had people who have been so generous with helping me think it through, giving me advice, and helping me to understand that what I'm going through is the same thing that every college president, most college presidents, have gone through or most institutions are going through these things. (President 9)

As reflected in the literature (Turnbull, 2004) these women talk about the commitment of time that the presidency requires. "If you look at my schedule I'm

scheduled back to back. I think that's the toughest part because you really want to respond to everybody, and you still have to prioritize" (President 10). "I knew it would be a 24/7 position but I guess I didn't imagine that it would be quite so consuming. There is no life outside a presidency. Not in my opinion" (President 8).

Knowing what they do now about the demands of the position, the presidents clearly state that they would still take the position. None of the women expressed regret in their decision to take on a presidency or that, now having done the job for a number of years, they feel it was a bad choice for them. The cost of leadership for these women includes the lack of a personal life, due to the expectation that the president is always representing her institution and the inhuman amount of time and energy the role demands. The presidents interviewed for this study are willing to pay the personal price of the leadership role. It is a self-selection criteria for the role of president, and not all women are willing to pay such a high price. I realize that the women in this study chose to be interviewed and other presidents, either who did not accept the invitation to be interviewed or were not invited due to the sample size of the study, may respond differently.

Balance and composing a life are evident in the consideration of a subsequent presidency. Brown, et al. (2001) include second presidencies, whether the option exists for women and whether women see it as the next step in their career, as one of the five concerns of women's leadership advancement in the role of president. The women I interviewed for this study, whether or not they go on to a second presidency, offer a vibrant and laudable example of the strength of a single presidency. These woman presidents have composed their lives to: make time for the balance of family and career,

focus on their work and the learning it offers, build and nurture the relations that are so important, choose an institution to lead that most aligns with their values and talents, give the institution their full attention to make a difference for the community, and, when the time comes, retire from the full-time demanding commitment to pursue other adventures.

I would expect that this scenario might be more attractive to women considering a presidency, and at a cost they would be willing to pay. Attention is given to balancing and shaping a career and life in the demanding role of president, rather than viewing the role as a temporary step to further professional advancement. Although the women interviewed for this study might not expect a second presidency, they could still accept such a position if offered. Accepting a second presidency, and the inherent balancing challenges, may depend upon the age of the woman when she first stepped into the role and how long she served in her first presidency.

McCarthy, et al. (2005) talk about balanced leadership as a combination of identity and adaptability and that "a [balanced] leader must be a balanced person" (p. 468). They include reflection, managing paradox, and being comfortable with change as facets of balanced leadership. To the list I would include curiosity, maturity, the ability to prioritize, and alignment.

I would call the women presidents I interviewed balanced people, and therefore balanced leaders. They engage in reflection for self-renewal and as a way to learn from their experiences. They are not only comfortable with change, they are agents of large-scale change efforts. "It isn't change for the sake of change, but change in order to make a stronger institution, and also change [so] that an ideal situation is really embraced by the members of the organization" (President 6). These presidents have the personal

and professional maturity to prioritize the needs of the institution with their own needs. President 12 speaks of, “finding the balance between what I’m willing to do as a person and what I have to do as a leader of the institution.” Sometimes it means choosing to attend a daughter’s graduation over the institution’s ceremony.

> I sent an email in the beginning of April last year to the community and I called it “Probability” and I said, “What is the probability that my daughter’s graduation from medical school will be the same day, almost the same time, as the commencement?” I said, “It doesn’t matter what the probability is. It’s going to happen and I’m choosing to go to my daughter’s graduation,” and I pushed the send button. People said to me, “The community is going to be upset, it’s unheard of.” The Chancellor said, “I think you should go to your daughter’s graduation” and then I got a slew of emails back from people saying we wouldn’t respect you if you didn’t choose your daughter’s graduation. And other people said, “That’s great, we believe that you made the right choice.” (President 2)

Roberts (2007) talks about balance as alignment. “Each woman’s source of strength was the alignment she experienced between her identity (professional, gender, and cultural) and the work in which she fully engaged” (p. 348). This alignment, balance, integration of selves, source of strength allows the women she profiles and the women participants in this study to act with authenticity, bring their whole selves to work, and for, “mobilizing others to achieve joint successes, connecting with others to foster high-quality relationships, and passionately pursue their goals” (p. 336). Authenticity, leading through relationships, composing a life, and balance are interwoven in the balanced person, and therefore balanced leader.

Balancing is a dynamic, on-going process, requiring a level of comfort with duality and complexity, and an ability to manage seemingly incompatible components of paradox. The duality of managing a career and acting as a woman is expected to act is represented in the literature (Hennig & Jardim, 1978), as is the duality experienced by women of color in leadership positions (Lindsay, 1999; Turner, 2007; Waring, 2003).

The women I interviewed hold the complexity of the demands of the presidency and understand the rigor and challenges of the role. They choose to carry the responsibility of the position and feel it counterbalances the privilege and an honor to be able to serve their institutions.

> I think being a president of a university is a big privilege, because you really can make a huge positive impact on the lives of your students . . . I know it requires a lot of time, but again I enjoy what I do. (President 10)

### *Learning*

These women leaders believe passionately in education in that it is "important to civilization, to humanity, to the future of democracy" (President 8). College presidents are in the business of education, shaping and nurturing the campus environment for the advancement of scholarship, creation and sharing of knowledge, fostering the joy of learning, and encouraging the reciprocal synergy of learning and teaching. President 1 sees her leadership role as promoting,

> The value of respecting education as an opportunity to move from where you were to where you are going to be, to lift you into your dreams and your vision, the concept that all people should have that right to be what they can achieve. And I'm just fortunate to go before them.

Not only is education what they do, but learning and teaching are inherent in these women as scholars, teachers, learners and leaders. "My children this weekend were saying I was a lifelong learner. I just like the fact that I'm surrounded by smart people who know more about their area than I do. And they kind of keep teaching me" (President 7).

An environment in which learning is rewarded is an environment in which questioning and risks are encouraged, teachers and students learn together and from one another, and the focus is on individual growth and development and the fulfillment of

personal and intellectual capacity. A leader within this environment must embody the identity of learner and teacher. “So in that sense it’s [her leadership] actually like being a teacher. You don’t want to be dictating or micromanaging people, you want them to have all of the ability to take risks and to innovate” (President 5).

These women are curious and intelligent, and able to draw upon a variety of experiences and resources. “I spent a lot of time reading about characters and people and caring about it and finding wonder and interest in all sorts of things. So I’m very comfortable moving from discipline to discipline, idea to idea, multitasking” (President 5).

> I joked in a column once that one of the reasons that I was able to be an administrator and administrative leader is that I had met in the pages of novels so many of the people whom I would then meet in real life I already knew what to expect. (President 8)

A passion for learning and curiosity are requirements for the job of college president and strongly represented in this group of leaders. The women talk about needing to know a little about a lot of things, to be a quick study, and having to move from one project or activity to another quickly. I expect leaders in higher education to be learners, but learning is a critical characteristic of all leaders. Learning is inherent in authenticity, relationships, composing a life, and balance and so pervasive that it can be overlooked.

There are numerous and varied examples of learning and teaching in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, from the role of reflective learning (Komives, Owen, et al., 2005) and the attribution of leadership learning (DiPaolo, 2004), to women learning to lead (Madsen, 2008) and learning in the role of president (Conway, 2001), to the role of learning in qualitative research as “learning is what is important to those being studied”

(Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 15). Learning is part of human development (Gilligan, 1993), mentors are key to the learning process (Turner, 2007) and women's ways of knowing are unique (Belenky, et al., 1986). We learn by teaching (Friedman, 2006), teaching is essential to identity (Astin & Leland, 1991), teaching "accompanies authority as it flows from the center of the web" (Helgesen, 1995, p. 56), and teaching, like midwifery, happens in relationship (Belenky, et al., 1986). These attitudes of learning and teaching are embodied by the women interviewed for this study.

### *Leadership Self-identity: A Holistic Concept*

This research study explores the leadership self-identity of women college presidents. The questions guiding the inquiry are: How do these women describe and define themselves as leaders? What personal attributes do they believe allow them to be leaders? What have been their career intentions, in the past and for the future? How have their relationships with others influenced their leadership self-identity? What stories do they tell about themselves and leadership? These questions are designed to uncover information about the components of leadership self-identity: core identity, career, relationships, and narrative.

A clear picture of the leadership self-identity of this group of women college presidents emerges from the study and their concept of themselves as leaders reveals the complexity of leadership. They have strength of character and conviction, while practicing a style of inclusion and soliciting the input of others. They like being a team member and speak highly of their senior teams, while stepping aside to make the necessary decisions and take responsibility for them. They value loyalty and integrity, in themselves and others, believe the president sets the ethical standard for the institution,

and are clear about what is expected of them and what they expect of themselves. Although they truly enjoy collaborative work, they list personnel issues among their greatest challenges as president. They have shaped their personal and professional lives according to their goals and circumstances at the time. They assumed the presidency at different ages and stages of their lives, requiring different degrees of negotiation with partners and families. Their families are important and often mentioned. The presidents present themselves as integrated: wives, mothers, daughters, friends, partners, colleagues, scholars, teachers, and presidents. They strive for balance in their lives, juggling the demands on their time and maintaining their personal identity while fulfilling a challenging institutional role.

These leaders reach out to others, as others reached out to them. Mentors, role models and teachers are an integral part of these women's concept of leadership and themselves as leaders. Mentors helped them recognize their leadership potential, and role models have shown what leadership can look like. These presidents are excited by the learning environments of their campuses and see their leadership role as a privilege and honor, an opportunity to influence and make a difference in the lives of their students, faculty, and communities.

Although they do not use the term leadership self-identity, Ruderman and Ohlott (2002) present similar findings from their study of high-achieving managerial women. They are interested in the "choices about 'how' to be a woman leader" (p. xii) and are looking to identify the "underlying forces guiding the personal choices and trade-offs in the lives of managerial women" (p. 5). The emerging themes of their study are authenticity, connection, controlling your destiny, wholeness, and self-clarity. Ruderman

and Ohlott explain self-clarity as self-knowledge. “Women high in self-clarity approach transitions and chaotic situations with the perspective that they can learn something from them regardless of what happens, and they can admit mistakes and learn from failures as well as successes” (pp. 136-137). Their emerging themes correspond to the leadership self-identity concepts of authenticity, leading through relationships, composing a life, balance, and learning.

Leadership self-identity is a holistic conceptual model, encompassing character and authenticity, connectedness, empathy, courage, confidence, passion and commitment, creativity, individuality, balance, wholeness, humor, integration, learning, voice and language, mentoring and teaching, preparation, curiosity and energy. The breadth and range of the list reflects the complexity of leadership. This model of leadership self-identity provides a structure to study the subtleties of leadership and offers a template and vocabulary for the evolving leadership discussion.

Clearly emerging from my interviews is a holistic concept of leadership self-identity that integrates its five critical components: authenticity, leading through relationships, composing a life, balance, and learning. This integrated concept is greater than the sum of its parts, and drives the actions and behaviors of the women presidents. It provides the women leaders in this study with the strength and power, even fearlessness, to act with integrity and authenticity. It encourages them to accept the paradoxical complexity and ambiguity of leading through relationships and being the lonely decision maker, and to trusting themselves as they compose their lives and careers. It equips them to face the uncertainty of taking the leap to accept a presidency, and allows them not only to live with, but to thrive on, the conditions of risk. The holistic nature of leadership self-

identity helps them keep their lives in balance and supports their vulnerability as continuously learning leaders.

Only the self-understanding inherent in character and authenticity enables a potential leader to integrate the components of leadership self-identity. As such, it presents significant implications for how leaders are identified, selected, educated, and trained. Can a person learn how to apply this model of leadership self-identity to develop themselves for leadership? Can a person learn to be honest and have integrity? Can she learn to respect the opinions of others and work as a member of a team? Can she develop the ability to improvise and create her life as she lives it, responding to the world around her and her core values? How does she learn to be a balanced person in order to be a balanced leader? Does she have the patience, curiosity, and stamina to learn and change? Can she learn courage, what President 11 calls, "a kind of quiet, consistent resolve?"

These questions point to some skills and talents that can be learned and developed and to aspects of a person's character that are more elusive. According to this leadership self-identity model, leadership requires, among other things, the capacity for critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, strong communication skills, an ability to interact effectively with a variety of people, cultural competence, courage, self-knowledge, and the finesse to manage large-scale change efforts. All of these may be nurtured and encouraged by a strong liberal arts education, broad reading, a passion for language, travel, and multiple professional and community service work experiences. Although skills and strategies for leadership can be taught, aspects of character—temperament and personality—lie at the core of the individual. This speaks to a more old-fashioned development of the well-rounded, integrated, whole person for leadership, rather than

specialized training in aspects of leadership. “I’m not sure that it’s [leadership] something that can be taught in a series of steps. I think it’s more than that. It has to do with qualities of mind and soul and experience and belief” (President 8).

From the leaders in this study we can learn the importance of curiosity and eagerness to examine the world around them and understand the people with whom they work. We can take note of their wisdom and the perspective that comes from self-knowledge and self-clarity. We can share their learning from the failures and successes that have given them confidence to make mistakes. We can sense their energy to try something new and all the while keep the big picture clearly in mind. We can witness their inner resolve and courage to often be the only women at the leadership table or the first woman president of their institution. We can appreciate their fulfilling personal and professional lives, constantly balancing conflicting demands. We can also laugh as they show us their humor and laugh at themselves. For us they personify the holistic model of leadership self-identity.

### *Conclusion*

This study offers insight into the leadership self-identity of a small group of women college presidents. It clarifies and strengthens the concept of leadership self-identity as it integrates previously separate areas of leadership thinking. This holistic model of leadership self-identity provides a structure and a vocabulary indicative of the complexity of leadership.

My research reinforces the findings of previous studies. It corresponds to the definition of leadership self-identity presented by Hiller (2005) and provides a representation of women college presidents similar to Madsen (2008). The emerging

themes from my research stand along side those of Ruderman & Ohlott's (2002) study of high-achieving managerial women.

The themes of authenticity, working through relationships, composing a life, balance, and learning are represented in the literature. My study reinforces the studies of: authenticity and leadership (Friedman, 2006; Josselson, 1996; Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Sparrow, 2005); the central role of relationships to women's leadership (Hartnett, 1994; Helgesen, 1995); and the importance of mentors (Brown, 2005; Selingo, 2005; Vaughn, 1989).

Bateson's (1989) concept of composing a life provides a way of explaining, representing, and interpreting the experiences of the women interviewed for this study. Viewing leadership through the lens of composing a life adds richness and deeper understanding of the women leaders in an historical and social context. My research highlights the concept of composing a life and a career and its powerful, creative, effective, and often underestimated role in a woman's leadership. The women presidents in this study made mindful choices in their careers, choosing jobs and opportunities that looked interesting and where they could learn something new and make a contribution. As they rose through the ranks they gained skills and confidence and from observing presidents learned what the job entailed, what worked, and what didn't work. Once they decided they wanted to pursue a presidency they were successful in obtaining one within a short time.

Issues of balance are addressed in the literature encompassing: balanced leadership (McCarthy, et al., 2005); balance as alignment (Roberts, 2007); balance in role and the importance of physical appearance (Brown, et al., 2001; Chandler, 1991); the

challenges of the presidency and strains on personal lives (Brown, et al., 2001; Sturnick, et al., 1991); and the commitment of time (Turnbull, 2004). The findings of my research also support those of the studies about learning: reflective learning (Komives, Owen, et al., 2005); women learning to lead (Madsen, 2008); learning in the role of president (Conway, 2001); and the importance of teaching to identity (Astin & Leland, 1991).

There is literature on the pieces of leadership self-identity. My research provides a holistic conceptual model that enables us to explicitly connect the threads and link the pieces together. The model provides the connectedness and acknowledges the dynamic interplay in that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This model of leadership self-identity offers a structure to study the subtleties of leadership and offers a template and vocabulary for the evolving leadership discussion.

The women college presidents interviewed for this study present a positive image of leadership. Although they talk about the challenges of the presidency, difficult situations they have encountered, and struggles to balance their personal lives with a demanding professional role, they do not talk about the shadow side of leadership—the pain, frustration, self-questioning, and self-doubt that accompany leadership responsibility. Because the study was not designed to explore psychodynamic aspects of leadership, I did not expect them to reveal their shadow sides.

These women leaders were responding to my questions exploring their self-identity as a leader and I think they portrayed themselves accurately as women and as leaders. Although they are currently in office, and these interviews took place in their offices, I did not feel they spoke only as *living logos* of their institutions. I inferred that they believed what they were telling me, and perhaps it is this optimistic outlook that

allows them to perform the demanding role of college president. One could make the argument that, given the difficulties and complexities of the college presidency, without such an optimistic perspective and a confidence in one's abilities, it would be difficult to imagine accepting the position. But these women have an outlook that allows, and compels, them to believe they can be effective in the role and make a difference to their communities.

A study of women college presidents, after they have left office, designed to explore the shadow side of leadership, would be a different study, and an interesting complement to this one.

### *Future Research*

This focused study of the leadership self-identity of women college presidents is an exploratory study of a small sample group. With no intention to generalize the findings to a larger population, the results of this study provide a basis for exploring other populations of leaders to ascertain commonalities and differences. This study provides insight into the leadership self-identity of a small group of women college presidents. It will take further studies to determine what this says about leadership self-identity in general, and what is applicable only to the leadership self-identity of women college presidents.

For a greater understanding of this population of leaders, I would propose a study, using the same interview protocol, of a larger number of women college presidents meeting the same selection criteria. A subsequent study could expand the selection criteria to include women with more than six years experience in the presidency, and also women in their second presidency. This would provide a larger number and broader

spectrum of participants with which to further explore this conceptual model of leadership self-identity of women college presidents.

The research could then split off into two different directions. If one were interested particularly in understanding the leadership self-identity of college presidents, the protocol could be used for studies with male college presidents matching the same selection criteria and include a review of the literature on the college presidency, which fell outside the bounds of this study.

If one wanted to continue exploring women's leadership, the same protocol could be used to study women in comparable leadership positions in other professions, i.e. businesses such as banking, manufacturing, and financial services; healthcare and human service agencies; the arts; the military; technology; and politics. It would be interesting to see what is common for women leaders across professions, and what aspects are industry-specific.

These studies could also seed longitudinal studies. I would be curious to speak with the women I interviewed for this study again as exit interviews when they step down from their presidency, or a few years after leaving office. It would be interesting to see if the careers of the younger presidents differ from the women who assumed the role at a later age. I would also be interested to compare how they see themselves as leaders now to when they are no longer in a formal leadership role.

Clarification and strengthening of the concept of leadership self-identity includes expanding the populations of leaders to be explored and continuing to develop the conceptual model. Two additional aspects of leadership self-identity to be added to this conceptual model for future exploration are previous leadership experience and

environmental context. Previous leadership experience includes the types, number, and quality of experiences a leader has accumulated over the years, and the feedback received from those experiences. As leadership is relational and does not occur in a vacuum, it is important to also take into consideration environmental context, such as the political, historical, organizational, or cultural context within which the leader operates.

Threads emerge from this study that would be interesting to include in future studies. Astin and Leland (1991) used a written self-assessment as part of their participant profile, which included a list of attributes and a scale for the participant to rate herself on each personal characteristic. Some of the listed characteristics are humor, creativity, tolerance, self-centeredness, loneliness, physical appearance, ambition and intelligence. Due to constraints of how much time I could reasonably ask of my participants and not wanting to break the flow of the interview, such a self-assessment was not possible in this study. I was able to pull characteristics from the women's narrative descriptions of themselves as leaders, and I did ask questions about some characteristics I felt were particularly applicable (i.e., physical appearance). With more time available, it would be interesting to include the self-assessment and a discussion of it as part of the interview.

Another additional thread to be explored as a possible contributor to leadership self-identity would be the participants' *career anchor* (Schein, 1996, p. 80). The anchors are underlying themes that influence a person's career choices based upon their self-perception and professional experiences. Schein developed a self-administered instrument for weighing the eight categories to determine which is the influential anchor. In an expanded study that could accommodate the career anchors self-assessment, it

would be interesting to see if there are identifiable patterns in anchors that correlate with other aspects of leadership self-identity.

Another thread that emerges from my research is the intertwining theme of learning and leadership. Others have studied this connection (Vaill, 1996) and I am curious if learning emerges as a leadership self-identity concept for other populations of leaders, or if it is specific to leaders in education, women leaders, or women leaders in education. If it is prevalent for other leaders, further exploration of the connection would be appropriate.

Women college presidents are the sample group of my research study and the focus is on leadership self-identity. Gender issues were mentioned a few times by the participants, but it is not an area designated for exploration in this study. Future researchers may choose to look at leadership self-identity through a feminist lens. This would be particularly appropriate if looking at the effects of organizational culture on women's leadership (Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999). With an expansion of the study of leadership self-identity to include men, and the comparisons that are bound to follow, a feminist perspective may help to highlight the gender differences, and could provide insight for changing conditions or advancing a feminist agenda.

This study was designed as a starting point in a greater study of leadership self-identity. I have identified a number of options for future research and know there are many more to be considered.

### *Personal Reflection*

I embarked on this study hoping to learn about myself as a leader as I listened to the stories of women leaders and the composing of their leadership self-identity. From

interviewing these women college presidents I learned a number of things about leaders that relate to my personal leadership journey.

As a woman in higher education, a college presidency is a natural focus for aspiring leadership, and yet the position of college president is only one option—a formal, titled, very public leadership role. It is possible to choose a different, less public, role for myself and still be a leader.

I hear women, colleagues and students, speak almost apologetically about not having a pre-determined career path, of following their instincts and seizing opportunities as they emerge, making it up or figuring it out as they go along. This is how I have approached my career as well. This research study has confirmed the process of composing a life as a viable, exciting, and desirable way of shaping a career and a life. If we had to choose career goals early in life our options would be limited to those that were known to us. As we learn what is possible along the way, we can create previously unimagined opportunities for ourselves.

As I look to these women college presidents as leaders, others look to me as a leader, and I have a responsibility as a role model, teacher, mentor, and leader to reach out to those coming behind me.

In the Introduction, I stated that with this research I aspire to provide a transformational experience for myself and readers of the study. I hope readers of this study gain insight into their own leadership self-identities as a result of hearing the stories of these women presidents.

> And so I am grateful that I had a chance to observe the women in this book in action before my own life handed me more responsibilities. Inspired by their example, I have been able to meet challenges greater than I could have imagined. (Helgesen, 1995, p. xxiv)

# APPENDIX

# Appendix A

## Interview Protocol

Leadership

- How do you define yourself as a leader in your role as college president?
    - Do you see leadership differently now than you are in this role?
- Can you give an example of someone whose leadership you have admired or who you try to emulate?
    - What criteria do you use when asked to comment on someone's leadership ability?
- The word "leader" means different things to different people. What does it mean to you and is it a label you would use in describing yourself?

Personal Attributes

- What attributes or characteristics of yourself as a leader are you most confident of, that come most easily to you?
- What attributes or characteristics are you less confident of, that you are finding you need to develop?
- Personal appearance is an attribute of women leaders that has been written about – do you feel this factors into your sense of yourself as a leader?
- Would you describe yourself as ambitious?

Leadership Self-perception Transition

- Do you remember when you first thought that you would like to be a college president?
- At some point in your career did you start to make choices to lead to a presidency? How did you come to see yourself as a leader?
    - What, if anything, did you have to overcome or change to see yourself as a leader?
- Were there major influences in your life that you feel impacted your sense of yourself as a leader?

Now as College President

- Has your idea of what the position would entail and what it would ask of you changed from when you first stepped into the role?
- What has been the toughest part of your job or challenge you have faced? Was there a time when you thought you were in over your head?
    - Did it shake your sense of yourself as a leader?
- Can you give an example of a time when you were disappointed, either in your career or as president?
- Did anyone give you advice when you took this position that has been helpful or meaningful?
    - Have you surprised yourself in what you have been able to accomplish?

- When you accepted the position of president, did you have a sense of how long you saw yourself in the role? From your experience in office, have you changed your expectation?
- How were you brought up/groomed for this position? What are you doing to bring up the next-in-line?
- What would you like your legacy as president to be?
- How do social expectations of women impinge upon you and therefore your presidency?

Wrap up

- Is there anything you wished I had asked or expected me to ask that I didn't?

I will send you a copy of the transcript for your review for accuracy and understanding.
If there are questions of clarity, may I follow up with you?
May I get a copy of your CV? With whom should I follow up to do so?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

# Appendix B

## Participant Informed Consent Statement

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Robbie Hertneky, a doctoral candidate in Antioch University's PhD in Leadership and Change Program in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

The research involves the study of leadership self-identity of women college presidents and understanding how these women see themselves as leaders.

The study involves one conversational interview, arranged at your convenience, which is expected to last about 75 minutes. The interview will be audio taped. Once the interview has been transcribed, you will be sent a copy for review. Your name will be kept confidential, unless and only if you give express permission for me to use your name in my report. If you are quoted in the final report you may choose how you would like to be designated (i.e., pseudonym and description of your institution). All recordings and transcriptions will be stored in a locked file in my home office and will be destroyed at the completion of the research study. The results from this interview will be incorporated into my doctoral dissertation.

I am hopeful that you may develop a greater personal awareness of your leadership self-identity as a result of your participation in this research. The risks to you are considered minimal. Although unlikely, there is a chance that you may experience some discomfort in the telling of your experiences. You may choose not to answer any questions (s) you do not want to. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Elizabeth Holloway, Professor of Psychology, Antioch University, eholloway@phd.antioch.edu, to discuss your reactions.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty. Should you withdraw, your data will be eliminated from the study.

There is no financial remuneration for participation in this study.

If you have any questions about any aspect of this study or your involvement, please contact:
Dr. Carolyn Kenny
Chair of the Institutional Review Board
Antioch University
PhD in Leadership & Change Program
Tel: 805-565-7535
ckenny@phd.Antioch.edu.

Robbie Hertneky can be reached at 603-525-3310 or rhertneky@antiochne.edu.

Thank you for your participation and support of this study.

Two copies of this informed consent form have been provided. Please sign both, indicating that you have read, understood and agreed to participate in this research. Return one to me and keep the other for yourself. Thank you.

Name of researcher (please print)

Signature of researcher

Date

Name of participant (please print)

Signature of participant

Date

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