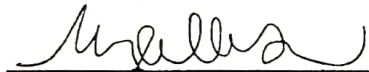


'THE CAVALRY ISN'T COMING': EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE
MIDDLE MANAGERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION


by

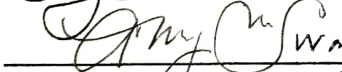
Jennifer Rainey
A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy
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Committee:



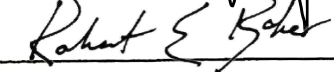
Chair

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Date: March 25, 2020

Spring 2020
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

“The Cavalry Isn’t Coming”: Exploring the Experiences of Female Middle Managers in
Higher Education

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

by

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DEDICATION

For Niles, who believes this qualifies as a “cake situation”.

And for Karen, who would approve.

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Abstract

“THE CAVALRY ISN’T COMING”: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE MIDDLE MANAGERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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George Mason University, 2020

Dissertation Director: Meagan Call-Cummings, PhD

As of 2016, only 36% of community college presidents were women in contrast to the nearly 75% that held business and financial operation positions. This difference underscores the problem of the leaky pipeline that exists between middle management and more senior administrative positions as many women elect to forego more advanced roles.

The purpose of this research was two-fold: to contribute to the fundamental knowledge of women’s experiences as mid-level administrators at a community college and to extend Dennis ‘s (2013) critical structural analysis model by employing two additional concepts that critically examine participant narratives: intersectional analysis and resistance analysis. This qualitative study explored a) the challenges that female administrators face and their coping strategies, b) the ways in which their institution has both supported and

hindered their success and c) the factors that contribute to their decision to pursue more senior positions.

The findings suggest that women in academia in middle-management positions face numerous structural and systemic barriers that prevent or hinder their career goals. These barriers include outside commitments and obligations (e.g. motherhood, elderly parent care) as well as a lack of mentorship. Findings also indicate that women of color in particular feel the need to suppress or mute parts of their identity in order to be successful in their jobs. Recommendations for further studies and implications for supporting female mid-level managers are discussed in the findings. Implications for extending Dennis' (2013) critical structural narrative analysis are also discussed, and the benefits of including intersectionality and resistance analyses are highlighted.

Chapter 1

I don't know. I am so stressed out, and I feel like every time I move an inch forward, I uncover some new mess. And I'm expected to fix it all, even when I'm not the one that created the policy. I keep wishing someone will swoop in and make everything right, but I finally realized a few weeks ago that that's not going to happen. The cavalry isn't coming. I'm going to swim or drown.

—Michelle, Interview 2, June 21, 2019

On the whole, the status of female administrators in higher education largely reflects the same gender gap that exists in most industries in the United States, where men continue to substantially outnumber women in most senior level positions (Cann, 2016; Catalyst, 2017; Jones, 2014; A. B. Martin, 2014; Townsend & Twombly, 2007; VanDerLinden, 2005; The White House Project, 2009). Academia has been slow in “efforts to fully involve women in the academic workforce” (Curtis, 2011, p. 2) as women “earn less money, are promoted and granted tenure more slowly, and work at less prestigious institutions” (Valian, 1999, p. 220). Women are more likely to hold part-time or adjunct positions than their male counterparts (Glazer-Raymo, 2008; Penney et al., 2007; West & Curtis, 2006), and a full 56% of full-time faculty positions are held by men (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Women are less likely to hold tenure

track positions (Jackson & Leon, 2010; H. L. Johnson, 2016) and are promoted at a slower rate than men (Collins, 1998; Lepkowski, 2009). An unbalanced workforce in this context means that women in general are less likely to hold administrative positions since most senior administrators begin as faculty members (Walton & McDade, 2001).

For the past two decades, scholars have warned of a leadership crisis in higher education (Hannum et al., 2014; Shults, 2001; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). The greying of the college presidency has meant an unprecedented rise in the number of college presidents eligible for retirement (the average age is 61), and a lack of succession planning has meant a new focus on the so-called leadership pipeline (Long et al., 2013). Much has been written about the benefits of women advancing into these senior roles (Airini et al., 2011; Dezso & Ross, 2011), but there is little research on the roles of mid-level leaders, which, particularly at the community college level, are overwhelmingly held by women.

Community colleges are experiencing what Gill and Jones (2013) have labeled a “leadership crisis” (p. 49). At the time of their study on female executive leadership at community colleges, the percentage of retiring community college presidents had reached nearly 79% (Romero, 2014), and nearly 60% of presidents were over 60 years old. More alarming is the amount of turnover in senior leadership positions. In 2011–2012, there were 134 such transitions in the nation’s 269 community colleges; as of March 2016, there were 203 (Smith, 2016). Furthermore, 75% of community college presidents and 75% of senior administrators have indicated that they will retire over the next ten years. While these numbers have meant an unprecedented amount of upheaval in the nation’s

community college leadership, Gill and Jones (2013) suggested that it will lead to more opportunities for women to obtain senior leadership posts. Whether or not this upheaval will constitute a trend remains to be seen, but as of 2016, 36% of community college presidents were women, up nearly 10% from 2012 (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017). As Evans (2001) explained, “the organizational needs of the newer, flatter organizations, where communications and group values are promoted, fit the culture women have learned, and their managerial and organizational skills are highly valued” (p. 191). Recent gains in leadership positions by women seem to have borne out this theory, though it is less clear whether these gains are due to a change in organizational values or a signal of a larger cultural shift.

Comparatively, community colleges employ more women than their four-year research institution counterparts (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2015; Boggs, 2012; Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009). Women hold 57% of management and 73% of business and financial operation positions at community colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). These statistics are a far cry from those at doctoral granting institutions, where only 34% of senior administrative positions are held by women (King & Gomez, 2008). As Townsend and Twombly (2007) pointed out, “numerically, women are well-represented [at the community college]...and the climate, while not perfect, is relatively good for women” (p. 208). Community colleges are considered to be female-friendly (Everett, 2011; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006), with researchers citing the work-life balance that community colleges offer. Lester and Lukas (2008) found that community colleges offered male and female faculty

comparable leadership opportunities, and Townsend (2008) suggested that, because of these opportunities, female faculty are likely exposed to more female role models at a community college than they would be at a research institution.

The mid-level leadership pool—deans, associate deans, department chairs, and discipline heads—has emerged as the source of the administrative pipeline and reveals much about how women have operated as leaders in higher education outside of the presidency. There are few studies on this middle role, but mid-level leaders are typically described as personnel who hold positions below deans, such as directors, associate deans, and department chairs (Bryman, 2008; Inman, 2011; Preston & Price, 2012, Rosser, 2004). Inman (2011) described four stages of an academic leader's career: formation, accession, incumbency, and reclamation (retirement). Middle managers appear to follow the first two stages, taking on additional administrative challenges because of their need to make a difference for others (Scott et al., 2008). Studies describe just how difficult that role is and how it can negatively impact an individual's interest in pursuing more advanced administrative positions. In Pepper and Giles's (2015) study, for example, an associate dean described the multiple directions her job has pulled her in:

The job has proven to be one of juggling competing priorities: reacting instantly to staff and student issues (such as misconduct, appeals, bereavements) which need a quick response; completing endless paperwork and signing forms; performance management of staff; and implementing university policies which are decided upon with little or no input from those who have to put them into practice. It has been much busier than I would like, with little time for reflection

or proactivity. I feel a great sense of responsibility and accountability resting on my shoulders but with little or no power attached to the position (p. 47).

Facing these kinds of challenges, it is easy to see why a mid-level administrator may not wish to pursue a more senior position. It could seem like an impossible task, or she may burn out before she gets there. The limited research on mid-level managers in higher education, female or otherwise, suggests a need for additional study in this area to better understand how institutions can support these women in their roles to ensure that they are willing to take on more advanced leadership roles as they become available.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the fundamental knowledge of women's experiences as mid-level administrators at a community college through providing the participants opportunities to narrate their frustrations, challenges, successes, and aspirations as they navigate their new roles. Specifically, it provided a vehicle for these women to reveal their perceptions of their work environment in their own words. To study a group of female mid-level administrators is to study the future of leadership in higher education, particularly in community colleges and to better understand the factors that may contribute to their seeking more senior administrative roles. By studying *what* they experience and *how* they narrate those experiences, I wanted to get a sense of how their personal challenges have affected their individual journeys.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What kinds of challenges do female mid-level administrators experience, and how do they seek to overcome those challenges?
2. How has the institution supported or hindered their success in a new role?
3. Why are women so strongly represented in middle management positions in the community college, as reported by the women themselves?
4. What factors influence a woman's decision to pursue a career in higher education administration?

Methodology

This study was conducted at West Community College (pseudonym), a large, multi-campus community college in the United States. Ten women who were new in their roles as associate deans were interviewed over the course of their first year in the job, both individually and during two different focus groups. Participants were asked a wide range of questions covering different aspects of their experience in the jobs, including questions about their challenges, accomplishments, concerns, and aspirations. The women in the study have a wide range of professional experience as administrators, from those with no experience to those with more than a decade of working in some administrative capacity. Participants represented a wide age range with some diversity in race and ethnicity, which largely reflected the overall age/race range of associate deans at the college (see Figures 1 and 2).

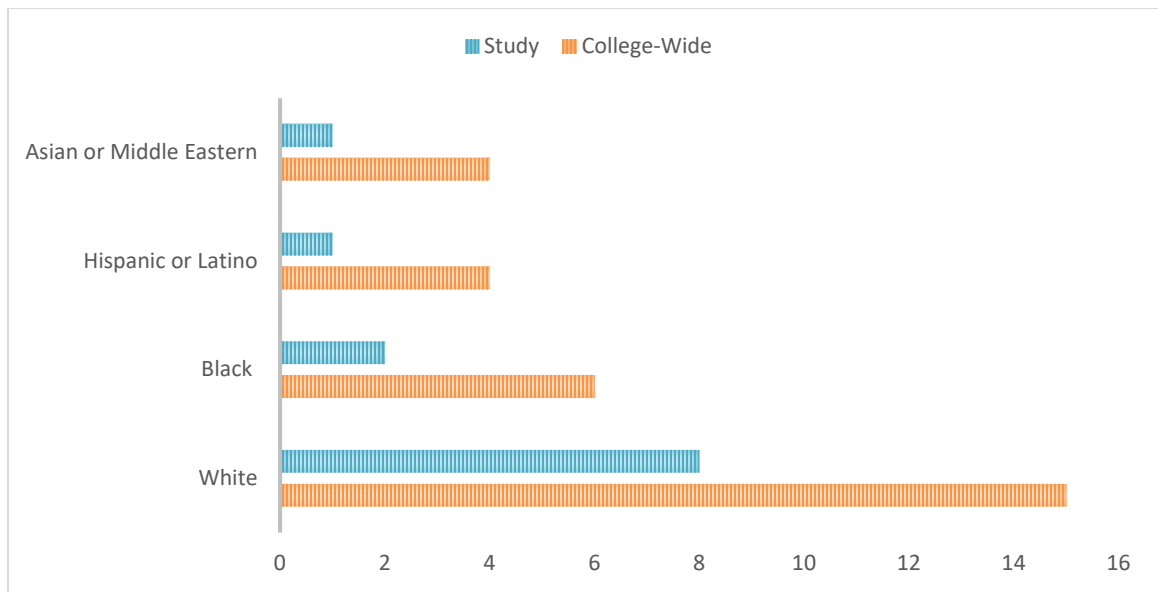


Figure 1 *Race and Ethnicity of Associate Deans at West Community College, 2019*

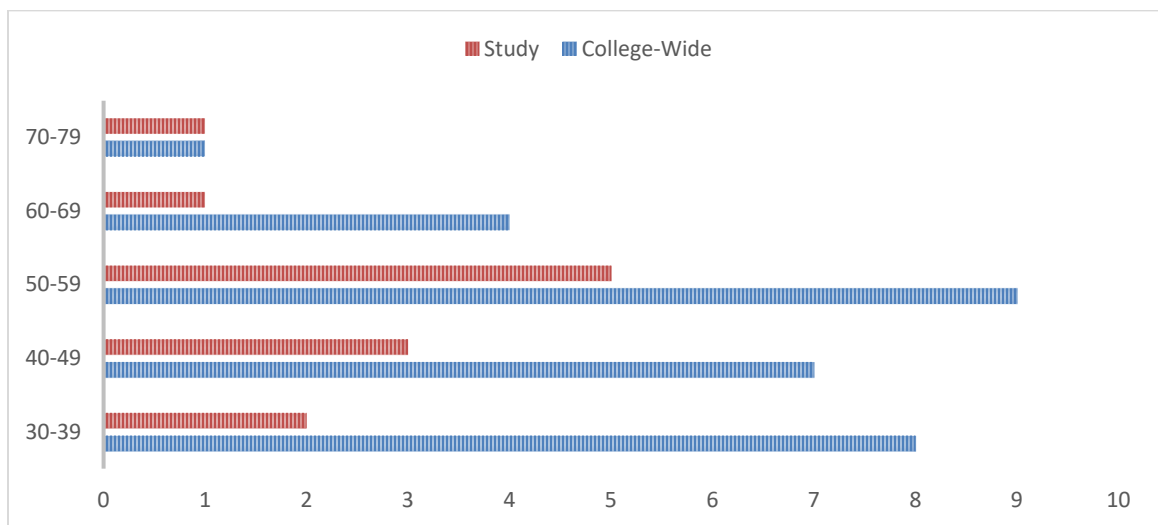


Figure 2 *Age of Associate Deans at West Community College, 2019*

Narrative methodology is appropriate for this research study for two reasons: one, because of my onto-epistemological commitments as a critical feminist scholar and, two, because of my interest in dialogical, participatory research methods. First, as a critical

feminist scholar, I am committed to fostering an inclusive and equitable research environment, wherein the experiences and personal stories of participants are understood and interpreted using the participants' own words. This emic, participant-centered approach to research is very well-suited to narrative methodology because it places value on participant experiences as they relate them in their own words. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained, narrative approaches capture a multiplicity of voices that are open to interpretation rather than a hard and fast determination of the *way things are*. As a critical methodologist, I understand that there is no such thing as *one* way to interpret an experience so much as it might be *one of the ways*.

Secondly, narrative methods are of particular use in participatory action research, on which the tenets of this study are loosely based. Inspired by participatory approaches to critical methodologies (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Ochocka et al., 2010), my goal is to report out the findings of this study in an inclusive and participatory way (Dickson & Green, 2001; Graziano, 2004; Torre & Fine, 2005). While my participants were not involved in the data analysis portion of the project (largely due to time constraints), they were heavily involved in deciding how and to whom the results of the study would be presented.

Narrative methodology allows researchers to explore the experiences of others—the powerful tales we tell ourselves about our own circumstances. In examining individual experiences through personal stories, it is possible to understand participant experiences as not only a product of personal circumstance but also of the larger institutional and social structures that shape those circumstances (Dennis, 2013).

Narrative inquiry helps to address the complexities and intricacies of the human condition and gives researchers a more comprehensive and holistic view of participants' lived experiences that can provide counter narratives and dispute misleading generalizations or refute universal claims (Maynes, et al., 2008). For this study, I utilized a critical narrative structural analysis that aimed to make explicit the underlying social structures that are either intentionally or unintentionally reproduced in the retelling of experience (Dennis, 2013).

Theoretical Perspective

Hatch (2002) discusses critical and feminist approaches to inquiry as part of the “same research paradigm, but having different emphases” (p. 16). He further explained,

The material world is made up of historically situated structures that have a real impact on the life chances of individuals. These structures are perceived to be real (i.e. natural and immutable), and social action resulting from their perceived realness leads to differential treatment of individuals based on race, gender, and social class. (p. 16)

Though Hatch's definition is debatable, his point about how social structures impact life chances is important. As research has indicated, *differential* treatment is putting it mildly—the “systemic, institutionalized practices of racism, sexism, homophobia and classism that pervade the public school system” are as real as the physical infrastructure (Dentith & Peterlin, 2011, p. 36). My own experiences as an administrator (and as a Black female navigating higher education) have made me privy to the deep inequities and injustices that are faced by women and people of color, to the extent that these

imbalances are often taken for granted as par for the higher education course. To understand the world as a place that “makes a material difference in terms of race, gender, and class” is to understand that, at nearly every turn, women and people of color encounter barriers that can only be overcome through social reform (Hatch, 2002, p. 13).

This area is not easy theoretical space to occupy, and even within a feminist framework, there are diverging opinions about what it means. Stanley and Wise (2002) suggested that there is a “feminist consciousness” that gives us “knowledge about what it is to be a woman, what the social world looks like to women, how it is constructed and negotiated by women” (p. 120). I strongly identify with this particular emphasis on the female experience as a way of knowing and understanding the world—to stride purposefully past constructionism to point out that individual realities are impacted by larger social issues. To ignore gender (and race, class, and all of the other fundamentally social constructs with which we are determined to marginalize others) is to ignore who we are, and it is unrealistic and even disingenuous to ignore how these constructs shape how we see the world and, indeed, how the world sees us. There is a distinct “cultural specificity of experience” in a feminist way of knowing that points to knowledge construction and identity as “being historically, culturally and contextually specific and also subtly changing in different interactional circumstances” (Stanley & Wise, 2002, pp. 193, 195).

The implications of a feminist ontology in higher education research then are relatively straightforward. Individual experience can only be understood in the context of larger social issues that impact (and, in some cases, constitute) that experience.

Understanding how institutions of higher education function must be understood within the larger context of how they reify sexist, racist, classist, and heteronormative structures and to acknowledge the uneven experiences that these structures produce. Dentith and Peterlin (2011) roughly situated feminist theory into three camps: radical, liberal, and postmodern. As they explained, postmodern feminism is characterized by the experiences of women “not characterized only in terms of gender but also in relation to race, class, nationality, religion, ethnicity, age and sexuality...the important relations of power are seen as complex and contradictory, productive as well as oppressive” (Dentith & Peterlin, 2011, p. 38).

My critical feminist understanding of inquiry means that my goal is to understand that individuals are a product of “multiple social identities, specific beliefs and values that have influenced experiences and informed personal action” (Dentith & Peterlin, 2011, p. 38) and to engage in reflexive, action-oriented research and scholarship. This approach is undoubtedly informed by my own positionality, which has necessarily shaped my onto-epistemological beliefs, which I brought to bear in this study.

Significance

This study is significant because it offers insight into the personal and professional challenges that women face when they take on advanced leadership roles, as well as barriers and support that they encounter as they ultimately decide whether or not to pursue higher positions. While there are a several studies that examine the roles of women in higher education administration at the presidential level (Madsen, 2008; Switzer, 2006; Wheat & Hill, 2016), there are few that consider mid-level leaders

(Wallace & Marchant, 2009; Koerner & Minders, 1997) and even fewer that study these roles in the context of the community college (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012). The current study contributes to the growing body of knowledge women-as-administrators at the community college and raises questions about the types of opportunities that community colleges afford women.

While this study is limited to community colleges, the challenges that women face in all institutions of higher education are well documented (Airini et al., 2011; Bagilhoe & White, 2011; Bain & Cummings, 2000; Bird et al., 2004; Brower et al., 20019; Carli & Eagly, 2012; Deem et al., 2009; Eddy, 2009; Hersi, 1993; Nidiffer, 2001; Sims Le Blanc, 1994). In providing the accounts of some of these professional women and highlighting the themes that have emerged from their narratives, this study offers suggestions for those in a position to help equalize opportunities and access for women pursuing careers in higher education administration.

Affordances and Constraints

There are a few constraints to this study that likely affected my findings. Only ten associate deans volunteered to take part in the study, and it is possible that those participants have had very different experiences from the ones that elected not to participate. Of the five campuses selected, only four are represented in the study. Only a handful of the associate deans switched campuses in the new structure, which may have impacted their experiences with their colleagues or may otherwise have limited their sense of how their relationships might have changed as a result of their new roles. One important theme of the study is progression, or how women decide to pursue higher roles

in administration, but it is clear from the interviews that I conducted that not everyone is comfortable disclosing their plans. This discomfort could be a result of the difficulty that many women have in expressing their ambitions for fear of being shamed or derided for them (Heifetz, 2007), or it could be that we are all technically in the same boat as mid-level administrators and thus potentially competing for the same advancement opportunities.

Additionally, I deliberately chose to interview only female associate deans for this study. Likely, if I had also interviewed the men who were chosen, I might have been able to draw better comparisons in their experiences or illustrate how women and men decide to pursue advancement in administration. My decision to interview only women, though perhaps limiting in the most general sense, is an acknowledgment that the story of higher education administration is largely a story of men and *their* experiences. For decades, men have held positions of power in higher education, and their experiences have largely shaped how researchers have described and have defined leadership. In offering the stories of these women, I seek to add to the knowledge of what a leader looks like and what qualities make effective leaders beyond the prevailing think-leader, think-male stereotype (Sczesny, 2003). In this study, gender was treated as a binary construct that may be unfairly reductive to the participants in the study who identify otherwise.

Perhaps the most impactful limitation to this study was my own participation. As one of the associate deans selected at West Community College, I am in a unique position to know and understand the rapidly changing landscape of the institution and the impact that the recent restructure has had on the position. I acknowledge this complexity but

would also point out that the rich data I was able to collect and perhaps more personal information I was able to elicit by sharing my own story far outweighed any disadvantage to my involvement. My relationship with the participants and my role as a colleague made it easier for them to speak freely about their experiences, trusting that I understood them because I am an associate dean myself. This added benefit of detailed, intimate interviews was more of a boon than a limitation, especially given the limited number of participants.

Chapter 2

In order to better understand the context of my research questions surrounding the experiences of female, mid-level administrators, it is necessary to look at the history of women in managerial positions. This review of the literature begins with a discussion of women in higher education leadership and uses J. Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations to explain the challenges that women face in higher education leadership positions. J. Acker's theory is overlain with research on intersectionality to better explain how individuals may experience other types of discrimination because of race or ethnicity and is followed by an examination of the personal and cultural factors that impact women as they seek opportunities in higher education administration. The next section explores the experiences of women as leaders in organizations and includes a review of gender-associated leadership styles and barriers to leadership. Finally, the literature review explores the experiences of women in middle management roles in higher education and the challenges associated with those roles in the context of Ryan and Haslam's (2005) *glass cliff* metaphor, which suggests that women are appointed to challenging leadership roles in times of organizational change and work harder for less merit and prestige than their male counterparts.

Women as Organizational Members

To grasp the full import of women's success in community college leadership, it is necessary to consider it in the context of the types of roles that women are generally afforded in the workplace and the kinds of implicit structural challenges they face.

Bagilhole et al. (2007) suggested that organizational culture is a dynamic process that can be described as something an organization has, something an organization is, and something an organization does. O'Connor (2011) wrote about management specifically when she explained that organizational culture can also be used to refer to a "complicated fabric of management myths, values, and practices that legitimizes women's position at the lower levels of the hierarchy and portray managerial jobs as primarily masculine" (O'Connor, 2011, p. 168). J. Acker (1990) devised the concept of gendered organizations to highlight the uneven distribution of power between men and women. She wrote,

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

In this way, gender becomes the lens through which one may understand the daily operations of a workplace. By understanding decision making, hiring, distribution of tasks, and organizational practices as fundamentally gendered, it is possible to see the stark inequities that exist in such a structure. J. Acker contended that organizations are inherently gendered through five interacting processes: (a) division along gender lines,

(b) symbolism and imagery, (c) gender interactions, (d) the formation of gender identities, and (e) the creation and conceptualization of social structures.

While J. Acker's framework exposes the deeply gendered nature of organizations, it ignores larger questions of intersectionality—the idea that gendered processes are shaped by other forms of inequality and exclusion, including race, class, and sexual orientation. As J. Acker (2012) wrote when she addressed this gap in the framework, ignoring intersectionality “inevitably obscures and oversimplifies other interpenetrating realities” (p. 442). Thus, in order to understand women's experiences in an organization, it is important to consider them not as a homogenous group but as they are shaped, influenced, and affected by multiple identities. Below is a brief discussion of these processes as well as a discussion of how questions of intersectionality have further complicated this framework.

Drawing Gender Lines

J. Acker argues that labor, behaviors, power, and physical space are clearly divided along gender lines. Though obvious to the casual observer and well documented in research (S. Acker & Feuerverger, 1996; Trinidad & Normore, 2005), these divisions are still very prevalent in higher education organizations. For example, despite the gains in management positions in community colleges, in 2013, women still accounted for 81% of office and administrative support staff (AAAC, 2013). Office and secretarial duties are overwhelmingly classified as women's work, reinforcing the stereotype that women are most suited to these tasks. Drury (2011) found that women in information technology (IT) in higher education experience “professional isolation” and often describe

themselves as “outsiders” in an overwhelmingly male work environment (p. 106). She points to Bechky’s (2003) notion of *occupational authenticity*—a sense of need and legitimacy associated with a role as perceived by others. In higher education IT positions, the logic is inescapable: Technical positions are perceived as more legitimate and worthy of respect; men overwhelmingly occupy technical positions; therefore, men are more legitimate “occupants” of these roles. As one of Drury’s (2011) study participants described technical staff, “they have some of the keys no one else has... They hold some people captive as to what they can and can’t do” (p. 110). These divisions further highlight the limited spaces women are allowed to occupy as their exclusion from more technical roles forces them into support positions.

Occupational authenticity is closely related to the idea of *competence*, which many organizations increasingly use as a way to combat racist and sexist hiring practices. The idea is that, by measuring an individual’s competence, employers might avoid discrimination, but the reality is that criteria of competence do not preclude bias, as both the race and gender of the applicant and hiring personnel can affect the process. White males are generally seen as more competent and more suited to managerial jobs (J. Acker, 2006). In practice, this perception means that jobs are not just designed for men but for White men and for White bodies in general (Royster, 2003), but it also means that White men are not always the ideal workers because of the kind of job that is needed. As Salzinger (2003) found, women (specifically women of color and immigrants) are often considered ideal and even desirable for employers who are looking for workers who will accept orders and low wages.

Research has also shown that despite the fact that they show no greater preference for it, women are much more likely to devote hours in service to their institution than men (Misra et al., 2011), and they are much more likely to perform committee-related service, though they were unlikely to chair those committees (Mitchell & Hesli, 2013). Pyke (2011) attributes this focus on service to the structure of gender inequity that exists in academia—women are more likely than men to be asked to give such service and are often unable to refuse for fear of retaliation—particularly if the request comes from a male department chair (Bowles et al., 2007). Volunteerism on the whole is high among female faculty, as Vesterlund et al. (2017) found in their study of volunteers for committee assignments at a large public university, and Babcock et al. (2017) confirmed that, “relative to men, women are more likely to volunteer, more likely to be asked to volunteer, and more likely to accept direct requests to volunteer” (p. 744). Bird et al. (2004) referred to these kinds of activities as “institutional housekeeping” because they “[represent] the invisible and supportive labor of women to improve women’s situation within the institution” (p. 195).

These kinds of community contributions that women are asked and expected to perform—work that often requires long hours for little or no compensation and even less recognition—are clear examples of J. Acker’s gendered labor divisions. As Guarino and Borden (2017) suggested, “both men and women faculty expect women to volunteer more than men and, relatedly, women are asked to volunteer more frequently than are men” (p. 677). In designating which roles are suited to women, higher education institutions arguably reinforce gender rules.

Symbolizing Gender

Symbols and imagery associated with leadership roles that reinforce gender divisions abound in higher education. Symbols represent ideas that members of an organization view as important and can take many forms (Sallee, 2012). For example, an institution that publishes faculty credentials in its public directory might be symbolizing the importance that the organization places on advanced degrees. Sallee (2012) examined how faculty fathers used symbols to rhetorically construct their images as “serious” academics (as opposed to more feminine academics who might be constrained by family or relationships). Francis (2010) argued that female academics may suffer the consequences of “gender heteroglossia,” where women engage in more masculine “performances” while also projecting traditional femininity. Søndergaard (2005) found that young female academics are generally described as “funny, pretty, lively colourful creatures” (p. 197) in contrast to older women academics who are cast as “unattractive and unfeminine” (p. 204). As Hughes (2004) wrote of gendered performances of female managers, “too masculine and she is threatening. Too feminine and she is wimpish. The feminine ‘touch’ is just a little make-up. Too much and one is the sexual working-class woman. None at all and one is of suspect sexuality” (Hughes 2004, p. 538). In this respect, women are expected to worry about others’ perceptions of their appearance—to be seen as both feminine and authoritative without seeming power-hungry. It is a question of what leadership *looks like* and how women have been pressured to alter or enhance their appearances in order to look the appropriate part. This view puts men in the position of deciding what constitutes “appropriate,” further reinforcing gender divisions.

More to the point, if women fail to meet the standard of what educational leaders look like, they may be overlooked as potential candidates for leadership roles (Ridenour & Twale, 2005).

Women in higher education have more than their appearance to worry about; often, they are judged by their gendered behaviors and evaluated critically for violating expectations. Research on student evaluations of male and female professors revealed that students expect them to behave differently and that they are more likely to receive favorable reviews for exhibiting appropriate gender traits (Sprague & Massoni, 2005). Female instructors who fail to meet gendered expectations of “warmth” and “accessibility” are criticized in contrast to male instructors (Basow & Montgomery, 2005). Macnell et al. (2015) explained,

On the one hand, students expect female instructors to embody gendered interpersonal traits by being more accessible and personable. However, these same traits can cause students to view female instructors as less competent or effective. On the other hand, female instructors who are authoritative and knowledgeable are violating students’ gendered expectations, which can also result in student disapproval. Therefore, female instructors are expected to be more open and accessible to students as well as to maintain a high degree of professionalism and objectivity. (p. 294)

Saddled with the expectation that they should behave according to traditional gender ideals, women may be punished for their deviation from expectation, which may unfairly skew teaching evaluations. Though there is some concern that previous research on

student evaluations is flawed because of the number of individual factors that affect students' ratings (Benton & Cashin, 2014; Perry & Smart, 2007), what *is* clear is that female instructors are evaluated differently—and more harshly—than male instructors by virtue of their gender.

Women who are ambitious may have even more work to do in terms of managing their identities. According to Heifetz (2007), ambitious women are concerned that they will be viewed negatively by others and often hide their ambitions so as not to feel ashamed of their own desire for advancement. As he wrote, “keeping these desires under wraps generates a self-defeating dynamic in which many women remain inhibited in trying to get the power they want” (Heifetz, 2007, p. 316). It is difficult line to toe—looking the part of a female professional that is not too masculine or too feminine and is not demonstrably interested in career advancement—but, of course, strict adherence to such rules does not guarantee success.

Gendered Interactions

J. Acker (1990) also discussed how gendered social structures are reproduced in interactions between men and women. In higher education, this structure is often seen in mentoring relationships. There is plenty of research to suggest that mentoring relationships are crucial to advancement in academic leadership (Airini et al., 2011; Chandler, 1996; Crippen & Wallin, 2008; Paterson & Chicola, 2017; Searby et al., 2015; Wallace & Marchant, 2009). Ballenger (2010) found that female leaders in higher education who had established mentoring relationships enjoyed career advancement. Though it is clear that mentoring can provide crucial opportunities, there is some question

about access to mentoring relationships. “Old boy” (White) networks that are responsible for reinforcing male norms account for the tendency of male leaders to select and groom male protégés (Dean, 2009). Indeed, Wolfman (1997) found that, “in many primarily White institutions, Black women administrators are left on their own, without mentors, having to learn the institutional culture through observations, guile, and intelligence” (p. 125). Worse, as a result of racial and sexist stereotyping, subconscious prejudice can influence who individuals recommend for leadership roles (Madden, 2005). As Dovidio and Gaertner (2000) found, individual feelings of prejudice can impact whether or not women and minorities are recommended for advancement.

Additionally, Carr (2012) found that men may also prefer to mentor other men because of their shared experiences. As Dean (2009) explained, “the ‘old girls’ network remains small in membership, scope and depth of influence. Thus, women may lack female mentors because of their rarity” (p. 132). This idea is further complicated by the fact that some women may feel that, having worked so hard to achieve and maintain their leadership positions, they do not have the time or energy to provide mentoring to others (Vaccaro, 2011). Additional studies have shown that Latina and Asian women are even more likely to be excluded from these informal networks (Ferdman & Cortes, 1992; Fernandez, 1981). Women’s lack of access to mentors, and the difficulties of men and women in finding common ground as part of the mentorship process only exacerbates the difficulties that women face in establishing these crucial relationships.

There is also research to suggest that even women who are in leadership positions are not always supportive of their female colleagues. Heim et al. (2003) found in their

study that women were often the first to attack other women who are promoted, “undermining their credibility” and “actively sabotaging” each other (p. 2). Women who advance are often viewed as threats to men *and* other women, possibly because of the perception that there are a limited number of such opportunities to go around (Heifetz, 2007; Mooney, 2005; Sandler, 1986; Tanenbaum, 2002).

Women are also responsible for understanding and navigating gendered interactions, a task made more difficult due to what Crocker et al. (1991) call “attributional ambiguity,” the difficulty that underrepresented groups face in determining whether interactions (both positive and negative) are a result of their minority status or some other, unknown reason. As Brower et al. (2019) found, attributional ambiguity is a particular problem in higher education, particularly among deans and may even present a barrier to advancement for women. They concluded that ambiguous interactions can have both psychological and organizational impacts, leading to conflict in the workplace and the anxiety and stress of individuals. One participant in the study actively wondered if her deviation from gender norms directly impacted her career advancement:

So, there were lots of opportunities early on in my career where it was hard to tell—and I’m a lawyer, so I tend to have an aggressive personality. There was more than one situation where the following question arose: “Are they reacting that way to me because they don’t like my direct style and they think that I’m a bitch or are they always reacting that way and they’re just treating me the way they treat men?” Those were always my questions: “Would they treat me the

same way if I had been a man and used the same type of communication style?”

(Brower, 2019, p. 127)

Because of attributional ambiguity, this participant was forced to wonder whether or not her gender had an impact on how she was perceived. More importantly, it left her with questions about whether she needed to modify her own behavior to advance in her career. In this way, old stereotypes about women’s behaviors are reinforced through interactions with male colleagues and, indeed, with the institution itself.

Further complicating these interactions are differences in race and ethnicity.

Pierce (1995), in a study of law firms, found that female paralegals were treated as mothering assistants, while male paralegals were framed as junior partners. Black women in the firms who overwhelmingly occupied secretarial positions were very aware of the ways in which they were often subordinated or overlooked in interactions with both paralegals and attorneys. Thus, a racial hierarchy overlays an already gendered system, further alienating women of color. While White women can focus almost exclusively on their gender differences, Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) explained that women of color are forced to wonder “which of their identities are responsible for the reactions of others” (p. 173), and additional research has shown that women of color often face other forms of discrimination that their White colleagues do not (Browne & Askew, 2006; Hyun, 2005; Leong & Gupta, 2007). This kind of *gendered racism* can make it difficult for women of color to interact with colleagues or feel comfortable in male-dominated environments (Blake, 1999).

Forming Gender Identities

Next, J. Acker (1990) said that organizational processes reinforce gender as a part of individual identity formation, which “may include consciousness of the existence of the other three aspects of gender, such as, in organizations, choice of appropriate work, language use, clothing, and presentation of self as a gendered member of the organization” (p. 147). In this way, organizational processes reinforce gendered social structures not only at a cultural level but also on an individual level—women *learn* what is expected of them. As a community college president told Glazer-Raymo (1999),

I bought into the system—I was decisive, a team player, flexible, didn’t take myself too seriously, was aware that I was being judged by my appearance, my voice, my dress. I looked around for advocates who weren’t likely to be women, to find a mentor who would single me out and work with me, show me how to administer and point out the pitfalls and landmines to me. (p. 157)

For this leader, adopting a kind of archetypal female leadership role helped her to find success (Glazer-Raymo, 1990). She was aware of gender as an aspect of her identity to be managed, and she did so in way that conformed to the expectations of those around her. Eagly and Carli (2007) would describe her path as a *labyrinth*—a difficult and uneven path of upward progression, made more complex by factors like childcare responsibilities, racism, sexism, and discrimination. To successfully negotiate this path, women must establish positive relationships with colleagues and network successfully with others, which, as previously mentioned, is not always possible.

That bias exists does not mean it is always recognized, even by the women who are affected by it. Erickson (2012) studied female doctoral engineering students and found that gender bias, though clearly a salient part of her participants' experience, was largely denied by the participants themselves. Despite giving numerous examples of clear gender discrimination, several of the women insisted that their experiences were not impacted by gender and stressed how much hard work was the most important factor in their individual successes. Erickson defined this idea as the myth of meritocracy—the belief that success is possible through hard work and perseverance, despite very real social barriers that suggest an individual's merit is not enough to guarantee success. She agreed with J. Acker's assessment that institutions of higher education are fundamentally gendered, describing how gender is both “avoided and revealed” by her participants who would prefer to believe that gender does not affect their own experiences (p. 368). They are clearly conscious of gender, but as Conefrey (2001) concluded in her own study of women engineers, “because gender should not be an issue, they think it could not be” (p. 181).

Creating and Conceptualizing Social Structures

Finally, J. Acker (1990) framed gender as central to the ongoing formation and reification of social structures in organizations. She explained that, contrary to popular belief, jobs (particularly managerial and administrative jobs) are not gender-neutral concepts; rather, they are built on the premise that an individual's personal needs are being met elsewhere and by others. Too many of these personal needs could interfere with a given job, rendering the individual unsuitable for the position. As Acker

concluded, the closest representation of this abstract notion of a suitable worker is the (White) male worker, “whose life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children” (p. 149). The notion of an *ideal worker* who is “rational, is a strong leader, and prioritizes work” (Brumley, 2018, p. 407) is often cited as a guiding principle around which most organizations create jobs (Britton, 2000; P. Y. Martin, 2003; Ridegway & Correll, 2004). We may understand jobs in this sense as inherently gendered—they assume an underlying social order is already in effect. Hierarchical jobs illustrate an even more complex entrenchment of gender roles. Those who are paid the most and given the most responsibilities are those who are “more naturally suited to responsibility and authority” (p. 149), and those who must divide their time (e.g., between home and job responsibilities) are in lower positions. As Muñoz et al. (2014) found in their study of female office administrators who aspire to superintendencies, “males are perceived as championing their family struggles by aspiring to leadership jobs” but females are thought to be “abandoning their families when pursuing leadership opportunities” (p. 772). In this way, even women who are willing to take on senior leadership roles, those who have indicated their willingness to minimize or eliminate “personal needs,” are viewed with suspicion.

Using J. Acker’s theory of gendered organizations, it is easy to see that the challenges women administrators face, which are so often portrayed as personal choices, are a result of positions that are structurally designed to support men. But what about women who are able to overcome these challenges to become leaders? How successful

are women who tackle these roles? The next section will explore how women have fared as leaders when they are able to obtain more advanced positions.

Women as Organizational Leaders

Most research done on higher education leadership has been based on male models of leadership (Astin & Leland, 1991; Bornstein, 2008; Kezar et al., 2006; Nidiffer, 2001). Hoyt (2007) attributed this neglect of gender-related issues to “methodological hindrances, a predominance of male researchers largely uninterested in the topic, and an assumption of gender equality in leadership” (p. 265). Despite widespread adoption of anti-discrimination laws, the gender gap in leadership has meant that fewer women have entered the senior leadership pipeline, resulting in fewer senior women leaders (Ely et al., 2011). Wheat and Hill (2016) identified four prominent themes that have shaped the discussion of gendered leadership and provided a useful way to organize the relevant literature in this section. These themes include masculine-associated conceptions of leadership, feminine-associated conceptions of leadership, gender-neutral approaches to leadership, pluralistic leadership, and barriers to leadership.

Masculine-Associated Conceptions of Leadership

Prior to 1990, conventional definitions and theories of leadership in higher education were based exclusively on the experiences of (White) men college presidents (Wheat & Hill, 2016). These definitions have precluded women’s ability to even be recognized as leaders outside of very narrowly defined context (e.g., women’s colleges), particularly as the characteristics and behaviors typically associated with leadership were behaviors and qualities considered to be almost antithetically female, such as aggression,

authority, confidence, courage, strength, and vision (Eddy & Cox, 2008). Dean et al. (2009) argued that this kind of “male imagery” associated with upper-level leadership creates an inherent “disadvantage” for women who “never quite fit” (p. 3). These “great man” theories suggest that women do not possess the “necessary attributes for leadership” (pp. 4–5) and put women in the impossible position of either appearing too feminine or not feminine enough (Oakley, 2000). Perhaps, as Bronznick and Goldenhar (2008) explained more pointedly, women leaders must navigate the small range between not too bitchy and not too wimpy.

Borstein (2008) argued that “even the most well-qualified and experienced women presidents are impeded by models, values, and expectations based on male norms” (p. 166). Boyce and Herd (2003), in their study of military students, found that senior students had more gender-based perceptions of leadership than first-year students had, which the authors suggest might be the result of enculturation. Successful female leaders were described as having both masculine and feminine traits, underscoring the importance of the balancing act that women must perform. A study of management students found that, though the ratings of men and women were not gender stereotypical, women students said that women leaders had lower task-oriented abilities than “leaders in general,” suggesting that they devalued or dismissed their own leadership abilities (Sczesny, 2003). This *stereotype threat*—“the concrete, real-time threat of being judged and treated poorly in settings where a negative stereotype about one's group applies” (Steele et al., 2002, p. 385)—can be psychologically challenging for women and can

result in women's leaving traditionally male-dominated careers before they have the opportunity to take on more senior roles.

Thomas, Speight, and Witherspoon (2004) refer to this as *internalized oppression*, in which women may devalue their own leadership potential if they believe stereotypes about their gender. As Pittinsky et al. (2007) explained, stereotypes have the potential to undermine women, even if they appear positive. For example, Prime et al. (2009) found that, while the men in their study generally felt that women were good at supporting others, this support can be damaging because *supportiveness* is not considered an important leadership trait. Ely et al. (2011) described this view as *second generation forms of gender bias*, "the powerful yet often invisible barriers to women's advancement that arise from cultural beliefs about gender" (p. 475). In this way, stereotypes about masculine-associated conceptions of leadership function as a way to both prevent others from seeing women as leaders and prevent women from seeing themselves as leaders.

Feminine-Associated Conceptions of Leadership

Research on women's leadership styles reveals that women tend to be relationship oriented and consensus building (Eddy, 2009; Switzer, 2006). Binns and Kerfoot (2011) called this tendency "problematic" because gender labeling can "run the risk of essentializing male and female characteristics and entrenching male privilege" (p. 257). Women are by and large considered "inadequately socialized to become leaders" (Wheat & Hill, 2016, p. 2), prompting leadership training programs that help women foster more masculine traits. (Conversely, there are no training programs aimed at men who want to foster more feminine traits). Women are penalized by *shifting criteria*, which, as Singh et

al. (2012) explained, are “agentic, meaning women who display characteristics of independence and single-mindedness are typically associated with masculinity” (p. 14). As a result, women are seen as lacking the qualities needed to be good leaders but are also expected to be communal and exhibit qualities of kindness, warmth, and helpfulness (Eagly & Karau, 2002), thus placing them in what Carli and Eagly (2012) called a *double bind*, as women are both criticized for overly assertive behavior and faulted for their perceived lack of masculine leadership traits.

Female leadership styles have been found to have positive outcomes for organizations in terms of communication, negotiation, structure, and authority (Oakley, 2000), but women remain at risk for stereotyping when there are fewer of them (compared to male colleagues) and when they comprise a smaller percentage of management (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999). Men perceive women as lacking the traits needed to effectively lead more often than women do (Koenig et al., 2011), and they are harsher in their evaluations of women in studies on hiring and job performance (Koch et al., 2015). Additionally, women are seen as better suited to middle management positions than upper-level leadership roles in settings that are less stereotypically masculine (e.g., community colleges; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Though it is not the focus of this study, it is worth noting that researchers have begun to consider the *feminine* leadership style as separate and distinct from the *feminist* leadership style that Shea and Renn (2017) described, which has a more emancipatory and inclusive orientation.

Gender-Neutral Approaches to Leadership

While the prevailing tendency has been to classify leadership styles as either feminine or masculine, there is research on higher education leaders that suggests that in reality there are “no reliable differences in the ways men and women lead” (Eagly & Johnson, 1990, p. 2). Birnbaum (1992) “found no apparent relationships between gender and leadership, either in terms of presidential background, the way presidents thought, constituent support, or institutional change” (p. 44), and Kaufman and Grace (2011) believed that “gendered differences in leadership style are a social construction” (p. 8). Binns and Kerfoot (2011) warned of the dangers of classifying some behaviors as feminine, because doing so only further entrenches sexist ideas that qualities like empathy or emotional communication are separate and distinctly female attributes. Whether there are actual differences in female and male approaches to leadership is probably debatable, but what is undeniable is that both women and men are held accountable for these perceived differences and that women in particular are punished for them.

Pluralistic Leadership

Pluralistic leadership examines the intersectionality of leader identity (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation) in a way that other leadership frameworks have traditionally ignored. Studying leaders pluralistically—that is, as a sum of their varied identities—avoids a common pitfall of other leadership frameworks, which assume that women are treated as a homogenous group, and acknowledges that they likely share common leadership behaviors that stem from their “identity and experiences as women” (Kezar &

Lester, 2010, p. 169). Research has indicated that leaders of color have pluralistic leadership styles that are characterized by, among other things, “awareness of identity, positionality, and power conditions” (Kezar et al., 2006, p. 129). Blackmore (1999) underscored the importance of acknowledging the differences in identity that can shape a woman’s experience, warning that researchers might otherwise ignore the unique challenges that women of color face in obtaining senior leadership roles and leadership legitimacy (Bornstein, 2008; Jean-Marie, 2010; Turner, 2008).

There are many dimensions of identity and positionality that may shape a leaders’ pluralistic style, and one that has received an increasing amount of attention is motherhood (Madsen, 2008; S. M. Marshall, 2009; Steinke, 2006; Switzer, 2006). Several studies have indicated that women who are mothers attribute some of their preparation for college presidency to skills gained through raising children (Madsen, 2008; Steinke, 2006). Madsen’s (2008) study in particular found specific competencies that women attributed to this role, including multitasking, patience, perseverance, empathy, and conflict resolution. Eagly and Johnson (1990) noted that this type of “spillover” of women’s roles outside of work into leadership roles could explain the perceived differences in male and female leadership styles as women leaders are generally thought to be “friendly, pleasant, interested in people, expressive, and socially sensitive” (p. 4).

Barriers to Women’s Leadership

It is clear that systemic bias, discrimination, and sexism (along with other *-isms*) have played a very large part in preventing women from achieving equity in senior

leadership positions, but there are other barriers that speak to the many obligations that women often have outside of their professional lives that can have an enormous impact on their success. Mason (2009) described what she calls the “snow-woman” effect, noting “the layers of missed opportunity, family obligations, and small and large slights build up over the years, [that slow women’s] career progress compared with men” (para. 10). In other words, there is not one single factor that might cause a woman to abandon ship, so to speak, but rather a slow build-up of frustration, personal trials, and negative experiences.

Scholars have described a wide range of barriers that women leaders face both internally and externally (Drury, 2010; Hersi, 1993; Kaplan & Tinsley, 1989; Oakley, 2000; Sims LeBlanc, 1994; Vaccaro, 2011). Drury (2010) found that stereotypes, lack of trust, lack of perceived recognition, lack of support, marginalization, and jealousy from co-workers all posed barriers to women who were in leadership positions. Additionally, Sims LeBlanc (1994) identified self-esteem issues, limited external interactions, family, motherhood, and loneliness as factors. Kaplan and Tinsley (1989) reported barriers that included personal and family obligations as well as a lack of mobility, and Hersi (1993) reported no less than 19 different barriers for stress and dissatisfaction among women in higher education, including being ignored during important discussions and not being addressed by their titles (as compared to their male colleagues).

The family and social obligations that women are expected to attend to are the most notable source of what scholars call a *leaky pipeline*, which describes the various points at which women deviate from their paths to senior leadership positions. Factors

like parenthood, which make it difficult for women to participate in job-related social networking, search committees, or receptions, can make it impossible for women to establish the social networks necessary to advance their careers (Mason, 2009).

McElreath (2008) wrote about attending a holiday party thrown by a senior, tenured faculty member at her institution with her children in tow and how difficult it was to even hold conversations with others while her children were present. What she remembered most, however, was the hostess's parting comment as she left the party:

She hugged me briefly at the door, took my hand in hers and shook it firmly. She urged me to “keep up with my job” by publishing and writing, and then said, squeezing my hand for extra emphasis, “don’t get *too* caught up in that mommy thing.” And there it was, right there. She had reduced my frustrating daily struggle between professional self and mothering self into one short phrase: *that mommy thing*. (p. 89)

Being unable to produce academic work at the same rate as their male peers because of childcare obligations may derail a woman's academic career before it has even started (Gasser & Shaffer, 2014), and as is clear from the above example, motherhood is seen as a personal, almost frivolous (and self-destructive) choice. Hewlett (2007) described these “off-ramps” that women may take during the course of their careers to raise children or care for parents can make their return to the workforce (or “on-ramps”) nearly impossible. Additionally, women are more likely to struggle with perfectionism than their male peers and might leave academia because of the burnout they experience while

working toward a goal that their male counterparts may reach more easily (Gasser & Shaffer, 2014).

Despite the myriad of ways in which women have been prevented from achieving equity in senior leadership positions in higher education, women have been successful in gaining middle-level management positions, particularly at the community college level. But what does success look like for female administrators who take on these positions, and how do they find that success in a structure designed to keep them out? The next sections examine the roles of female middle managers and the challenges that are unique to that position.

The Role of the Middle Manager

There is a dearth of research on mid-level managers at community colleges, and what little research there has largely centered on the challenges that middle managers face (Floyd, 2016), ways to develop leadership skills for department chairs (Gillet-Karam, 1999), or learning to lead (Albashiry et al., 2015). Even less has been written about specifically gendered leadership experiences (Vongalis-Macrow, 2012) or race-related experiences (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017; Perrakis et al., 2009). While the number of women who hold presidential appointments is worth noting, a focus on the most senior levels of leadership overlooks an important truism that administrators have known for years: mid-level managers are largely responsible for the day-to-day operations in higher education institutions, including community colleges (Amey & Eddy, 2018). As Eddy et al. (2016) wrote, “it is mid-level leaders who operationalize

institutional strategic plans, who engage with students, and who ultimately determine the effectiveness of top leadership” (para. 2).

Academic middle leaders tend to see themselves not as representing core organizational values but rather as representing core academic values (Gleeson & Shane, 2003; Lapp & Carr, 2006). Briggs (2004) noted that this view is an important distinction for middle managers in higher education because they see themselves at the forefront of change in areas like teaching and learning as well as the advancement of pedagogical and academic goals. Given the likelihood that they have recently emerged from full-time faculty pools themselves, middle leaders have a deep understanding of how their organizations work, as demonstrated through their ability “to act as colleague during times of trouble and as people who are seen to learn with their colleagues in times of change” (G. Marshall, 2012, p. 507).

Considering the turnover in higher education senior leadership, it stands to reason that mid-level managers are responsible for maintaining the stability and functioning of community colleges; indeed, research suggests that these positions are important to university planning and overall organizational structure (Bolden et al., 2008, 2009; Corrigan, 2013). While the trend has been to frame these positions as college leadership pipelines, the reality is that these positions are in and of themselves important leadership roles. Part of the problem, as Amey and Eddy (2018) explained, is that mid-level managers are typically not viewed as leaders, either because they are seen as subordinates (Koerner & Mindes, 1997) or because of the inherent biases surrounding what a leader should “look like” (Amey & Twombly, 1992). Often given a large number of

responsibilities with little authority, middle managers experience pressure to run efficient, cost-effective, and student-centered departments with few resources and little support. As Branson, Franken, and Penney (2016) wrote,

A problem for middle leaders is that they are expected to be able to persuade, influence or direct the beliefs and behaviours of their colleagues, but invariably have little to offer by way of tangible benefits. Middle leaders' access to discretionary funds, their capacity to significantly adjust workload or employment conditions, and/or alter the workplace environment, are all typically limited. The authority of the middle leader is thus largely psychological and is made manifest relationally. It can be notably compromised by their need to sustain professionalism and collegiality. (p. 130)

Stuck between the pressures of management (presidents, Provosts, deans), peers (faculty and other professionals), and subordinates (usually staff and adjunct faculty), mid-level managers walk a fine line between their administrative responsibilities and their personal obligations. Participants in a study by G. Marshall (2012) described this kind of administrative no-man's land as "being caught in between or sandwiched between senior management to whom they were accountable...and subordinates for whom they had some functional and often moral responsibility" (p. 511). Other studies have revealed several challenges to the mid-level role, including dealing with poor performers and difficult personalities (Bryman & Lilley, 2009), competing expectations between administration and faculty (Rosser, 2004), and the difficulty of maintaining relationships with colleagues (Preston & Price, 2012).

Associate deans in particular are sensitive to these pressures because their transition to the role is “often abrupt” leaving “little time for faculty members or chairs who are appointed to these positions to prepare for the work” (Sayler et al., 2017, p. 2). In a study of associate deans in Australia, Pepper and Giles (2015) found several consistent themes that summed up their participants’ experiences in this role. Table 1 outlines these themes and provides a brief description of their findings.

Table 1

How Associate Deans Perceive Their Leadership Roles in Higher Education

Theme	Description
The Overwhelming Nature of the Role	A sense of feeling overwhelmed, regardless of the incumbent’s experience. Participants describe “an avalanche of work” and “juggling competing priorities” (Pepper & Giles, 2015, p. 49).
Huge Responsibility with Little Power	The perception that associate deans have little influence on policies, but are themselves “required to implement changes and field any questions about those changes” (Pepper & Giles, 2015, p. 50).
Constantly Reacting to Events	A sense of “inundation with problems on a daily basis, requiring time, energy, and tact to resolve” (Pepper & Giles, 2015, p. 50).
Feeling Isolated	The perception that the associate dean is alone and unable to consult with faculty colleagues for support because of their quasi-supervisory relationship (Pepper & Giles, 2015).
Leading Others	The sense that despite the difficulty, the role of the associate dean is a leadership role that involves the mentoring and nurturing of others (Pepper & Giles, 2015).

A participant in the study described her role as “the meat in the sandwich” (Pepper & Giles, 2015, p. 50)—someone who is tasked with both implementing change and fielding complaints about that change when she has very little influence over institutional policy. All of the participants in the study acknowledged their lack of preparedness for the role, and most lamented the sheer volume of work and unrealistic expectations associated with the position. The authors summed up these challenges by acknowledging that “participants describe their sense of an inundation of problems on a daily basis requiring time, energy and tact to resolve” (Pepper & Giles, 2015, p. 50). Given these challenges, what, if any good, comes from taking on such a position?

Pepper and Giles’s (2015) fifth theme, “leading others,” at least partly addresses this question. Participants in their study recognized the importance of fostering an environment of mentorship and nurturing, and research bears out this experience. Middle managers frequently take their positions because of their desire to help make a difference for others (Scott et al., 2008; Inman, 2011) or a sense of obligation to lead (Preston & Price, 2012). Floyd (2012) found in his study of heads of departments (HoDs) that several participants were encouraged by their deans to apply for their administrative roles, and this “vote of confidence” allowed them to “gain more belief in themselves, which duly increased their perceived status, and in turn, gave them the confidence to apply for the role” (p. 280). Additionally, the participants discussed how taking on the role would “help them to make a difference” and “make changes to the social structures and systems in which they worked and align them more closely with their own developing set of

values” (Floyd, 2012, p. 281). Given the challenges of such a role, however, taking on a middle management position may not offer women the opportunity to make the differences they seek.

Scaling the Glass Cliff

Ryan and Haslam (2005) used the metaphor *glass cliff* to describe situations in which organizations appoint women to leadership roles that are inherently risky or rife with complication, often in the face of organizational crises. As they explained, “women can be seen to be placed on top of a ‘glass cliff,’ in the sense that their leadership appointments are made in problematic organizational circumstances and hence are more precarious” (p. 87). In essence, women who are chosen to lead are often given roles that are destined to fail. This situation makes women who adopt these roles increasingly subject to criticism or blame, despite the fact that the job itself was predestined to end poorly—well *before* a woman assumed the role.

Glass cliffs can be found in many different professions and need not be linked to an organizational crisis. Wilson-Kovacs et al. (2006) found that women with jobs in information technology in the United Kingdom experienced much the same phenomenon, as do women in the legal profession who are often assigned more challenging, less lucrative cases than their male counterparts (Ryan & Haslam, 2006). Peterson (2016) extended this metaphor to higher education in her study of Swedish higher education administration, which found that women are more likely to be given senior academic management roles as those roles decline in status and become more difficult to manage. One woman in the study described herself as a “quota bitch” insofar as she felt she was

given her role so that the company might meet some unspoken quota (Peterson, 2016, p. 120). Ignoring for a moment the deeply troubling nature of that assessment, this participant described a glass cliff situation that she was chosen for solely because of her gender, her experience and qualifications notwithstanding. This is not to say that she is *not* qualified; indeed, it is important to understand the glass cliff metaphor not in terms of the women who are subject to it but rather in terms of those who create the situation. Brabazon (2017), the dean of the Office of Graduate Research at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia, described her role in a glass cliff position:

This is a middle management role, on contract, that offers some seniority. Soft power is traded for short-term job security. The glass cliff posts have a great view, but within a few years the occupier of this space is forced off the cliff. They may either withdraw before the conclusion of the contract to another transitory post or—if unable to find another position—jump off the cliff to un(der)employment.
(p. 6)

Brabazon framed her position as essentially unwinnable—one that offers a tempting title and short-term administrative experience but is an ultimately empty promise, as there is no long-term success to be found there.

While there are many reasons that a woman might elect to take on such a role that are beyond the scope of this literature review, there is at least one immediately relevant answer: They may not have felt they had a choice. As one dean in Peterson's (2016) study said, "I think it's embarrassing, as a woman, to say no. The fact that you're a woman makes it impossible to say no whether you want it or not because you must

support women's struggle for equality" (p. 122). This sentiment underscores previous research that indicated that academic middle managers often accept their roles out of a sense of duty—in this case, to their fellow women.

Understanding women's administrative leadership roles using a glass cliff metaphor helps to illustrate the precariousness of such positions and underscores the difficulties that middle managers face as they strive to meet the demands of their jobs. The idea of a glass cliff also highlights the flawed assumptions that community colleges, by virtue of employing more women in middle management roles, are somehow providing better options and more opportunities for women.

Chapter Three

As part of a recent reorganization of the college structure at West Community College (WCC), the role of *associate dean* was established to alleviate some of the administrative responsibilities faced by deans. As institutions have looked to businesses as models of efficiency (Dan & Pollitt, 2015), the result has been an increase in the number of associate dean positions (Bryman, 2007; Preston & Floyd, 2016; Preston & Price, 2012). There have been few studies about the role of an associate dean, much less their role at the community college, and even fewer that provide a clear definition, but Preston and Floyd (2016) asserted that associate deans primarily “provide a link between the academic voice and the ever-changing demand being placed upon universities” (p. 266).

An internal, college-wide search was conducted at WCC in the spring of 2018 to identify 24 new associate deans to fill positions at five different campuses. Fourteen of these positions were filled by women, and the women selected represented a wide range of ages, races, academic backgrounds, and experience and included several women who had limited or no previous experience in higher education administration. Women from all but one of the campuses were represented in this study. All of the associate deans selected were previously faculty members, and most had acted as assistant deans (department chairs) at WCC before that position was eliminated as a cost-saving

measure. This intersection of events—a reorganization, a mass hiring, and a sudden influx of women in administrative positions at the college—has set the stage for a significant organizational change over the course of the next several years. But how do the individuals who embody this change feel about their new roles? What kinds of challenges do they experience as women, and how do they rise to meet those challenges? How has the institution supported or hindered their success in a new role? Given J. Acker’s (1990) framework and the context of the glass cliff, do these middle management positions really offer these women the opportunities they seek? This study examined the experiences of these women as they took on new roles in service of their institution and explored how their professional identities changed as they grew into their positions.

As both a critical feminist scholar and one of the newly chosen associate deans at the institution of interest, I am both personally vested in the experiences of my colleagues and significantly impacted by the outcome of this reorganization. My unique access to the women who have filled this role and the context of this position gave me insight to which I would not otherwise be privy. I believe that research is only as good as the people it helps, and it is in that spirit that I undertook this project: as a way to both amplify and elevate the voices, experiences, and expertise of the women around me to educate those who may underestimate the women they have hired.

Methodology

Because I am a critical feminist scholar, it is essential that the methodology I engage in is informed by my epistemological commitments. Narrative inquiry—more specifically, critical narrative inquiry—was chosen because of its “holistic approach to

address issues of complexity, multiplicity of perspectives and human centredness”

(Webster & Mertova, 2007, p.4). As Hartman (2015) explained,

The more fully we can understand the potential meanings implicit in how people represent their experience, the better equipped we will be to understand the implications of their self-presentations, and the more resonant will be the theories we construct of those accounts. (p. 22)

While it is not possible to fully capture or represent another’s experience, it is my hope that in adopting a narrative approach, I have given an accounting that is as true to the participants’ experiences as possible.

Broadly speaking, narrative inquiry describes a process by which individuals make sense of what they know through the sharing of stories, allowing them to interpret new experiences (Bruner, 1987), connect events (Labov & Waletzky, 1968), and depict these events from their individual perspectives (Ochs & Capps, 2001). One important aspect of narrative inquiry is that it frames research as the “construction and reconstruction of personal stories” that acknowledge “the influence of experience and culture on the construction of knowledge” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 4).

Understanding narratives in this way brings to light the highly personal, subjective, and contextual nature of an experience and an understanding that the answer to *what happened* could have more than one possibility. Critical narrative analysis is often understood from a rhetorical perspective—that is, an examination of a narrative in the context of critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA approaches “language as a form of social practice” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 2), and scholars engage in the analysis of discourse

in order to examine specific social issues in order to promote social change (Soutou-Manning, 2014). As Wodak (2001) explained, “CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed signaled, constituted, legitimized, and so on by language in use (or in discourse)” (p. 2). In combining CDA with narrative analysis, scholars suggest that narrative analysis becomes a critical inquiry (Soutou-Manning, 2014), but this type of analysis, though certainly useful, is limited by its focus on the language and discursive choices actors use to describe their experiences. What is perhaps *more* useful is an analysis of the hidden social structures and pressures that shape these discourses.

In her work examining the structural elements of caring, Dennis (2013) described a method of critical narrative analysis designed to “make explicit inequality, oppression, distortions to the communicative potential of participants, ideological influences, and other such categories of impact on the autonomous, free, and equal expression and participation of actors in engagement with one another” (p. 408). In essence, the goal of this approach to critical narrative analysis is not to provide a definitive interpretation of individual actors’ behavior based on their linguistic choices so much as it is to make plain all of the cultural and social factors that can affect an individual’s interpretation of events and actions. Dennis argued that, since all meaningful action is constituted and constrained by cultural structures that are out of an actor’s control, such structures can potentially produce effects beyond that actor’s intent. She outlined three aspects of narrative structural analysis, including the analysis of cultural structures, unintended consequences of action, and deconstruction. In the following sections, I describe each of these aspects

and suggest how we might deepen this analysis with the additional concepts of intersectionality, deconstruction, and resistance.

Cultural Structures and Unintended Consequences of Action

Dennis's (2013) conceptualization of structure is grounded in Giddens's (1990) theory of the structural reproduction of social systems, which are "social practices that are organized through the shared knowledge about how things should be done and the presupposition that people are capable of doing things in a manner in which they should be done according to the social knowledge" (Dennis, 2013, p. 410). From this theoretical perspective, cultural structures delimit actors' choices, influence their decisions, and, importantly, define the conditions under which actions and intentions may be interpreted. For example, in McElreath's (2008) description of her encounter with a senior faculty member who reduced her internal struggle to "that mommy thing," McElreath's response was heavily constrained by cultural structures that suggest that there is a correct way to respond to such a comment. A socially correct response likely does not allow for an impromptu lecture on the unreasonable hurdles that female researchers must face when forced to choose between their careers and motherhood, but such a response is *possible* and illustrates how social structures like gender and motherhood influence the way actors engage with and interpret each other's actions.

As Giddens (1990) explained, structures both create and are created through society and culture, and this "fundamentally recursive relationship" imperfectly reproduces, reinforces, and reinvents the way actors behave (p. 69). At the same time that these largely unseen structures provide parameters for action, they allow actors to engage

in new actions because, as Giddens underscored, all actors *could* have acted differently from what they chose. McElreath, for example, could have lectured her professor on the sexism of her statement just as her professor could have elected not to mention the baby at all. The professor might have offered support or might have encouraged McElreath to stay the course. She did not, and her action had a very particular effect and set of outcomes. Dennis (2013) explained that it is this ability of actors to choose actions of their own volition and reflexively monitor those actions, allowing them to examine these actions critically and to “critique the conditions and consequences of our actions for inequity, oppression...and ideological distortion” (p. 411). These “unacknowledged conditions of action” create the conditions for unintended consequences of action (p. 411), providing us with the second aspect of Dennis’ narrative structural analysis.

Giddens’s (1990) stratification model of social action suggests that actors make choices in a context of both the unacknowledged and unintended consequences of action. He proposed that there are two ways to go about studying these elements: the examination of social systems as “strategic conduct” and the identification of “chronically reproduced” unintended consequences of action (p. 80). The strategic conduct that Giddens mentioned refers to the ways in which actors make use of and draw upon cultural structures and rules in their own social relationships—in other words, to study the way a person navigates and uses structures and rules to interact with others. In this study, for example, by examining the strategic conduct of my participants, I was able to describe structures of power that were both implicitly and explicitly used to differentiate between *good* and *bad* leaders and, in several cases, allow participants to

position themselves as *better* leaders than others. By examining the chronically reproduced unintended consequences of action, I noticed that efforts by participants to connect with the faculty they were now managing further undermined their ability to be seen as figures of authority.

Dennis's model provides a useful basis for critically examining narratives, but what both she and Giddens do not explicitly acknowledge is that while all actors have the ability to choose their actions, some actors are more constrained than others in their choices because of the social structures that disproportionately affect them. In this study, I extend Dennis's and Giddens's work by employing two additional concepts that critically examine participant narratives: intersectional analysis and resistance. These concepts both extend these authors' work and further define the range of potential unacknowledged and unintended consequences of action. Though I employed deconstruction analysis in this study (as did Dennis and Giddens), I chose to use Boje's (2001) conception of deconstruction because of its emphasis on binaries and antenarratives that situate participants as both constructors and deconstructors of meaning (Wolgemuth, 2014).

Intersectional Analysis

Intersectionality is broadly defined as the "simultaneous, intersecting, inseparable, coterminous and multiple forces of oppressional acting on individual/groups, including: racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism and classism" (Chadwick, 2017, p. 2). Coined by civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw, the term was originally applied to the experiences of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). The idea central and most relevant to

this study is that intersectional theory “argues that we cannot approach gender, race, class, or sexuality as single or discrete issues or categories” (Chadwick, 2017, p. 5). As mentioned in a previous discussion of J. Acker’s (1990) framework, women of color experience the workplace differently than White women because of their race, compounding the fact that they are likely already experiencing oppression or discrimination because of their gender. Their experiences are fundamentally different from the experiences of White women, and they are often more restricted and constrained in their actions in ways that White women are not. These racial constructs both shape and are shaped by the women who are bound by them in ways that are different and more oppressive than gender constructs alone. This kind of “structural intersectionality” refers to the day-to-day reality of race and class oppression which leads to markedly different experiences for Black and White women (Chadwick, 2017, p. 7). Chadwick (2017) further stated,

Women’s social positions are mediated by their economic status, citizenship, race, and access to politically stable states. A convergence of these social positions with gender has material effects on lives, experiences and access to facilities and support structures. As a result, poor immigrant black women experience violence, healthcare and political and legal systems in materially different ways to wealthy, privileged white women as a result of the intersections of race, class, nationality and gender oppression (p. 7).

This concept is important because it speaks to Dennis’s (2013) notion that unacknowledged conditions of action influence a person’s action but further highlights

how these conditions may disproportionately affect or constrain an individual's actions. In other words, these unacknowledged conditions are not created equally and are unlikely to produce the same result for women of color that they are for others.

Translating the concept of intersectionality into a concrete methodology is no easy task and has led to distinct camps that disagree on how scholars ought to even conceptualize intersectionality. While the origins and outcomes of that discussion are beyond the scope of this study, it is important to recognize that, even in the most general sense, there are multiple ways to talk about intersectionality and that there is no universal agreement on the best way to do so. In this study, I adopted Prins's (2006) notion that intersectional research can be approached in two different ways: systemically and constructively. Systemic intersectionality is (unsurprisingly) concerned with the impact of structural and systemic inequalities on identity, in which individuals are seen as the "passive bearers of the meanings of social categories" (p. 280), meaning that they are acted *upon* by systems of oppression rather than acting within (a problem that I have attempted to address in the resistance analysis). A constructionist approach, which Prins recommends, examines identities not as they are named by others but as they are narrated by the individuals who claim them. Though Prins's point that systemic approaches tend to be reductive is well taken (e.g., the more identities an individual has, the heavier the burden), it is worth understanding intersectionality from a systemic viewpoint as well as a constructionist viewpoint because, agency notwithstanding, individuals are often *treated* as the sum of their identities. Whether that view is a good thing or a bad thing (and

reductionism tends toward the latter) is immaterial; it is the reality that many minorities face.

On the surface, intersectionality seems at odds with a narrative approach. After all, narratives are by definition individual accounts and personal stories that are almost exclusively centered on “the specific experiences undergone by individuals” (Crossley, 2000, p. 40), and they are largely removed from the context of structural, political, and cultural power relations (Chadwick, 2017). One way to approach this is by using Mishler’s (1995) functional narrative framework that examines how narrators reproduce, subvert, or enact power dynamics. As Bonilla-Silva et al. (2004) explained, stories are told within the context of “particular ideological formations” (p. 556), which become socially supported master narratives (Billig, 1991). These stories are the “narratives that actors draw on in explaining personal or collective realities” (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2004, p. 556). These “summaries of socially shared understandings” are used by actors to make sense of their experiences (Nelson, 2001, p. 6). By examining the ways in which these master narratives are embedded in the stories of actors, we can both honor the unique perspectives and experiences of participants and understand their narratives in the larger material and structural context within which they are embedded.

Deconstruction

Deconstruction, originally conceived by Derrida as a semiotic analysis in philosophical texts (Derrida & Caputo, 1997), has more recently been treated as a quasi-concept (Houle, 2009), or a paradoxical concept, used to expand qualitative analysis (Childers, 2012). While Derrida’s idea of deconstruction is rigid and primarily concerned

with binaries (e.g., woman/man, mind/body), a quasi-conception of the term would include much greyer concepts, like justice and ethics, which are not so neatly contained. Deconstruction, therefore, cannot be *done*, but it can be witnessed or traced in a text—or, in this case, a narrative. The goal is to “pinpoint moments of weakness in narratives of subjectivity where meaning breaks down with/in the logic” and witness the “destabilizing, rupturing process of displacement or inversion” (Tarc, 2005, p. 839)—in other words, to identify how the stories of participants tend to fall apart or deviate in some way.

Boje (2001) posited eight analytical steps for deconstruction analysis, the result of which is to “find a new perspective, one that resituates the story beyond its dualisms, excluded voices or singular viewpoint” (p. 21). Wolgemuth (2014) specifically pointed to the last four steps of this process as useful in deconstruction analysis: finding dualities (i.e., locating Derrida’s binaries), finding exceptions, looking between the lines, and resituating narratives (i.e., identifying how participants restore or reconceptualize such dualities). Boje (2001) also suggested that antenarratives—stories that are fragmented, incomplete, or unconstructed—are equally important to examine as they can highlight the inherent complexity of a story that a narrator might otherwise gloss over or oversimplify. This perspective is important, as Wolgemuth (2014) explained, because it situates “participants as *deconstructors*, rather than just constructors, of stories, meanings, and self” and allows researchers to identify stories that might not fit a more traditional definition (p. 589).

Deconstruction trace analysis helps to further narrative structural analysis because it allows for the examination of cultural structures and rules that guide and influence narratives that the participants themselves may be unaware of or may deliberately ignore or misrepresent. In this study, I engaged deconstruction by highlighting how the stories participants shared fell apart in their telling. I actively looked for binaries that the participants themselves used to frame their experiences and noticed stories that did not hang together or were framed differently depending on the context. This phenomenon occurred repeatedly with one participant in particular. As discussed in a subsequent chapter, this participant often railed against the incompetence of higher-level administrators, framing their relationship as an Us/Them binary and implying that they did not come by their positions honestly. She talked about how women are naturally more suited to these positions but then implied that the women themselves were undeserving and unqualified *because* they were women. This view is problematic because she simultaneously made the case that, because she is a woman, she would be the perfect candidate for a higher-level position but that the women currently in charge are not qualified because of that same reason. She was cherry picking—using the master narrative of women as leaders to both justify her own qualifications and dismiss the qualifications of others. Without specifically tracing deconstruction, I might have missed the way she purposefully distorted this binary for her own gain.

Resistance

Resistance analysis centers around the examination of relationships—positive or negative—with and between subjects identified in narrative inquiries (Wolgemuth, 2014).

Wolgemuth (2014) wrote that this kind of analysis

seeks to understand these relationships from a critical structuralist perspective, examining the kinds of selves participants constructed to resist hegemonic subjects, and from a critical resistance perspective, examining the way participants resist the desire to be identified as selves in the first instance. (p. 595)

This notion of resistance analysis speaks directly to Dennis's (2013) method of narrative structural analysis because it allows for another way to understand the unintended consequences of action. If narrators construct identities that are resistant to hegemonic or largely unquestioned social constructs and behave in ways that subvert or reject these norms—behavior which could be understood as a kind of action—it is possible that that resistance could lead to unintended consequences.

Giddens (1976) pointed out that “the individual could have acted otherwise” (p. 76), though Archer (1996) suggested that Giddens was likely overstating the amount of agency an actor has, if they are indeed constrained by such structures. The varying degrees of an actor's individual agency are not under discussion here but serve to underscore a previous point: There are some actors who are more constrained by cultural structures than others are. Logically, then, there are some actors who have more freedom to resist those structures than others do. In this study, it became readily apparent that some participants used their (arguably) unchecked and unchallenged racial privilege to

resist and question the structures of gender and higher education they encountered, while others felt that they needed to closely monitor their own behavior to avoid backlash.

Ultimately, resistance analysis asks two questions: “How do the participants’ subjects relate to one another,” and “how do the participants submit to, resist, and/or critically resist normative ideals?” (Wolgemuth, 2014, p. 596). In this study, I examined the relationship between the participants’ constructions of an ideal leader and how they submit to or resist that ideal in pursuit of their own leadership identities. By adding the two additional concepts of intersectionality and resistance to Dennis’s model, my study further adds to the scope and depth of narrative structural analysis. Using these elements, I was able to trace how cultural structures and constructs presented challenges to participants and how they overcome or, in some cases, rationalize those challenges in order to stay on the job.

Participants

This study drew from the experiences of 11 of these women (including myself) as they went through their first years in their new roles as associate deans. The study was based on data collected from an ongoing study of the women who had taken on this new role and their experiences over the course of the first year. I had initially planned to interview at least two different women at each campus for two main reasons. First, though the role of associate dean is ostensibly the same for each participant regardless of the campus selected, they conduct these roles in a variety of contexts that are specific to each location, so while the job function of each associate dean is the same in theory, it might look quite different for every participant in practice. Second, as previously

discussed, administrative life (much like life outside of academia) is gendered (Bagilhoe & White, 2011; A. T. Johnson, 2014; O'Connor, 2011; Paterson & Chicola, 2017; Pyke, 2013), and I elected to focus exclusively on the experiences of women. Despite the disproportionate number of women hired for this position, research suggests that women are often recruited to do the “dirty job” of middle management (Shain, 2000) and “carry the burden of organizational change” (Deem et al., 2000). By interviewing women at every campus, I hoped to get a sense of the range of those tasks. The reality of scheduling, campus politics, and the difficulty of change management meant that I was unable to recruit participants from one of the five campuses. All three of the women hired for positions at that campus explained that they felt too overwhelmed with their jobs to participate in the study. That left four other campuses and 15 other women, ten of whom agreed to participate. (The other five were either on leave for the first part of the year or cited similar concerns about the overwhelming nature of their work).

Participants were identified using purposive sampling, which “relies on the researchers’ situated knowledge of the field and rapport with member of targeted networks” (Barratt et al., 2015, p. 5). As one of the newly selected associate deans, I had unique access to the context and events surrounding the creation of this position and understood better than others the challenges of transitioning to such a position as a female faculty member. The criteria for participation was twofold: Participants must be female and must have been hired within the year prior to the study’s start. Potential participants were emailed prior to the start of the academic semester immediately following their

appointments and asked to participate. I received human study approval from both WCC and my research institution prior to contacting participants.

I am keenly aware of the “hidden dilemmas of being an insider that often relate to issues of unintended positioning, shared, relationships, and disclosure” that may arise when conducting research in my place of work (Leigh, 2014, p. 429). The complexities associated with *insiderness* have been well documented, particularly in ethnographic studies (Coffey, 1999; Edwards & Ribbens, 1998; Humphrey, 2013; Kanuha, 2000; Labaree, 2002). Taylor (2011) wrote of being an “intimate insider” and how the very personal nature of an observer’s relationship with her surroundings can create its own problems. As Larabee (2002) pointed out, however, this kind of access is essential to uncovering “hidden truths that the public is unaware of” (p. 102). White (1997) conducted an ethnographic study in the context of her work as a social worker. While her role of team leader gave her unprecedented access to her participants, she admitted that she often felt “uncomfortable” as a researcher—a “spy in the camp” who could not ensure that her participants would “feel no sense of betrayal” in their representation (p. 331). White used Geertz’s (1974) framework of *experience near* and *experience distant* to argue that research can be conducted by those who are on the inside as long as they recognize their outsider status. Though I experienced feelings similar to White’s throughout this study, the narrative aspect complicated my research even further, as the women were required to literally tell me one of their own, personal stories. On the one hand, my role meant that participants were more likely to share stories because I had

personal knowledge of the people involved. On the other hand, it was clear that at times participants were hesitant to tell me the full story *because* of my personal knowledge.

As an insider, I had intimate knowledge of the processes and practices at the institution and a nuanced understanding of the people involved. I knew, for example, about the differences in campus culture and management style that affected each associate dean individually, and perhaps more importantly, I knew information that *my participants did not know*. This knowledge presented an ethical challenge for me as I weighed what I knew against what I was being told. Could the information I had potentially make the participant's life easier? Would telling that information hurt or harm my relationship with a given participant? I sorted through each question during every interview and focus group and came away more than once wondering if I had done the right thing.

This messy, collaborative, and reflexive process of thinking through my roles as both researcher and participant was critical to building the rigor of this study because of the potentially sensitive nature of some of the themes discussed and because of the vulnerability that was required (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Pillow, 2003). I asked participants to be honest and open about their feelings and experiences, and while they had assurance from me that I would maintain their anonymity, they had little or no reason to believe that others in the study might not judge their experiences. It was clear, for example, that one of the associate deans with no administrative experience was more hesitant in her answers. While she could be reasonably assured that I would not tell her supervisor, she did not necessarily know me well enough to trust that I would not think

less of her or judge her incompetent. She quickly dismissed any gaps in her knowledge as “newness to the job” and often sought reassurance that I was experiencing the same issues. Through my conversations with her and others, I eventually came to understand that each of us brought to the table a unique set of struggles, experiences, and challenges—an interaction of experiences that were different from others. The outside perception of having a cushy administrative job masked the personal difficulties that many of us experienced daily as a result of our selection. In examining my own institution from a critical perspective (Watt, 2007), I was able to identify inequities within the institution and consider ways that I might begin to call attention to some of these issues and effect positive change for all associate deans.

Participant Profiles

Participants represented a range of ages, races, backgrounds, and experiences. Below, I have included some limited information about each participant to provide further context for the study.

Alice. Alice was an associate dean at one of the smaller campuses. Prior to becoming an associate dean, Alice had more than 15 years of teaching experience with the college and served as an assistant dean. A former law enforcement official, Alice was particularly sensitive to what she perceived to be gender inequity at the institution.

Barbara. Barbara was an associate dean at a smaller campus. She had more than 10 years of teaching experience at the college and served as an assistant dean for eight years, as well as serving as an interim dean. Barbara was one of the few associate deans who had transferred from another campus after taking on this role.

Carolyn. One of the older participants in the study, Carolyn was an associate dean at one of the fastest growing campuses at the college. She served as an assistant dean for five years prior to becoming an associate dean and was one of only two participants with a science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) background.

Jillian. Jillian was an assistant dean prior to taking on her role as an associate dean. She was one of the younger participants in the study and frequently expressed irritation that her provost treated her like a child. She was concerned that her outspokenness on important issues would prevent her from advancing at the college, and she was unsure about whether or not she would remain.

Mara. Mara was an associate dean from a smaller campus and had very limited administrative experience prior to taking on her role. She was put in a difficult position because she had been selected for the job over a faculty member with more experience than her. While she said that the faculty member has been supportive, she has had some trouble with other faculty who no longer see her as a colleague.

Marine. Marine switched campuses to take on the role of associate dean at a smaller campus. The campuses are quite different from each other, and Marine had difficulty adjusting to the new culture. She has already had what she calls “run-ins” with faculty and staff, and she admitted that she was considering going back to teaching.

Matilda. Matilda was an associate dean at one of the smaller campuses. She was formerly an assistant dean and has been very vocal about her disdain for senior management. Over the course of this year-long study, Matilda had begun the process of applying for administrative positions at other institutions.

Michelle. Michelle was one of two associate deans with a STEM background. Over the course of the study, she struggled to establish authority in her division and with the rest of the campus. She has often borne the brunt of toxic male behavior from faculty who have treated her as an administrative assistant, and she has been hesitant to report this behavior to her supervisor.

Nina. Prior to her role as an associate dean, Nina worked in the non-academic side of the college, so while she has had much administrative experience, she has had very little academic experience. She described herself as “in recovery” from a previously toxic work environment, and while she has enjoyed her new role, she has struggled to keep up with the demands of the role.

Sabrina. Sabrina was one of two participants with no prior administrative experience prior to taking her new position as an associate dean. In fact, prior to being hired, she was working as an adjunct instructor, teaching one class a semester, so she had no prior relationships with faculty or administrators prior to assuming her role.

Sema. Sema was one of the youngest participants in the study and was new to higher education administration. She was only one of two participants (and one of three at the institution) who was not a former assistant dean. She initially struggled in the role but became more confident as the year progressed; however, Sema indicated that she is no longer interested in pursuing a more senior position as she focuses on her young family.

Data Collection, Transcription, and Rigor

For this study, I developed a semi-structured interview guide based on previous research in administrator and faculty identity development (Collinson, 2007; Gizir, 2014; Marine & Martinez, 2018; Motha & Varghese, 2018; Murakami et al., 2018; Palmer, 2015; Whitchurch, 2006), and it included questions based on my own experiences as an administrator and faculty member. In-depth interviews with all of the participants were conducted that explored the participants' preparation for and understanding of their new roles, including dimensions of socialization, satisfaction, and relationship negotiation, using what Clinchy (2003) described as an *epistolary voice*—one that seeks to explore and engage participants rather than assert or announce intention. Interviews were conducted twice—at the beginning of the participants' first year and at the close of their first year as associate deans—as a way of gauging the changes that each participant underwent, contributing to the rigor of data collection. Each interview lasted about two hours each, and participants were asked to be available for follow-up questions via email. All conversations were digitally recorded with the knowledge and consent of each participant. Full transcripts of all conversations were sent to the participants prior to beginning data analysis so that they could review them for accuracy. I then held short interviews with each participant to confirm that they had been accurately characterized and to offer them an opportunity to provide additional details and clarification.

Two additional group interviews took place over the course of the year to allow participants to interact with each other and to give them the opportunity to contextualize their individual experiences. The group setting is important because, as George (2013) explained, “group interviews create an opportunity for participants to discuss collectively

normative assumptions that are typically unarticulated” (p. 257) as participants “both query each other and explain themselves to each other” (Morgan, 1996, p. 139). Beyond the practical function of eliciting more information from participants, a group interview had the potential to form the basis of a network that participants might rely on in their work at WCC. As previously indicated, women’s access to other women in leadership positions may be limited, and this small group was one way to encourage important networking and relationship building.

In addition to interviews, participants were asked to respond in writing to a series of prompts about halfway through the year as a kind of check-in about how they were feeling about their role and any concerns or challenges they faced. I also asked that participants periodically journal about their experiences so that they could share that information with me in our final interview. While I initially considered asking participants to journal electronically, I was concerned that the additional burden of having to write about their experiences might dissuade some from agreeing to be part of the process. Instead, I periodically emailed questions that participants could respond to as a way of “documenting” their experience. Participants chose their own pseudonyms as both a measure of anonymity and an effort to give some control over their representation in future publications.

Field notes were also used as data in this study. As Patton (2002) explained, field notes can assist in analyzing and interpreting interviews, can provide researchers with new insights that can shape a study, and can focus the researcher to aid in the prompt of additional questions. Field notes are of particular importance in narrative methodology

because the goal is to arrive at a plausible explanation (or a set of explanations) as to why something occurred in the manner it did (Polkinghorne, 1995). In taking the time to reflect on the interviews themselves, I was able to offer multiple explanations for the stories I was told. Immediately following every interview, I took extensive field notes, writing detailed descriptions of the setting, the body language of the participant, the interaction itself, and other relevant observations. Most of the individual interviews took place in the participants' offices, which in themselves offered insight into the personalities of the participants. Recording impressions of their mannerisms and reactions helped me to construct a more detailed portrait of each event and participant.

The interview data was transcribed using the transcription service Rev.com, a service that has an excellent reputation for both accurate and timely transcription. Rev.com also gives users the opportunity to identify any features the transcriptionist should be aware of, including accents, acronyms, and jargon. While I used this service because of the sheer volume of data collected (e.g., 40 hours of data) I acknowledge that the process of transcription is in itself a valuable process. Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) explained that "analysis takes place and understandings are derived through the process of constructing a transcript by listening and re-listening, viewing and re-viewing...Transcription facilitates the close attention and the interpretive thinking that is needed to make sense of the data" (p. 82). This process of viewing and reviewing the data is important but not exclusive to the manual transcription process. As a qualitative researcher, it is my task to analyze the data I have collected, a process which requires a

deep familiarization with the data itself, a familiarization that is possible whether or not I have spent hours typing up the data myself. As Tilley (2003) pointed out,

Similar to the discovery of fingerprints, through dusting at the crime scene, a transcriber's interpretive/analytical/theoretical prints become visible on close examination of the transcription process and the texts constructed. Research rigor is enhanced when qualitative researchers interrogate the ways in which hired transcribers influence the analysis and therefore trustworthiness and reliability of data as they translate tape into text. (p. 752)

In that sense, all transcription is a reflection of the transcriber. Just as there is danger in a researcher entirely divorcing themselves from the transcription process, there is danger in believing that the documents they transcribe are somehow a purer or more accurate reflection of an interview. As Green et al. (1997) noted, "a transcript is a text that 're'-presents an event; it is not the event itself. Following this logic, what is represented is data constructed by a researcher for a particular purpose, not just talk written down" (p. 172). I am mindful of this tension between the transcriber and the transcribed and hope that, by openly discussing the issues that this process may represent, I have demonstrated my commitment to fully engaging with this data.

Analysis

Interview data was analyzed using two techniques. First, I reviewed the transcripts of the interviews according to the research questions to identify passages that addressed (either explicitly or implicitly) the questions asked. This type of open, holistic coding method is a first attempt "to capture a sense of the overall contents and the

possible categories that may develop” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 141). Next, I conducted a narrative structural analysis using Dennis’s (2013) explicitly critical method that aims to “articulate the context of unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences of action” (p. 411). To conduct this type of structural analysis, I used Dennis’s (2013) critical structural narrative analysis by coding the interviews for cultural structures, unintended consequences of action, and deconstruction. I then added to this model by engaging Wolgemuth’s (2014) concept of resistance. I also added the concept of intersectionality to the model to emphasize the importance of the individual experience. Counter-narratives that did not fit the emerging themes were identified as a way to enhance the quality and rigor of the analysis.

Additionally, I used reconstructive horizon analysis (RHA) to investigate some participant claims more deeply. With RHA, speech acts are analyzed to uncover claims of objective (tacitly agreed upon claims about the external world), subjective (internal experiences), normative (value claims), and identity (personal character) meanings (Carspecken, 1996). By engaging in this process, it is possible to “reconstruct” the claims that participants make in a social exchange and highlight the multiple possible meanings of a given speech act. Carspecken (1996) suggested that meaning occurs when the range of possible shared meanings are identified in a given speech act and that meaning is shaped by social context, ultimately delimiting a meaning field for the speech act or interaction.

Coding was performed using the computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) tool Dedoose. First developed in 2009 at the University of California Los-

Angeles (UCLA), the program has a number of advantages over its competitors, including a low monthly subscription rate, the ability to store information in the cloud (and thus be able to work with data from any location or by a group), and a very simple, user-friendly interface. Using a digital tool like Dedoose to code has several advantages. First, it allows users to keep a digital record of their work in a way that manual coding does not and eliminates the paper management problem that qualitative researchers often face. Second, it allows others to view not just the results of coding but also the actual process of coding that researchers engage in. This capability might be particularly useful for member or peer checking as an opportunity for the researcher to quite literally show their work. Additionally, this software allows for the coding of new data around previously established parameters, making the comparison of narratives a much easier process. It is important to note that while CAQDAS software makes the coding process easier, it is not a stand-in for analysis, which should be a multi-dimensional process that takes into account the complexity of the language (Geisler, 2018).

Representing Findings

In conducting this research, I am speaking to two different (albeit overlapping) audiences. The first audience, the academic community, may find value in both the structural analysis methodology used in the study as well as the study itself. My goal is to ultimately further Dennis's (2013) analytical approach to critical structural analysis. For this audience, my findings are presented here in the traditional form of a dissertation. The second audience, however, are the participants in the study, as well as the higher education administrative community they serve. While this audience is also comfortable

reading academic journals, I think it would be more impactful to share statements/personal stories from the participants so that they have a sense of the kinds of repercussions/consequences that have resulted from the organizational change. In keeping with my commitment to a critical feminist epistemology, I believe that the most important part of my research is to share my findings with those who are in a position to help make positive changes for my participants. To that end, I will create a digital presentation to be shared with the provosts and/or deans' council to report some of the information I have collected visually and will provide a link to an online forum or blog where they can read in greater depth about the experiences of their associate deans. I have explored some platforms for this type of reporting, and I am considering using the popular blog-creation site WordPress. WordPress allows users to post private blogging sites and provides a variety of templates for this purpose.

There are certainly privacy concerns about reporting results in this kind of format. While my participants are anonymous and their stories will be stripped of readily identifiable information, sharing a link to their stories with administrators could mean that their stories will spread to a wider audience. While I could control who has access to the link via specific email regulation, I am concerned that kind of control might prove to be a barrier in getting administrators to access the site. I have had candid conversations with my participants about the importance of sharing these stories to ensure that they understand how this data might be viewed by others, and I anticipate working with them to carefully curate what information is shared.

Validity and Quality

For qualitative researchers, validity covers a multitude of terms, including *authenticity, credibility, confirmability, internal coherence, transferability, reliability,* and *significance* (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010). Too often in qualitative research, validity is externalized and is used to “mechanically guarantee and produce truthful representation of reality and “real” objects of research” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010, p. 603). This view is overly simplistic and one that I take issue with in view of my own ontological commitments as a critical feminist scholar. To begin with, I prefer the term *validation* instead of *validity* as Mishler (1990) and Koro-Ljungberg (2008) understood the term. As Koro-Ljungberg (2008) explained, *validation* “highlights the diverse ways of making, conducting, and even legitimizing research” and “illustrates the active role and agency of knowers” (p. 983). Understanding validation in this way is central to my own positionality because it speaks to the inclusion of the numerous ways in which research is conducted to actively advocate for social change and underscore the agency of both researcher and participant.

A Feminist Approach to Validation

My stance as a critical researcher is what Lather (1986) referred to as *openly value-based*. As she explained, concepts of scientific *neutrality* and *objectivity* belie the “inherently ideological nature of research in the human sciences” and “legitimate privilege based on class, race, and gender” (p. 64). Reinharz (1985) contended that, since it is logically impossible to produce knowledge free of interest, researchers should “substitute explicit interests for implicit ones” (p. 17). In Lather’s and Reinharz’s views, openly value-based research is no more or less ideological than positivist research; rather,

it represents an “epistemological break” (Hesse, 1980) from “positivist insistence on researcher neutrality” (Lather, 1986, p. 64). However, Lather’s call to practice openly ideological research does not assume a kind of methodological free-for-all; on the contrary, Lather explained that the need for self-reflexivity in qualitative research necessitates a more systematic and transparent way of establishing the trustworthiness of data.

The goal of critical feminist research is to “correct both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of the female experience” (Lather, 1986, p. 68), highlighting the need for validation efforts to be emancipatory. Lather offered four guidelines that have shaped my own approach to validation and that serve as a guide to understanding how researchers might navigate their own subjectivity in a research setting.

Triangulation. Beyond a *multiple measures* approach, Lather (1986) suggested that triangulation ought to include multiple sources, methods, and theories. In my own research, this approach points to the need to include information from multiple sources—critical, given that my sample size is so small. Triangulation is best achieved in my research through multiple methods—interviewing participants individually, interviewing them in a group setting, and conducting multiple observations as I have done in this study.

Construct Validity. This type of validation speaks to Lather’s call for *systematized reflexivity*, in which researchers establish the link between a priori theory, real-life experience, and the researcher’s positionality. I utilized this type of validation in my own research by conducting an extensive literature review on the experiences of

women in the workplace and comparing those experiences to the responses of my participants. I also practiced reflexivity by journaling throughout my data collection as I considered how my own perspective was impacted by the data.

Face Validity. This type of validation can be viewed as a kind of explicit confirmation from the participants that the researcher has accurately represented their condition. Often done in the form of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1981), I met this standard of validation by debriefing with my participants following their interviews to ensure that I accurately represented their positionality. Reason and Rowan (1981) wrote that good research “goes back to the subject with the tentative results, and refines them in the light of the subjects’ reactions” (p. 248). By bringing the data back to my participants for review, I ensured that the participants were able to act as the ultimate arbiters in the accuracy of their representation.

Catalytic Validity. Arguably the most important tenet of critical, emancipatory research, catalytic validation refers to “the degree to which the research process re-orientes, focuses, and energizes participants...knowing reality in order to transform it” (Lather, 1986, p. 67). In my research study, I practiced catalytic validation by sharing the results of my research with my participants and discussing how the research impacts their understanding of their own professional roles. It is critical to provide a space for reflection and discuss ways in which this new information might assist participants in improving their personal situations and advocating for change.

By understanding validation in this way, I have reinforced my commitment to social justice and change and held my research to a high ethical standard that privileges

the experience and personal knowledge of my participants. In actively engaging with my participants and highlighting my own subjectivity, I sought to establish the credibility and validation of the data, not as an unassailable fact, but as a trustworthy and logical account that, to the best of its ability, makes the implicit accounts of my participants explicit.

Related Validation Issues

With this firm grounding in Lather's (1986) understanding of validation, I now move to discuss some issues that arise related to this conceptualization of validation and discuss how they are best addressed from a critical feminist vantage point. These issues include reductionism, othering, reflexivity, and responsibility.

Reductionism

Koro-Ljungberg (2008) described reductionism as "an approach that promotes singularity based on a priori selection criteria or process" (p. 984). This notion, in her view, implies that particular criteria specified by subject-matter experts can grant legitimacy to that research. By choosing to define validity through "accurate representation" (p. 985), researchers assume that there is only one such accurate representation to be had. Though Lather's (1986) list of validation types could be used reductively, Lather and others warn against using checklists to establish credibility and validation; rather, the features of validation that Lather suggested should be a part of any good research qualitative research study in whatever form is most appropriate to the research itself.

Carspecken (1996) noted that validity requires the consensus of a cultural group, based on the inherent structures of human communication. Thayer-Bacon (2003) further

explained that validation should include ways in which knowers build assertions about their experiences as well as the ways in which they speak about their experiences. Koro-Ljungberg (2008) suggested that researchers might best avoid reductionism and exclusivism by highlighting three important assumptions, which are critical to the understanding of validation: interconnectedness, process, and pluralism.

Interconnectedness Between Reality and Subjects. By assuming an interconnectedness between reality and participants, researchers are in the position of relying heavily on the knower's subjectivities in order to provide an accurate account. This process would require in-depth and detailed description of the participant's experience and a large degree of reflexivity and openness from the researcher (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008, p. 986). In assuming this interconnectedness, however, researchers are effectively rendering outside, etic validation criteria irrelevant. In this way, member checking and triangulation become less about a checklist of validation to-dos and more about our ability as human beings to communicate with each other about our experiences in ways that can "evoke" and "construct" new realities (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008, p. 986).

Knowledge as a Process. In understanding knowledge as a process, Koro-Ljungberg (2008) argued that researchers are acknowledging the existence of various truths and realities which "emphasize the fallibility of assertions," "invite alternative knowings," and "promote social dialogue" (p. 987). For researchers, it can be difficult to conclude a research article without arriving at an answer that precludes other answers, but this type of openness on the part of the researchers underscores research and knowledge construction as a dynamic process.

Pluralism. This assumption highlights Koro-Ljungberg's (2008) call to move beyond our understanding of validation as a dualistic, implying that "there exists more than valid or invalid, good or bad, and well-or ill-executed research" (p. 987). In understanding research this way, researchers become more accepting of diversity and consider a range of viewpoints and perspectives.

Othering

Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012) warned against *othering*—the difficulty of representation in academic writing that "can be a potential source of dominance when it becomes a mode of subduing her in a network of interpretations and representations" (p. 299). Todorov (1984) explained that we define ourselves as we are different from the Other using value judgments, social distance, and knowledge. This concept is particularly relevant to a critical feminist perspective, wherein the goal is to give voice to the female experience. There is the danger that, in attempting to represent that experience, the researcher inadvertently engages in othering through implicit lexical strategies that reify hierarchy, subordination, and dominance (O'Barr, 1994).

Though Krumer-Nevo and Sidi (2012) discussed othering in regard to women in poverty, arguably, the same factors apply to all men and women of color. Specifically, they argued that there are four major factors at work, including objectification (reduction and subjugation of individual complexity), decontextualization (a focus on behavior abstracted from context), dehistoricization (a focus on the present, detached from individual history), and deauthorization (the creation of an omniscient, objective text). The authors argued that it is the responsibility of critical scholars to "write against"

othering and specifically suggested three modes of writing that have the potential to resist othering, including narrative, dialog, and reflexivity. This idea is particularly relevant to this study, given its narrative methodological design.

Narrative. Narrativization (locating a participant in the context of a narrative) allows the researcher to “explore women’s subjectivity both as influenced and created by the context of their real life” (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012, p. 301). In my study, I have interviewed and have narrativized the experiences of women college administrators. There is the danger, of course, in reducing their specific stories to the grand narrative of all women as both victims and tokens. In offering narratives, I have created a space for each participant to speak in her own voice in a way that specifically contextualizes the individual experience.

Dialog. The authors argued that dialog is both the most “appropriate literary form for expressing a variety of voices” and “vulnerable to power relationships” (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012, pp. 302–303). They suggested that, by providing dialog within the text, researchers provide description that is richer and more complex because it is composed of a variety of voices. Given the unequal power relationship between myself and those I interviewed, it is important to frame my interpretations in the context of the interview dialog to point out the multiple interpretations that might be formed by the reader and to underscore Koro-Ljungberg’s (2008) assumption of knowledge as a process.

Reflexivity. The conscious examination and articulation of the researcher’s positionality in the research process, reflexivity “posits the interviewer/researcher inside

the text—the object-subject of examination and study” (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012, p. 305). This idea reflects Lather’s (1986) call to catalytic validity and is an essential component of a transformative and emancipatory research process. I addressed my own positionality and my relationship with the research through journaling, portions of which I included in the text in the interest of being as transparent as possible about my role in the process and to make explicit my own subjectivity.

Responsibility

Finally, and perhaps most importantly to my personal onto-epistemology and positionality as a researcher, it is important to locate validation in the context of my own responsibilities as a researcher. Koro-Ljungberg (2010) argued that howsoever we define validation, the researcher ought to resist research practices that shift responsibility from the researcher to external discourses of validity. It is reductive and overly simplistic to reduce the monumental task of providing credible and trustworthy data to “textbook” validation strategies like member checking and audit trails. This is not to say that these are unnecessary or unhelpful strategies, but to rely on them as sole means of ensuring validation is to miss the contextual and situational factors that are a hallmark of qualitative research. Koro-Ljungberg (2010) wrote that “responsible researchers could strive for ongoing and disruptive dialogues with study participants and collaborative communities thus opening spaces for themselves and others to challenge the authorities of oppressors, to allow margins to speak, and to dislocate decolonizing privilege” (p. 608). As a critical feminist scholar, I find the notion of responsibility to be central to the research process. When in engaging in transformative or emancipatory research,

researchers are responsible for their participants beyond their textual representation, should be active in their commitment to work on the behalf of others, and be constantly attentive to issue of welfare and fairness. How can research be valid if it does not do what it sets out to do—in this case, to amplify the voices and experiences of others?

Challenges

The literature review revealed that women in leadership roles have a lot to worry about. Between the glass ceilings, glass elevators, and glass cliffs, there are many ways in which women could find themselves in a precarious position at an institution and in their own lives. This kind of study, though designed to shed light on some of these challenges and promote change within the institution, could have the unintended effect of “outing” my participants as unhappy with their jobs or incapable of doing the work. Though the literature showed nothing of the kind—indeed, women are *more* than capable of performing above and beyond the expectations of their roles—it is possible that this study might give the impression that women are unsuited for administration. As the researcher, it is my job to show the structural inequities that work against my participants and suggest how those in power can help them to be successful, as well as highlight their accomplishments in the face of such diversity.

While I do not anticipate any specific backlash to this study, I can anticipate that some of my participants might hesitate to have the outcomes shared for fear of negative consequences from a supervisor. While unlikely, it is not unheard of. Every participant had a different relationship with their supervisor, and not all of their experiences have

been positive or even neutral. It will be important to make sure that my participants are comfortable with how the findings are disseminated in the future.

As previously mentioned, I am currently an associate dean at one of the campuses I studied. While I do think that my role is valuable for this study because it allowed me access to insider knowledge about the institution, it did present a personal difficulty for me as I worked to frame my findings through the narratives of others and not my own. I did not want to influence the others who participated or cloud their narratives with my impressions, but I also did not want to divorce my experiences from theirs. While I accepted their narratives and acknowledged my own struggles, I did not suggest that they are comparable.

Chapter 4

I remember when I got offered the job. I had really mixed feelings about it. Like yeah, I wanted it, but also I could feel myself mentally starting to back away from it. I had worked really hard as an assistant dean, and so I thought I had a good chance at this position, but I know other qualified people applied too. So I was sort of surprised when I got the call. After the dean offered it to me, I started thinking—maybe I should think about this some more? This is such a big leap. What if it doesn't work out? What if I'm a total flop? I was full on spiraling, and I was thinking about my kids and what would happen if it didn't work out and whether or not this was a good move for me. This was like a 15 second rollercoaster that went on after they said, "you've got the job." I didn't even mean to say it out loud, but evidently, I said, "This could be bad." My dean got really quiet, and I actually thought they had hung up the phone, and then they said, "Yeah. You're right. I don't know what's going on around here. But I think you're the right person for the job." I think about that a lot now. Am I the right person for this job? I don't even know.

—Michelle, Interview 1, November 21, 2018)

This chapter is organized by the four aspects of the extended critical narrative analysis model used to analyze participant narratives. Each section includes a narrative

exemplar of a particular aspect of the augmented critical narrative analysis model, including analysis of cultural structures, unintended consequences, intersectionality, deconstruction, and resistance, and each section concludes with data analysis. In keeping with my critical feminist epistemology outlined in the previous chapter, I used a variety of methods to validate the data, including multiple interviews, peer debriefings, member checks, and negative case analysis. These techniques were employed to explicitly highlight and make plain my research interests—namely, to elevate and amplify the experiences of women in higher education administration—in an effort to “correct both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of the female experience” (Lather, 1986, p. 68). In this analysis, I do not seek to represent my participants’ experiences so much as I wish to contextualize their individual experiences and provide space for multiple interpretations.

This dissertation used an expanded critical narrative structural analysis methodology (Dennis, 2013), which was informed by additional types of critical analyses, including intersectionality, and resistance. This narrative study included participants from four of West Community College’s (WCC) campuses and was limited to women embarking on their first year as associate deans. Data was derived from two different interviews with each participant, once at the start of their first year and again at the end, as well as two different focus groups attended by the majority of the participants. In addition, some data was derived from personal communications from participants who were asked to answer several prompts throughout that first year.

Data analysis was first conducted using an open, holistic coding method in an initial attempt “to capture a sense of the overall contents and the possible categories” that

developed (Saldaña, 2009, p. 141). Next, I conducted a narrative structural analysis using Dennis's (2013) explicitly critical method to "articulate the context of unacknowledged conditions and unintended consequences of action" (p. 411). To conduct this type of structural analysis, I coded the interviews for the previously mentioned types of critical analyses. I then identified counter-narratives that did not fit the emerging themes as a way to enhance the quality and rigor of the analysis. As the following sections detail, this type of analysis yielded both methodological and thematic results, as I both employed the modified methodology and attempted to understand the barriers and challenges that govern the experiences of my participants.

Critical Narrative Analysis—Findings

Cultural Structures

According to Dennis (2013), the structural reproduction of social systems binds actors' choices and decisions and defines the conditions under which actions and intentions may be interpreted. These structures are both created and reified through society and culture and ultimately reinforced by the actors themselves. These invisible parameters both prescribe the limits of action and allow for new actions because, as Giddens (1990) pointed out, all actors could have acted differently than how they chose to act. To identify the cultural structures that were present in the participant narratives, I examined the data for structural indicators, or "talk that seemed to point toward either localized patterns of effects and structures of an awareness among participants of cultural conditions as being in operation" (p. 414). There were two cultural structures that seemed

to structure participants' experience in their roles as associate deans: structures of power and structures of gender.

Structures of Power: A Question of Value. In the narrative excerpt below, from the second focus group, Alice (one of the associate deans from a smaller campus) vented her frustration with the provost at her campus, who abruptly decided not to invite associate deans to her regular staff meetings:

Many of you mentioned the Provost Staff Meeting. Initially, we went to the Provost Staff, and then it was, "Okay, we're done with you." I mean that's how I felt. It was like we were invited, and then all of a sudden, we were no longer invited, and when I asked why we were not invited anymore, it was, "Well, first of all, you're not direct report to the provost"—okay, I know that—"and the information, again, will be communicated to your dean, and the dean will communicate it to you." That never happens. Then, finally, the provost came up with an alternative idea, and I felt like it was just to appease us as associate deans by coming up with this other named meeting. Yet I feel like that one is a waste of my time. I don't feel like we're getting the same information, but who would know because we're not given any information about what happens at Provost Staff, and it's too crowded in the room, so we don't need four more bodies in there because, heaven knows... [trails off, throws hands up in the air].

She later picked up this thread, describing how, in the new meeting she was invited to, faculty members who should not be privy to administrative matters were often invited to stay. She recounted an example in which faculty members were invited to a meeting

during which the provost discussed the associate dean evaluation process and were not asked to leave, making her feel unvalued and excluded from the administrative team.

Though Alice's experience is one of the most obvious examples of frustration with hierarchy, nearly all of the participants voiced this same problem, either explicitly or obliquely, and a lack of communication was among the chief complaints. Others have described their provost's decision to exclude them from regular briefings as a demotion. Barbara described it as a shunning. When the associate deans questioned why they were disinvited, the provost explained that there were too many people in the room already—an obvious evasion, Alice pointed out, since there were only four other people in the meeting to begin with. In Alice's narrative, it is apparent as to the manner in which hierarchy is explicitly wielded to both bar her from the meeting and remind her of her place in the organization.

After being invited to another meeting that Alice felt was primarily an effort to appease the associate deans, she was dismayed to find that the discussion of how the associate deans would be evaluated was done in front of faculty members, making her feel unvalued, as stated above. There are clearly layers to Alice's account: Not only did she feel marginalized by being left out of conversations she felt she should have been a part of, but she also invoked that hierarchy herself when she expressed anger at faculty members being allowed to hear the details of her upcoming evaluation. The participants overwhelmingly seemed to find themselves in a kind of hierarchical no-man's land, where they are both excluded from important college meetings and discussions with the administration and treated as pariahs by their former faculty colleagues.

Alice was not the only participant who acknowledged the problem with power, both directly and indirectly. Barbara expressed frustration with her dean's lack of communication as well as her refusal to send an associate dean to her meetings as a proxy when she was unavailable. As a result, she has resorted to conferring with associate deans at other campuses to get a sense of what is happening. Nina questioned her dean's decision to limit her signing authority, particularly when the dean was often unavailable for signature. Barbara's story underscores the lack of communication from her dean, but it also points to the ways in which she has tried to establish relationships with associate deans at other campuses to get that information. Nina's example, though less explicit than Barbara's, points to the same problem of power in a different way, as she questioned her dean's decision to allow her signing authority only on certain documents. As she argued, she is often on the frontline of most student issues and problems and has more information about these situations than her dean. Having to ask for a supervisor's sign off on a problem she could have solved herself only adds a layer of frustration and bureaucracy that calls into question how much her dean trusts her to handle issues as they arise.

Mara talked about power in terms of physical distance. Her dean is often absent, and she feels like she is responsible for communicating with full-time faculty, even though she is not their direct supervisor. As she said, "Sometimes I feel like the parent who has the absentee spouse... and I think to myself sometimes, 'I wish he'd come around more, I wish he was around more.'" Mara went on to clarify that this concern is not for herself so much as it is for the faculty that she feels could benefit from her dean's

presence. Her belief that hierarchies should offer a measure of comfort and support to those who are a part of that system is unusual and quite different from Alice's sense that they act as barriers between classes of workers (i.e., her feeling that she should be given information because she is part of the administration and that faculty should not be privy to that information). Carolyn neatly summed up her perception of hierarchy with a similar analogy. She explained, "It's like being a stepparent. You have all of the responsibility and none of the authority. It's like 'you're not my dean!'"

Part of the issue with power, particularly in this setting, is that it is not immediately obvious who is directly responsible for which tasks. Following WCC's restructure, little work has been done to delineate the tasks of a dean versus the tasks of an associate dean, and the result has been a variety of interpretations of the associate dean's role (see Figure 3).

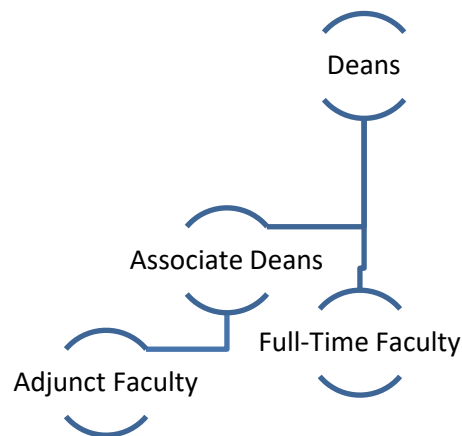


Figure 3 *West Community College Hierarchy*

Note. The asymmetrical nature of West Community College's hierarchy effectively isolates associate deans from administrative decisions and their own disciplines.

As Figure 3 illustrates, associate deans are quite literally excluded from the institution's power structure with few options for advancement or garnering additional authority. Nina pointed out, "So you keep thinking, should I be doing this, should I be doing that? But I don't want to step on someone's toes as well, so those boundaries, I think, are not defined at all." This lack of boundaries and clearly defined expectations has led to more than one difficult encounter between associate deans and faculty members. Alice disclosed that she feels like the faculty are constantly yelling at her "because of things that either I've been told to change or have no control over because it's not in my job description and not because *I'm* saying it's not, but because I'm being told it's not." The tension between a lack of authority and a need to uphold the institutional hierarchy is noticeable here because Alice (and others) wish to be recognized as *part* of the hierarchy—an impossible task if they are held responsible by faculty for job functions they are not allowed to perform.

These findings echo Drury's (2010) study, which found that women often face a lack of trust, lack of perceived recognition, and marginalization in leadership roles, as well as Hersi's (1993) research, which demonstrates that women are more likely to be ignored during important discussions as a barrier to their success in higher education. Barbara's attempt to get information from associate deans at other campuses because of her own dean's refusal to share information experience, for example, can be understood in terms of Eagly and Carli's (2007) labyrinth—the navigation of relationships and networking that women are often forced to undergo in order to be successful. In describing her role as a "stepparent," Carolyn described her role in much the same way

that the associate deans in Pepper and Giles's (2015) study do—as the “meat in the sandwich,” responsible for implementing and defending administrative policies that she had no hand in creating as well as fielding complaints about those policies from employees she does not supervise.

Structures of Gender: Translating Women. The other prominent cultural structure present in nearly every narrative account was that of gender. This structure seemed to affect every aspect of the participants' experiences in their roles as middle managers, from interactions with students to interactions with peers and supervisors. One participant, Jillian, expressed frustration with feeling like the opinions of her male peers were valued over her own, even as they repeated what she said. She wrote in one of her journals,

I was in a staff meeting a few months ago and I offered a staffing solution to the Provost. I laid out all the reasons, explained how we could make it happen as a campus, and even talked about how it might lead to a boost in enrollment. Before I could sum up, the Provost cut me off and essentially dressed me down in front of the entire room because she didn't understand what I was talking about. I have learned in that space that the smartest thing to do is not to correct her, because she will fly off the handle and go for the jugular, so to speak, so I just shut down and stopped talking. Another associate dean, a guy, looked at me sympathetically and I guess decided to support me by explaining to the Provost what I meant. She let him finish before she said, “We should really look into that. I like that idea.” I was in shock because I felt like he said exactly what I had just said—the only

difference being that he is white male. I know he was trying to help me, but it was humiliating—I felt like I was being told that my ideas were only good when they came from someone who was not me. It's like this constant feeling of having to be translated—like I'm speaking some sort of foreign language that has to be put into terms that others can understand. Like I'm not speaking English. Like I'm not understandable. I try really hard not to comment in meetings anymore, because when I raise my voice in excitement or express my displeasure at something, I am made to feel like I am being hysterical. You start to question yourself after a while.

Jillian's experience is not unique but is notable because her provost is female. Subsequent interviews with her revealed that she believes her provost often feels threatened by other women that report to her directly and is notorious for cutting them off mid-speech. Jillian is experiencing a kind of attributional ambiguity: Are her negative interactions with the provost a result of her gender, her perceived ambition, or her race, or are they perhaps the result of some outside factor she is unaware of? Is the provost herself even aware that she is tearing down her female subordinates?

Importantly, Jillian has modified her behavior because of her perception that she might upset the provost and has elected not to speak up when given the opportunity in order to avoid conflict. She is constrained by the cultural expectation that she will be deferential to those in authority and appreciative of her male colleagues who support her. She is well aware of the unspoken rules that dictate how she might respond in such a situation, and she chooses not to violate them to avoid being singled out. Although she

acknowledged her colleague's help, she was clearly frustrated by the fact that he felt compelled to intervene and described the entire experience as "humiliating." Her attempts to contribute have left her vulnerable to both her provost's ridicule *and* her male colleague's need to rescue her from the situation. As much as she might resent that help, she believes that she needs it in order to be understood and accepted by others.

In the same way that Jillian is constrained in her responses to her provost, she is limited in her responses to her colleague, toward whom she is both grateful and resentful, but her rescuer had choices of his own when he attempted to intervene on her behalf. Rather than simply supporting her comments or outright agreeing with her, he instead chose to interpret her words, or perhaps more colloquially, to mansplain her suggestions so that they might be more acceptable to others. Jillian does not appear to blame him or even question the way in which he offered his support but rather sees his intervention as a necessary evil that has led her to question her own value.

Nina's experience with structures of gender highlight quite a different problem, as evident in her short discussion with Mara during a focus group discussion:

Nina: Me, the only thing I can think of is related to what you mentioned, both of you, the socio-emotional aspect. I feel like so frequently, faculty adjuncts and full-timers could just walk in, sit down, and start talking—

Mara: Yes.

Nina: —and I feel like if I were a male associate dean, that would probably not be happening.

Mara: I have three full-timers that, when I hear their voice out in the office, I pick my phone up and I just talk into it.

Nina: Mara!

Mara: I do, I don't have time...

Nina's sense that she is called on to act as a therapist or a sounding board more often than her male colleagues was shared by other participants who felt that they were often used as free therapy during the course of the workday by faculty who felt that they could spend upwards of an hour chatting about everything from student issues to family problems. Moreover, participants felt compelled to make themselves available to faculty to have these discussions because their deans were not readily available. When Mara confessed that she pretends to be on the phone when she hears certain faculty in the hall, Nina's surprise was also an admonishment—she shook her head as if to underscore the inappropriateness of that behavior. Michelle was more direct, if resigned, when she said, "You can't win. When I closed my door the other day for an hour to catch up on emails, I got yelled at by my admin (assistant) who told me it 'must be nice to shut your door. Some of us can't.'"

The underlying sense of obligation to be available as a kind of emotional dumping ground was a common thread for nearly every participant, and most felt that their male colleagues were not subject to the same treatment, either because they were seen by faculty as unapproachable or because they were not expected to provide that level of emotional support. The repercussions for violating this expectation of availability are

very real, as Jillian revealed in her interview about a time when she decided to limit the amount of time she spent on student issues:

A student was complaining about a faculty member, and there was no basis for it, really. I advised him of his options, and before he could waste any more of my time arguing about it, I stood up and walked him out. I have a male administrative assistant in my department who came into my office to ask why I was done so quickly. When I told him, he shook his head and commented that my predecessor would have spent at least 20 minutes with the student. So, because I'm not spending enough time, I'm bad at my job, I guess. I feel like, if I were a man, I would have been praised for being efficient.

As Jillian herself recognized, she is stuck between a rock and a hard place, held to an expectation by a man whose perception of how her job should be performed is based solely on his interpretation of how her predecessor performed day-to-day tasks.

Cultural structures that dictate what constitutes "good" and "bad" leadership were also deeply embedded within the structures of gender, as they overwhelmingly aligned with male and female conceptions of leadership. Sabrina, for example, praised her dean for her willingness to spend time with Sabrina and allow her to make mistakes as a new administrator, praising her for her "nurturing" and "caring." In the same interview, Sabrina praised her dean for "not being too pushy" and compared her to another female dean, who "sometimes comes on too strong." Mara, who had concerns about her dean's being present, compared him to an "absentee father" and wished that he were around more. However, she also spoke of a female dean at another campus who was "never

there”; therefore, she could not understand why she *was* a dean. The double standard was evident, but participants seemed largely unaware of the comparisons they were making. Marine, who had commented on her dean’s “cowardice” when dealing with difficult faculty, later wondered aloud if she were being too hard on her because she was female. “But,” she added almost as an afterthought, “doesn’t that mean we have to work harder?”

Gender is unsurprisingly the dominant structure that seemed to affect the participants’ experience. In much the same way that Basow and Montgomery (2005) found in their study that female instructors are expected to be warm and accessible, the female associate deans in this study found that they were also expected to make themselves *available*, even at the expense of their own work. Women who do not make themselves available are subject to consequences, as Jillian discovered when her administrative assistant compared her negatively to her predecessor. Macnell et al. (2015) would likely explain this act as a violation of her assistant’s (unreasonable) gendered expectation that she be open, accessible, professional, and objective, the *wrong* balance of which made her open to criticism.

The findings also support Bird et al.’s (2004) notion of “institutional housekeeping” and the unseen labor that women perform in the workplace to improve their situation (p. 195). Nina’s and Mara’s discussion about the lengths to which they were willing to go to avoid becoming free therapy for faculty who take up a lot of their time is very telling and leads to the following questions: Why did both women feel that the only way to “get out” of having their time wasted was to pretend to be busy? How is it that neither woman considered establishing hard and fast boundaries? Both women

have been engaged in the difficult work of emotionally supporting the people with whom they work to the detriment of their own work, and neither felt empowered enough to put an end to the practice. As I continued to analyze the data from this study, I found it almost impossible to separate structures of gender from other parts of critical analysis. It pervades almost every aspect of the participants' experiences, affecting their choices, perceptions, and, as I discuss in the next section, their actions.

Unintended Consequences of Action: Two Select Examples

Giddens (1990) suggested that actors make choices in a context of both the unacknowledged and unintended consequences of action and proposed that they might be studied by examining “strategic conduct” and the “chronically reproduced” unintended consequences of action (p. 80). Strategic conduct refers to the way a person navigates and uses structures and rules to interact with others. As much as she is limited by what she perceives as gendered rules, Jillian has also engaged in strategic conduct in order to circumvent these rules. In her interview, she described ways that she sought her assistant's advice, thinking that, by giving him the opportunity to provide input into how things were done, he would be less likely to invoke comparisons to her predecessor:

Sometimes, I will just be like, “hey, I don't know how so and used to do this, do you remember?” And he will take maybe 10 minutes to explain to me how it used to be done. Sometimes, I agree, and other times, I try to explain why I was doing it differently. It works sometimes, but now he comes to me more often to ask if I need help in figuring out what to do with a student. Sometimes, he just gives me advice without my asking. It can be annoying. I've had this job for a year, but I

was doing this job for almost three years. I don't need any help; I'm just trying to be nice.

Through her strategic action, e.g., deferring to her assistant's judgment to make him feel valued, Jillian hoped that he would be more supportive of her decisions. Because of her invitation, however, her assistant now feels that he has the right to tell her what to do. By inviting his input, she has unintentionally reinforced the same structure she was trying to circumvent and has seemingly given him *carte blanche* to correct her if he feels she is wrong.

Another notable example of unintended consequences took place during the first focus group, when Alice declared her intention to be president of a community college. It is very common for women to hide or keep secret their ambitions so as not to be seen negatively by others (Heifetz, 2007). Alice violated this norm repeatedly when she referred to things that she would do when she eventually became president. When the question of career plans was posed during the first focus group (i.e., whether or not participants intended to pursue more advanced careers in administration—dean positions, in particular), most of the participants were evasive or downplayed their interest. Alice was much more direct:

And now that I've actually been in this position, I realize I don't have to go through all the different channels. I think I have enough confidence, and I hope this doesn't sound too terribly arrogant in front of you all, but I feel like I have enough confidence, and after everything I've seen and heard, I can be a provost or a president. I don't have to wait and be a dean.

While none of the participants directly responded to Alice, several looked away, and one even rolled her eyes. I noted the awkwardness that the comment produced in a memo of the incident:

So that had to have been the 50th time that Alice referred to herself as a future president. I didn't think it bothered other people as much, but Barbara looked irritated and several people looked around the room or down at their hands. After the meeting she said it AGAIN and said, "I can't believe none of you want to be president." No one responded. I feel bad for even asking now—I don't think she understands what a weird position she is putting people in.

There are a range of possibilities that could account for Alice's behavior, as illustrated in Table 2, including the less savory explanation that she was purposefully trying to establish her own power and therefore discourage others in the room from taking such power for themselves. It also is conceivable that Alice felt that she was encouraging others around her to be more ambitious but did not realize that she was working against a cultural structure that dictates that, even in the presence of other women, it is not polite to discuss one's ambitions so openly. The unintended consequence appears here in the form of contradiction—how Alice has accounted for the situation versus how it actually occurred.

Table 2*Reconstructive Horizon Analysis—Alice*

	Objective	Subjective	Normative	Identity
Foreground	Ambition is a common trait in mid-level leaders.	I assume that others share my ambition.	Everyone should desire to be at the top of the hierarchy.	I am going to be president someday.
Mid-Ground	It is unusual for people who take this position not to be interested in more senior roles.	I really want to be president someday.	Leaders should aspire to the top of the hierarchy.	I am a good leader.
Background	You are not as ambitious as I am.		Poor leaders are not ambitious.	I will be more successful than you.

Whatever her reason for violating this norm, the consequence was the same: by strategically opening up about her own ambitions and inviting others to do the same, she unintentionally alienated the other participants. Even if Alice had been attempting to establish her own power or discourage others from pursuing such opportunities, she clearly did not intend to upset the others and even tried to mitigate her statement by apologizing for sounding arrogant. She did, in effect, align herself with the very hierarchy she was so critical of—a hierarchy that she both resented and believed in. She specifically identified her *confidence* as the most important trait needed to help her obtain a more advanced position and, in doing so, unconsciously (or perhaps strategically)

implied that her colleagues do not have that same confidence and are therefore not as qualified.

The other participants, in choosing (however passively) not to vocally support Alice, produced unintended consequences of their own as they further shored up gender structures that do not allow for female expressions of personal ambition. After Alice's statement, Mara went on to say that she "just wanted to see where this goes for a while," and Barbara shared that, while she thought she could do a dean's job, she did not think it was something she would ultimately enjoy. Others, through their body language, expressed disapproval or distaste, and Michelle admitted to me after the meeting that she did not know whether or not she wanted to be dean but that she "certainly didn't want to talk about it in that room."

There were two participants who did not identify gender constructs in either of their interviews and even went so far as to dismiss their importance all together. In her first interview, Barbara explained that, having never worked for different men before, she did not think that the gender of her supervisor or her colleagues had a major impact on her work:

The thing is that I've never had the experience of having... I mean I had a male dean once. I don't know. I mean I've never had a male provost, so I have no idea. But I've had other female provosts that nobody would dare go see her because she wasn't very approachable. But that could be problematic too, though. You know being too approachable and not telling faculty exactly where they should go before they come to you.

Barbara was quick to dismiss gender as a factor in both of her interviews, and even when the subject came up in the focus groups, she often shrugged or shook her head. While, on the one hand, this behavior could be seen as counter to the other participants' experiences, it is clear that Barbara understands gender as a factor only as it relates to men. In fact, much of her narrative centered around her difficulty with her female supervisor, and as in the preceding excerpt, she referenced the pitfalls of having a female provost. What she does not recognize as a gendered construct is in fact a glaring one—her previous provost was unapproachable and therefore not a good leader, while her current provost is *too* approachable and thus also not a good leader. She is subjecting those women to the same treatment that she is assuming I am asking about in terms of men and, in doing so, highlighting just how difficult it is to escape structures of gender even when the hierarchy is primarily female.

Carolyn was also quick to dismiss gender as a factor in her own experience, characterizing her relationship with her female dean and provost as a positive one. In the second focus group, she interpreted my questions about gender playing a role in her experience as whether or not she had ever been affected by a male colleague:

I think, at our campus, our provost herself is very sensitive to women not being treated that way because I think she feels that she has faced it herself, so she's very alert to it. So I've never felt that I said something, and the guy across the table repeated it, and he's the one who got credit for it. Having said that though, there's at least one male faculty member on campus who's a flat-out misogynist. He's downright unstable, and he will bully, or attempt to bully, any female who crosses his path. Carolyn seemed to recognize

that her positive experience has been shaped by her female supervisors but acknowledged that her experience is not completely impervious to misogyny. In later interviews, after having worked with her dean and provost for a year, she seemed to characterize any issues that she had experienced as ones of leadership rather than gender, much like Barbara. Both seemed to think that, by doing their jobs, they can avoid some of the gender issues that other colleagues have faced, illustrating Erickson's (2012) suggestion that women both avoid and reveal their gender by denying its impact.

Intersectionality

Though not all of my participants were necessarily subject to intersectionality, a surprising number of participants made reference (even indirectly) to the effects of intersectionality on their own experiences. One of the most forthcoming participants was Sema, who felt that both her religious identity and her race made her subject to greater pressure than her colleagues, as she explained in her first interview:

That perception, minority female perception. I'm just small. Like, I'm short, too.

All of these things, it's funny how people interact with you when you are now in a position of power, and they just don't see it. It's like they don't see it at all. And whether it's intentional or not intentional, I don't know. Even with students.

Students still walk in my door and ask me if I'm a secretary and then ask me to direct them to Sabrina as the associate dean. And I'm like, "But, you don't see the sign outside?" So, there's that...I think my religion matters, too. ... It's very subtle. When it was, we were at the same level, it was, "All right. Cool. Yay for your story, and yay for you being able to persevere, and be a minority in a space

where ... there's not a lot of minorities.” And then, it's completely different when you're a minority that's in a power position, in a space where the majority of people here are not minorities.

Sema's perception that she is “small” aptly illustrates the weight of oppressive systems that minority women often struggle with on a day-to-day basis. Her race and ethnicity make it difficult for her to claim the power and authority that is rightly hers, and she is in the position of having to constantly reassert that authority with both colleagues and students. The underlying logic is plain, if unpleasant: Students have been socialized to believe that a person of color must be in a supporting role and therefore could not be in a position of authority. Students, who likely stand only mildly corrected, might be at least partially excused for this error, as they are all too aware that most of the authority figures that they come into contact with are not people of color. Sema's relationship with faculty, however, is more fraught and difficult to navigate.

A memo I composed after our interview confirms that this is no insignificant issue for Sema:

I just interviewed Sema, and I was only half-listening to her answers because I kept thinking about how as soon as she described herself as “small.” She sort of shrank. She was hunched over and just looked really tired and unhappy. She is normally very upbeat, and I am really glad she felt that she could share her experience, but I feel badly that I made her relive it. Or maybe she is living it all the time?

As we completed the interview, it was clear that these issues present a daily challenge for Sema and also limit the ways in which she might respond to her colleagues. On the one hand, she could demand respect and chastise her colleagues for not respecting her. On the other hand, she could simply accept their slights and navigate around them. Both of these choices (and any iterations thereof) come with their own range of consequences, and perhaps, more to the point, they present a range of repercussions to which Sema's White female colleagues are not subject.

A former full-time faculty member, she characterized her relationship with her former faculty colleagues as very friendly and recalled that most were very supportive of her new position. She has been open about her religion (not discussed here so as to preserve anonymity) but found that once she accepted the role of associate dean, her religious expression turned problematic for several of her colleagues. In one interview, she discussed that her religious identity makes others feel uncomfortable swearing in her presence, despite the fact that she herself swears "like a sailor." When she does swear, colleagues give her disapproving looks. Other colleagues simply ignore her, refusing to afford her what she calls "basic human decency." Sema's account clearly illustrates how religious identity intersects with gender and race and how the narrative scripts she employs for these collective identities modify each other to produce a singular life experience.

As she stated in the interview, Sema is very aware of what is expected of her and does her best to live up to that expectation:

I think it's still something that I'm working on. This is such a people position, and I don't, when I'm upset, it shows on my face. And I need to work on that. I'm not, I have to work to smile. And so, it's hard to not be sarcastic all the time, and it's hard to not look grumpy all the time. Especially when you feel it. So, I'm trying to work on that. It's harder. It's harder than it looks because you want to just, there's so much to do, and I don't have time to smile. I have only time to get work done. So, I'm struggling being happy or projecting happiness. And that people side, at the same time that I will actively work to walk out of my office and to go interact with people, when they come see me in my office, I need to work on just filtering out my face and what I'm doing here to address their needs, which is hard.

Sema has clearly determined that her best option is to grin and bear it, despite the obvious difficulty. She feels that she must perform to a certain standard and, tellingly, *filter out her face*—a powerful way of describing her efforts to suppress her own identity for the comfort of others, as the reconstructive horizon analysis in Table 3 illustrates. The fact that Sema even believes that, to do her job, she must effectively erase part of her identity is indicative of the lengths that women of color must go through in order to successfully navigate the labyrinth of career advancement.

Table 3*Reconstructive Horizon Analysis—Sema*

	Objective	Subjective	Normative	Identity
Foreground	People expect me to be pleasant when they interact with me.	I am aware that this position requires a pleasant countenance at all times.	Good leaders project happiness, even when they do not feel it themselves.	I struggle to project happiness sometimes.
Mid-Ground	As a leader, it is not appropriate to show my true feelings to others.	I am expected to be pleasant, even when I am not feeling up to it.	Good leaders are always positive.	I must hide my negative feelings.
Background	My true feelings might make others uncomfortable.	I am responsible for the comfort of others.	Good leaders do not make others feel uncomfortable.	I have to suppress my identity in order to do my job.

Understanding Sema's account of her identities systemically is not the only way to understand her intersectionality, but it offers an important example of how claiming multiple identities can have a cumulative effect on one's individual experience. While it is perhaps not fair to say that, because Sema claims multiple identities (e.g., her number is bigger), she experiences more or less oppression than someone else, it *is* fair to say that these identities make navigating her career path a much more complicated task for her than her White female colleagues. Sabrina, one of Sema's closest colleagues and an

associate dean herself, agreed with Sema's assessment, describing her friend's experience as "another level of tokenism" that made her "feel really disgusting."

Jillian alluded to her own difficulties in navigating this labyrinth when she wondered in her journal whether the words of her White male colleagues were worth more than her own. Marine experienced a different kind of challenge when she spoke about being assigned a difficult administrative assistant whom she ultimately had to reprimand for taking excessive time off. Marine met with her and invited the dean to sit in while she explained to the administrative assistant how she would need to perform in the future. When I asked her why she had invited the dean to be present during the conversation, she bluntly said, "I didn't have to because the admin works for me. But I did, because this person is Black. Yep. She's a female and she would say that I was attacking her." I followed up with Marine to find out whether she felt that the administrative assistant was assigned to her because she is Black herself. She did not think so because of how long she had been there, but she did think that the fact that she is often forced to play the "bad cop" role when doling out consequences or reprimands was a result of her race. The situation had been going on years prior to Marine's taking on the role, but the dean had never addressed it with the assistant. Though she was reluctant to be in the room, she was clearly relieved to leave the work of supervising a Black woman to another Black woman.

A study of Marine's intersecting identities revealed a multilayered account that a systemic reading would not necessarily show. On the surface, Marine's identity as a woman of color has relegated her to the role of bad cop, a phenomenon that she feels is a

direct result of her minority status. Her White supervisor, though supportive, is happy to leave difficult conversations to Marine to handle, and it is Marine's reputation that suffers as a result. She is the bad guy, and though it is a role that Marine is happy to embrace when needed, she recognizes that it only further reinforces the angry woman of color stereotype that she labors under. Marine's story reveals the complicated nature of intersectionality and how her own experience as a Black woman does not necessarily extend to understanding the experiences of other women of color. That she largely glosses over her own belief that her administrative assistant would accuse her of attacking her *because* she is Black is an interesting contradiction to Marine's own sense of being forced into a stereotype. Her story both reinforces her point that she is often asked to play the role of enforcer as a Black woman and unintentionally casts other Black women as potentially difficult *because* of their blackness.

Jillian, Marine, and Barbara all admitted that they were reluctant to discuss or even consider their race or ethnicity as a factor in their careers, and even Sema apologized for being "compelled" to bring up race. Nina, though not a woman of color, also avoided the idea that her ethnicity impacted her experience or affected how she was perceived by others. As she admitted, "as long as I don't speak, nobody knows," and her long career working with students of other ethnicities and a variety of accents has largely inured her to the idea that she might be treated differently because of her accent. The truth of that statement notwithstanding, Nina's experience illustrates why understanding intersectionality systemically is so important. Whether or not she believes that her accent marks her is irrelevant if others treat her differently when they recognize that difference.

Her recognition that her accent might give away that difference is an acknowledgment that one way for her to find success has been through the active suppression of her ethnicity.

Interestingly, though not surprisingly, with the notable exception of Sabrina (who blamed the experience on her social science background), none of the remaining participants, all of whom were White, acknowledged or even considered their race as a relative advantage. In fact, one participant voiced concern that a senior administrator had been chosen *because* she was Hispanic. As she explained, “she was hired because she's Hispanic. That pissed me off as a woman. You hired her because she met an ethnic box. How dare you.” This participant used her gender to justify her anger at anyone being chosen for their ethnicity and notably identified the administrator’s ethnicity as the issue when she could have easily located the problem in her lack of experience or previous administrative track record. This notion likely says more about the participant than it does about the senior administrator and confirms Sema’s feeling that many of the women she works with tear other women down.

As these findings indicate, Sema illustrates the conundrum that Sanchez-Hucle and Davis (2010) said most women of color face as they are forced to wonder whether or not they would be subject to the same slights and micro-aggressions from others if they were White. Her shrewd insight that her White colleagues were more than happy for her to succeed when she was not in a position of authority speaks to the underlying systemic racism that women of color experience in the workplace (Blake, 1999). Matilda’s reaction to a Latino woman’s being chosen for promotion is consistent with Heim et al.’s

(2003) finding that some women attack other women who are promoted in an effort to undermine their credibility, actively sabotaging their advancement and dismissing their achievements as unearned. This kind of double standard and inconsistency becomes even more visible during the deconstruction analysis.

Deconstruction

Deconstruction analysis allows for the exploration of cultural structures and master narratives that guide and influence participant narratives, even if the participants are themselves unaware of those structures (Derrida & Caputo, 1997). Most of the participants exhibited some level of deconstruction in their narratives and did not seem aware that they were doing so. Following Wolgemuth's (2014) example, I conducted a deconstruction trace analysis for each participant by locating dualities (binaries), identifying exceptions, looking between the lines, examining how the narratives are resituated, and locating where the narrators adopted both sides of a dichotomous position. Sema provided a good example of resituation when she discussed her varying identities as challenges in the workplace. While she initially framed the problem as a difference in age (i.e., she is one of the youngest associate deans versus her older colleagues), she ultimately resituated the challenges she faces as a difference in race. She remarked frequently throughout her interview that she was not prepared for the position and was learning as she went along, but she did not frame any of the issues she encountered as a result of her ill-preparedness for the role. Mara's narrative adopted a similar resituation when she described her role in caregiving terms and later expressed frustration that faculty do not have the benefit of interacting with the dean, whom she believes could

offer them similar support. Despite ample evidence to the contrary that she herself provided, she does not identify her dean as the problem but rather internalizes it as a failure on her part to not be “enough” for her faculty colleagues.

No participant’s narrative was more suited to deconstruction analysis than Matilda’s. Matilda repeatedly voiced her irritation with what she perceives to be an incompetent and ill-equipped senior leadership team. In both of her interviews, she railed against the administration and, much like Alice, felt very strongly that she could easily take on any senior leadership position. Her second interview was on the heels of a negative encounter with her supervisor, and her frustration was apparent in her responses:

I can't wait to get the hell out of this place. That's where I am. I have already interviewed for two positions at the dean level because I would much rather be the bigger fish in a smaller pond and get more done than to ride upstream, this insanity, for much longer. My frustration is one borne not out of anger, but disappointment. I expected my management to be leaders. I answered ads to be interviewed where a dean is a visionary. I don't work for visionaries. I work for government workers who want to do a bare bones minimum to get by. They want to punch a clock and just see that they get their six-figure income and just say, "See ya." I have never met a more unmotivated group of people in my life. I would have left a job three months in if I didn't have two kids in college and an income that can help support that as a mom because I caretake first. I lack structure; my dean gives me no guidance; I get blamed for things that don't get done. I get blamed for meetings I didn't know I was supposed to be in. I have to

fight for every resource I need. My dean has two full-time admin staff. The oversight has two admin staff. That dean has two associate deans. This dean has three associate deans. But our provost thinks everything should be fifty-fifty. I'm sorry, that's not the way it was set up...I have a group of faculty that are covertly and, to some degree, overtly undermining my success.

Matilda set up a very clear binary from the beginning of her narrative—a narrow definition of what constitutes a good/bad leader. A good leader, by her reckoning, is a “visionary,” a stark contrast to the “government workers” for whom she works. They are unmotivated and, in her estimation, actively working to undermine her efforts.

Importantly, Matilda’s dean and provost are both female, a fact that she brings up more than once. On the one hand, she is frustrated because she feels very strongly that women are underrepresented and not given enough chances to lead in higher education. On the other hand, she believes that the women she who currently hold the position are incapable of doing so.

Based on her responses, Matilda seeks to position herself as a good female leader while simultaneously undercutting other female leaders by suggesting that they are bad *because* they are female. She warmed to this theme later in our interview, calling her office “a cat fight waiting to happen.” She went on to explain that, because of her work in industry, she would much rather work for a man because they have clear expectations in contrast to women, whom she feels have changeable expectations that are largely based on how they feel on a given day. This accounting of female leadership is full of contradictions—women are “lazy” and “unmotivated” at the same time that they are

“catty” and scheming. Female leaders have expectations that Matilda finds impossible to meet because she receives no guidance and is given unclear objectives with moving consequences. Men, by contrast, set clear standards and establish firm consequences, while women are ultimately changeable and unreliable.

What Matilda has couched in terms of a good/bad leadership binary is ultimately a recasting of the male/female binary that, at best, reduces the women she works for as hapless, unknowing victims of their own gender stereotypes and, at worst, suggests that they are willing participants in a hierarchical system designed to oppress other women. Neither option is particularly appealing, and both options present Matilda with an interesting conundrum: how to claim that she is qualified for a dean position *because* she is a woman while simultaneously dismissing other women from contention because of their gender. Matilda has attempted to solve this problem by describing her little blue book, which presumably outlines how to avoid falling into the same trap as her supervisors. More to the point, it is supposed to provide direct evidence of her efforts to distance herself from other women—proof that she will lead like a man.

Matilda’s belief that women who are not her make poor leaders is not limited to her immediate supervisors. Later in the interview, when she was asked about why she thinks women on the whole do not go on to pursue higher administrative positions, she quickly dismissed the phenomenon as a function of women “not being able to sell themselves.” She went on to add that the ability to sell oneself is a “business mode” and that she has “learned to get better at that.” Reading between the lines, as Wolgemuth (2014) suggested, requires little effort in this case, as Matilda offered a syllogistic logic

as to why women are not in higher administrative positions. Women cannot sell themselves, and the ability to sell oneself is a function of business; therefore, women cannot be in business. The implication is obvious: Men *are* capable of business, something that Matilda implied she has had to learn over the years.

Granting for the moment that Matilda is correct—that she *does* have incompetent supervisors who have not supported her in her role—her assumption denies that there may be larger systemic issues at work that prevent women from advancing. She conflated the actions of her supervisors with women as a group, reifying the binary assumption that women are not inherently qualified for leadership roles but that men *are* and that women must do additional work to be more like them. Outside of being deeply flawed, this kind of logic is self-defeating. On the surface, Matilda’s story is a how-to in advancement. In adopting the mannerisms and strategies of men, she is confident she will be able to get what she wants. The trouble is that, if she does not, the blame will be on the women for whom she works. If she does eventually get what she wants—that is, a new position as dean—she will have taken on a role that she has already established that, as a woman, she is not qualified for. Her current narrative works only as long as she stays in her current position and continues working for women.

Matilda’s account stands in stark contrast to Sema’s, Sabrina’s, and Carolyn’s accounts, which from the beginning of our interviews, showed firm support for the women that they work for. All three have female deans and provosts, and they expressed appreciation for their leadership, using words like “protective” and “patient” to describe their interactions. Two even went so far as to describe their deans as a “mama bear.”

Over the course of the year, however, all three women expressed the occasional irritation that they were perhaps being *over*protected. Without framing it explicitly in terms of gender, all three women admitted that, at times, what was framed as protection seemed like more of a limitation or exclusion and, ultimately, a veiled assessment of their abilities. Interestingly, all three were hesitant to identify their deans as the source of that irritation, emphasizing how much they enjoyed working for them. Sabrina went so far as to say that, while she feels that she is personally valued, the position of associate dean is often not and that the “position occasionally feels like it is undervalued or disrespected,” though not by the people she works with and for. For Sema, Sabrina, and Carolyn, there is a larger, unnamable force that seems to undercut even the best efforts of their deans. The frustrations with her position that Matilda placed directly at the feet of her female supervisors are recognized by others as a fault of the restructure and, ultimately, a problem that is out of their direct control.

Deconstruction analysis allows for a deeper look at the contradictions that exist within and between narrative accounts, but more to the point, it *allows* for those contradictions to coexist as participants necessarily shift their narratives to account for their experiences. Alice’s narrative about her relationship with full-time faculty changed several times over the course of the study, notably when there were other associate deans in the room. Initially, she was very frustrated by her working relationship with faculty, whom she felt resented her and were purposefully trying to sabotage her efforts. She largely dismissed this resentment as jealousy and felt certain that particular faculty were inciting others against her. Coupled with what she

saw as a lack of support from her dean, Alice felt that she was being “set up” to take the blame for others. It became clear, however, that, in listening to the experiences of the other participants, Alice began to think of her challenges with full-time faculty as a weakness on her part, and by the last focus group, she had shifted her narrative to account for this change. She revised her narrative to include a hero’s arc, wherein others wondered why she would even take on such a role and the level of difficulty and tried to persuade her that she was making a mistake. Despite everything, however, she has now “found her pace,” and what she before had characterized as jealousy and distrust she now characterizes as a kind of grudging respect for her success. Later, in a private interview, Alice admitted that her difficulties with faculty has persisted and that she feels that they do not respect her without seeming to recall that she recently described how much better her relationship with them was.

Alice’s inconsistency is a reflection of her need to be seen as competent and prepared to take on the role of dean or president, something that she makes clear to the other participants in the latter half of the focus group. She demonstrated this kind of shift repeatedly as she, rather than explain how she has come to terms with or continues to struggle with challenges, simply recast them as barriers she has overcome or problems that she was never really concerned about to begin with. On the one hand, it would be easy to dismiss Alice as untruthful in an attempt to further distance herself from her colleagues and paint herself in the best light. On the other hand, these inconsistencies and holes in her account suggest that she is struggling in service of a larger cultural structure, perhaps similar to Matilda’s experience, that

does not allow her to show weakness or admit that her difficulties could be systemic and thus outside of her direct control. There could be a range of possibilities that account for her behavior, and it is through deconstruction analysis that it is possible to trace the dissonance and disconnect present within and between her narratives.

Resistance

Critical resistance “explores the degree to which participants align with or resist constructed subjects” (Wolgemuth, 2014, p. 595). In this case, “constructed subjects” can be thought of as the identities that participants form—an ideal self against which they compare themselves and others. In this study, the ideal self was described most often by participants as a strong woman in a position of power with the ability to make decisions for herself and others. Interestingly, this ideal is quite different from the commonly held, albeit stereotypical, hegemonic form of a female leader. Typically, female leaders are thought to be relationship forming and consensus building (Eddy, 2009; Switzer, 2006), and women are not often described as “powerful.” Though most of the participants in this study described this ideal in that way, none of them seemed to consider themselves particularly powerful, either because their roles did not afford them the opportunity or because they felt that others were keeping power from them.

Questions of power—who ought to wield it and how it ought to be wielded—act as undercurrents in all the participants’ narratives. Several participants considered power in terms of their new roles, particularly as it related to their direct supervisors, the deans. Matilda, Alice, Barbara, Michelle, and Nina all expressed, to varying degrees, frustration with the limitations of their roles. On the one hand, they described feeling empowered to

make more decisions for themselves and, on the other, feeling that they are often left out of major institutional decisions or are prevented from making choices for themselves. Other participants wondered about the power dynamic between themselves and the full-time faculty over whom they hold no supervisory role. Several gave examples of how they felt challenged by faculty who made direct reference to the fact that they did not report to associate deans and were therefore free to do as they pleased. Matilda hinted about being openly undermined by faculty, and Jillian doubted that the new restructure was even sustainable, given the lack of clarity in individual roles and what she perceived to be “power-grabbing” taking place at the upper-administrative levels. All of the participants wondered about power in terms of their gender and could readily identify at least one example of a time when they felt that they were expected to behave in a certain way or were treated differently because they were female.

Despite the group’s general acknowledgment (albeit grudging for some) that their gender affected their roles, very few discussed how they subverted or resisted the “gender box”—a reference Michelle made to describe how she was made to feel limited by her gender. As indicated in the previous chapter, some actors feel more able to resist social structures, or “gender boxes,” than others, likely depending on the other types of “boxes” they are already expected to adhere to. Women of color, for example, are held to a different standard and level of scrutiny than their White counterparts and may feel that they are unable to actively resist the social structures that limit and delimit their roles. Marine explained that, though she was aware of how her race and gender impacted how others treated her, she was very determined from the start that it would not impact her job

function and performance. In her first interview, she described an encounter with colleagues from another division, after she had decided that she could no longer be responsible for work that they themselves should have taken responsibility for:

I had to go off a little bit on the other associate dean and the admin because we are all supposed to be one college. So a student came in, and they helped the student with their two programs and then sent them over for me to help them with my program and somebody else's and I was fed up. I did it for the first three or four weeks but I was done doing other people's work. I took the paper and went in the office as was like "did you just help this student and send her to me" and the person was like "no I didn't help her" and then I went to each admin and was like "did you, did you" and one of them finally admitted it. She offered to do it, but I said, no, I got it. She ended up having to do it anyway, but I think since then they know that I am crazy. I think that there is a level of respect and I had to... I wasn't trying to be crazy but remember we are all one and we have to service the students so that we don't have them all over the place. I went back later and I apologized that for being a little terse but asked them to remember we are all working as one. I said, yes, she had four requests from three different departments, but you can handle that, you don't have to send her to me. Because when you guys aren't around I handle it. I have a stack of stuff that I do, for everyone. Let's keep that going.

Respect is an important issue to Marine, and she made it clear in all of her interviews that she would not tolerate disrespect in any form from anyone. Deciding that the

administrative assistant's decision to send her yet another student that she could have taken care of herself was disrespectful of her time, she immediately confronted her and dictated the terms for future interactions. This action is risky because Marine was actively subverting the norms and expectations of her gender and certainly the expectations of a woman of color. She was not unaware of these expectations, so she later returned to apologize for her terseness. Her assertion that she "had to go off" on her colleagues invites scrutiny. She did not actually *have* to confront them at all; indeed, other participants in the study confessed to doing work that they were not responsible for to avoid being perceived as uncooperative or rude (common accusations leveled at women in power).

From a critical perspective, by enacting the "powerful" woman identity that she has constructed, Marine is resisting the hegemonic norm—particularly important because she does so at the risk of condemnation or reprimand from her colleagues/supervisor. Interestingly, though Marine, as a Black female, has the most to lose in terms of her resistance to this norm, she is the participant who has come the closest to outright rejecting/actively working against this stereotype. Other participants with as much to lose were more hesitant to appear as if they were actively wielding power for themselves.

Marine's resistance was not limited to her own role. She actively encouraged other participants to demand respect from the people they worked with. During the first focus group, she immediately spoke up for Michelle when she relayed an incident with a male, full-time faculty member, reminding her that she should not stand being bullied. Michelle, obviously feeling that she was not in a position to alter her situation, simply

shrugged and shook her head. Throughout the discussion, Marine shook her head in disbelief at what she was hearing from other associate deans and how they had handled (or, in many cases, did *not* handle) the discrimination that they faced. She encouraged the others to consider their behavior as administrators, not as women, and often questioned whether they would behave that way if they were men, saying, “I’m not listening to that. I don’t think a man would sit there and listen to an hour and 15 minutes of someone complaining.” The other participants nodded gamely, but it was clear that many of them felt that they were not empowered to take action when their time was wasted out of concern that they would be perceived as impolite or ineffective in their roles. Jillian shared her experience of being constantly compared to her male predecessor whenever she stood up for herself and expressed admiration for Marine who did not feel that she had to conform to others’ expectations.

Marine is clearly resisting the stereotypical female leadership tropes that other participants feel they are unable to avoid. From a critical perspective, Marine’s definition of what it means to be a woman in a position of leadership deviates from the generally accepted norm of female behavior. Interestingly, though the other participants in the study clearly agree with Marine, most felt unable to follow her example, constrained by the hierarchies within which they work. Michelle struggled with power dynamics throughout her first year as an associate dean and found it difficult to navigate the preexisting conflicts she encountered in her new role. Since her transition to associate dean was within her own department, Michelle hoped that, in her new position, she would finally be able to address some of the uneven power dynamics in the department.

When asked, she spoke to the importance of having what she felt was newly endowed power, explaining that she is more likely to “get taken more seriously.” Though she admitted that she had always felt she had the support of her department, she was not sure she had the support or respect of the rest of the campus.

Though ostensibly in her role as assistant dean Michelle had dominion over her own department, she felt that she needed the title of associate dean in order to be treated as an authority figure by the rest of the campus. Even students, she felt, did not always respect her authority in the way that they should. However, the feeling of power that she described in her first interview turned out to be fleeting. In a later interview, she described the difficulties she has faced with a group of lab managers she supervises: Everybody thinks they're the boss, and some people feel like they can rewrite their job description because there's certain stuff they just can't be bothered to do. So, I took the chicken's way out and decided, “No, you're not changing your [job description] and here's your evaluation.” Rather than sitting down with the person and explaining why they need to be doing what they're doing, I get several emails a week about how so and so's not doing such and such. Then it's, “This person is too demanding. This person is talking down to us, telling us we can't give partial credit in this course. So and so's mean, so and so's loud, so and so's talking back to me.” I'm like, I did not know I was going back to middle school teaching. Michelle's frustration that she “didn't know” she was going back to middle school teaching is not entirely accurate. In fact, she did know because she had been dealing with the same group of people in the same capacity before her promotion. What she did not know, or perhaps could not have anticipated, is that the

mere changing of her title would not erase the years of personal conflict that existed in her department before she was promoted. Relying on her title to give her the authority she needed to bring order and quell arguments ultimately failed her, and she felt forced, at least in the short term, into maintaining the status quo. Unlike Marine, Michelle did not appear to test the bounds of her new, limited authority over the course of the first year. On the contrary, she seemed anxious that she not lose what little power she felt she had gained. In a later interview, when asked how she thought she would ultimately resolve the problem of the lab managers, she shook her head and pressed her lips together before shrugging as if to ask, “What can I do?”

Part of Michelle’s hesitance is likely related to her field. As the associate dean of a STEM field, she is particularly vulnerable criticism and scrutiny by the male members of her department. Though gender is clearly an important part of her experience, Michelle is quick to deny that gender has played a part in her challenges, despite the fact that almost all of her anecdotes center around male colleagues who treat her like a glorified secretary and often argue with her in front of other faculty and students. Michelle’s lot is a difficult one. At the same time that she wishes to be recognized as an authority figure, she is reluctant to wield even the little power her title affords her because she is uncertain of the consequences.

Both Michelle and Marine find themselves at the mercy of the cultural structures within which they work and are subject to unintended consequences. Marine, for her efforts to exercise control and take on the role of a powerful woman leader, has been assigned the role of *bad cop*—an enforcer who is get expected to confront others. Her

blackness is exploited, and she is allowed, within the confines of her supervisor's discretion, to wield her power in aid of the institution—notably, to keep others in line. Marine has some power but not always the ability to use it as she sees fit. Michelle, on the other hand, is constrained by her fear of unintended consequences and appears paralyzed. She is unable to act because she is unsure of the backlash or response of others if she does resist the prevailing hegemonic stereotype.

In conducting a critical narrative analysis and studying the cultural structures, unintended consequences of action, intersectionality, deconstruction, and resistance, I found that gender is both “avoided and revealed” in the ways in which participants describe their experiences (Erickson, 2012, p. 368). Consistent with women's studies and leadership literature, this study found that women often make strategic choices to navigate their careers that sometimes have unintended (and unpleasant) consequences. Perhaps most significant was the finding that women, particularly women of color, frequently feel that they must suppress parts of their identity in order to function as effective leaders. In the next chapters, I will review the findings of this study and use the results of the analysis to address the research questions that were initially posed.

Chapter 5

Over the last decade, there has been a slow but perceptible shift in higher education administration. As leaders, traditionally older, White men, have begun to age out of more senior roles, there has never been more opportunity for women to take on these positions, particularly at the community college level (Gill & Jones, 2013). Despite the increased opportunity, however, there is still a very small percentage of women who advance to these more senior administrative roles (ACE, 2017). This study locates this problem in the so-called mid-level pipeline—the leadership pool comprised of deans, associate deans, department chairs, and discipline heads—and suggests that the challenges associated with these roles are in large part responsible for the lack of women in senior administration.

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the fundamental knowledge of women's experiences as mid-level administrators at a community college to uncover the challenges that prevent them from advancing to more senior roles. Additionally, this study sought to identify ways that the institution supported these women in their quest for career advancement. As the mid-level leadership pool at a community college ostensibly serves as a proving ground for more senior positions, this study theorized that, in studying these challenges and triumphs and the ways in which they are narrated by the women who experience them, it might be possible to understand

the factors that contribute to a woman's decision to pursue additional opportunities within higher education administration. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What kinds of challenges do female mid-level administrators experience, and how do they seek to overcome those challenges?
2. How has the institution supported or hindered their success in a new role?
3. Why are women so strongly represented in middle management positions in the community college, as reported by the women themselves?
4. What factors influence a woman's decision to pursue a career in higher education administration?

This study was conducted at West Community College, a large, multi-campus community college in the United States and, through the participants' narratives, traced the experiences of ten women over the course of their first year as associate deans. Participants discussed a wide range of questions covering different aspects of their experience in the jobs, including questions about their challenges, accomplishments, concerns, and aspirations.

A critical narrative analysis was performed based on an extension of Dennis's (2013) work to "make explicit inequality, oppression, distortions to the communicative potential of participants, ideological influences, and other such categories of impact on the autonomous, free, and equal expression and participation

of actors in engagement with one another” (p. 408). This type of analysis was used in order to provide the additional context of cultural and social structures that may resource or constrain an individual’s interpretation and narration of significant events. In this chapter, the significance, the findings, answers to the research questions, the implications of the study, and recommendations for future research and practice are discussed.

Significance of Research

The literature review detailed in Chapter 2 painted a wholly unsurprising (if disappointing) picture of women in managerial positions regardless of the industry and specifically in higher education. Using J. Acker’s (1990) theory of gendered organizations overlain with intersectionality research, I explored the wide range of discrimination that women, particularly women of color, face in the workplace. The literature review suggested that, despite the fact that middle managers are ultimately the pool from which senior administrators are chosen, there is very little research that examines their experiences and that what little research *does* exist treats women as a kind of monolith for whom the role of mid-level manager is identical. Leadership scholarship has the same shortfall; though much research has been done on male leadership, there is considerably less written about female leaders, and what has been written errs on the side of stereotypes. Women leaders are portrayed as nurturing, empathetic, and compromising and put women in the unenviable position of being either too feminine or not feminine enough. In addition, the literature suggested that

women are often subject to *internalized oppression*, wherein they fail to see themselves as leaders (Thomas et al., 2004).

The literature review revealed another interesting phenomenon: the *glass cliff*. According to Ryan and Haslam (2005), the glass cliff serves as a metaphor to describe situations in which organizations appoint women to leadership roles that are inherently risky or rife with complication, often in the face of organizational crises. This metaphor describes the nearly impossible situation that women face in leadership roles as they are forced to make the best of a potentially futile situation. This concept raises more questions than it answers and points to a significant gap in the literature: If a glass cliff does exist, how do women manage their positions, how do they overcome a potentially disastrous situation, and why would they accept such a position to begin with? Overall, the literature review suggested that additional study of women's experiences in mid-level managerial roles should be conducted to address the gap in the research of women as leaders.

Chapter 3 offered a justification for the selection of a critical narrative methodology to analyze the participants' experiences. As a critical feminist scholar, I am committed to elevating and amplifying the experiences of women, and a narrative methodology offers just such an opportunity. The "construction and reconstruction of personal stories," which acknowledge "the influence of experience and culture on the construction of knowledge" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 4), provide a more inclusive, subjective, and personal framework through which I sought to understand

the individual participant experience—experiences that are in and of themselves multilayered, multifaceted, and contradictory.

Critical narrative analysis provides a vehicle through which it is possible to make plain the hidden social structures and pressures that shape the participant experience or, perhaps more accurately, their retelling and understanding of that experience (Dennis, 2013; Souto-Manning, 2014; Wolgemuth, 2014). Dennis (2013) envisions critical narrative structural analysis as a method that seeks to make plain the cultural and social factors that can affect an individual's interpretation of events and actions through the study of cultural structures and unintended consequences of action. Using her model as a starting point, I proposed two additional aspects of critical narrative analysis: intersectionality and resistance.

In Chapter 3, I also made the case for *insiderness*, as I engaged in this study as both researcher and participant. My unique access to and intimate knowledge of the institution helped me to uncover “hidden truths that the public is unaware of” (Larabee, 2002, p. 102). The messy and often challenging process of reflexivity led to deeper insights and more interesting connections in the analysis of the study than it would have if I had not been a participant myself (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Pillow, 2003).

In Chapter 4 I used each aspect of the augmented critical narrative analysis method to examine the participant narratives. I identified cultural structures in the participant narratives as structures of power and structures of gender, and my analysis provided new insight into additional structures that likely impact a woman's

decision to pursue a more advanced degree. I also explored the unintended consequences of action and exposed the contradictory and often inconsistent actions and narratives of the participants (Dennis, 2013). Deconstruction analysis helped to identify contradictions between and within narrative accounts, and resistance analysis offered insight into the participants' sense and pursuit of power (Wolgemuth, 2014). The additional intersectionality analysis that I added to the analysis revealed the lengths that women who claim multiple identities must go to in order to successfully navigate their jobs and further examined the experiences of women of color in the context of mid-level management.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

By applying each aspect of critical structural narrative analysis to the participants' narratives, I was able to gain interesting insights into participant narratives that I might not otherwise have uncovered.

Cultural Structures

In looking for cultural structures that impact or influence participant narratives, I observed two distinct structures: structures of organizational hierarchy and structures of gender. Structures of hierarchy explain the distance that many of the participants felt between themselves and senior leadership, which led to their feeling unvalued and unable to establish important working relationships with their supervisors and faculty colleagues. This experience supports O'Connor's (2011) definition of organizational culture as a "complicated fabric of management myths, values, and practices that legitimizes women's position at the lower levels of the

hierarchy” (p.1 68) and Bechky’s (2003) notion of *occupational authenticity*, a sense of need and legitimacy associated with a role as perceived by others. In this case, organizational culture was often cited by participants as a reason why they were not allowed to do something, and it served as an effective barrier to several associate deans’ attempting to establish some measure of authority for themselves.

Structures of gender were prominent in participant narratives and affected nearly every aspect of the participants’ job functions. Some felt that they were “translated” by their male colleagues to supervisors, resenting the fact that a male colleague had to intervene in order for them to be taken seriously. Others felt that they were expected to act as emotional sounding boards to their colleagues, particularly male colleagues who felt that they could take up the participants’ valuable time with unimportant personal issues. Some participants dismissed the importance that gender played in their own experiences, illustrating Erickson’s (2012) suggestion that women both avoid and reveal their gender by denying its impact. Other important structures identified included structures of leadership, motherhood, race, and age.

Unintended Consequences of Action

In examining participant narratives for unintended consequences of action, I discovered many examples of women’s engaging in behavior that they felt would mitigate or influence the behavior of others, only to have it backfire or produce results they did not anticipate. Some participants attempted to manage the sexist behavior of their colleagues, for example, only to find that they had unintentionally reinforced the negative behavior. Other participants found that they themselves were unintentionally

reinforcing sexist stereotypes, doubting their own qualifications for leadership as women and questioning the leadership abilities of their female colleagues. Giddens's (1990) assertion that actors can always choose to act differently than they have revealed the complex layers of choice that participants face in their roles—choices that could leave them vulnerable to the criticism or disregard of others. Some participants felt that they had more agency than others in their actions, and predictably, those participants who additionally identified as part of a historically marginalized group (i.e., race, religious identity) felt they had less agency than their White colleagues.

Intersectionality

Several participants pointed to their individual struggles with systemic intersectionality as the primary challenge they faced in their roles as associate deans. Racial and religious identities, for example, made participants more vulnerable to criticism and, in some cases, ostracism. All of the participants who referenced the impact of multiple identities on their professional lives discussed the lengths that they went to in order to mitigate the impact of those identities on others—to make those identities less noticeable or offensive. Several participants felt that, by not acknowledging their intersectionality to others, they could better blend in with their surroundings. As this study revealed, however, experiencing marginalization does not preclude one from marginalizing others; only one of the participants who made mention of her own intersecting identities managed to avoid stereotyping others for the same identities. Consequently, even participants who wished to be recognized as individuals and more than the sum of their identities were unable to avoid making generalizations about others.

Deconstruction

Deconstruction analysis was performed by locating the binaries, exceptions, and resituations present in participant narratives (Wolgemuth, 2014). Often, participants resituated or reframed their experiences as failures or challenges that they felt they needed to overcome, despite the fact that those challenges were clearly systemic and therefore outside of their individual control. An examination of the binaries in the narratives revealed contradictions and disconnections in several participant accounts—frequently within the same interview. The inconsistencies within and between narrative accounts underscore Giddens’s (1990) idea that there is no one way in which people behave. Participants often shifted their explanations and retellings to account for their own behaviors, and despite the fact that they were all women and all filling the same role, they each chose to act differently from their counterparts.

Resistance

Critical resistance—determining the degree to which participants align with or resist constructed subjects (Wolgemuth, 2014)—provided some of the more revealing analyses of participant narratives. Though most participants were able to articulate the stereotypes and unfair expectations often leveled at them by colleagues and supervisors, only one was able to articulate how she tried to resist or reject these stereotypes. Though the participants most often described their ideal selves (constructed subjects) as strong women in positions of power, none seemed to believe that they could reach this ideal, constrained by the organizational hierarchies in which they worked.

Answers to Research Questions

This critical analysis has allowed me to do as Dennis (2013) and Wolgemuth (2014) suggested and read between the lines to reveal some of the hidden cultural structures and institutional barriers that impact the experiences of female administrators in higher education. By engaging in this type of analysis, I was able to answer my original research questions in a more nuanced and context-specific way than if I had performed other types of analyses that may be limited to language analysis. This section addresses the answers to those original research questions.

What Kinds of Challenges Do Female Mid-Level Administrators Experience, and How Do They Seek to Overcome Those Challenges?

The participants in this study cited a variety of challenges that they have faced in their new roles. From the difficult interview process to a feeling of being left out of an administrative “loop,” every participant cited multiple barriers to their success and effectiveness in the role. Though some described greater challenges than others, the common theme that emerged in every interview was a concern that senior administrators did not fully support their positions, likely because the deans themselves did not understand the importance of the position when it was created.

The Monkey in the Middle. Matilda, for example, found it difficult to navigate the middle ground between deans and faculty, as she explained in the second interview:

I feel like the monkey in the middle. I'm hated by my colleagues, because I'm on the dark side. So I've been positioned. And I'm not well received by my dean,

because they haven't figured out how to use me. My dean should be utilizing an associate dean, not for the scut work he or she does not want to do, but should be utilizing my skillset.

Matilda's experience is not uncommon. Many of the participants described this feeling of not belonging to any one group and often felt alienated by both. Most felt that the deans and the provosts had not fully fleshed out the role of associate dean before they were hired, leaving many associate deans struggling to determine the functions and limits of their authority. What the deconstruction analysis shows is the necessary dissonance that occurs in both acknowledging the "dark side" of senior administration and actively wanting to be a part of it. Matilda's narrative shifted over the course of several interviews as she became more and more disillusioned by her relationship with her dean, and she went from feeling blamed because *she* is female to blaming her supervisors because *they* are female.

Alice described a similar problem with faculty, referring to herself as a "dumping ground" and her faculty colleagues as "dump trucks." Mara and Sema both described previously warm relationships with faculty that have since turned frosty. However, whether participants locate the problem in upper administration or faculty, all identified (either obliquely or directly) the cultural structures of hierarchy as the underlying problem. Without a real place in the administrative hierarchy and in a role that varies in responsibility from campus to campus, associate deans often struggle to perform their jobs with the requisite authority.

The participants in this study felt that this challenge is insurmountable. Despite their individual best efforts, including directly addressing the problem with their supervisors and attempting to repair their relationships with colleagues, they felt that, without a change to their job descriptions, they would be forever caught between senior administration and faculty.

Who's in Charge Here? As alluded to in the previous section, one of the biggest challenges that associate deans face is a lack of real authority with full-time faculty members—a common complaint under the old college structure that was not addressed (and, in fact, is likely exacerbated) in the new structure. As Jillian pointed out in the first focus group, however, if the upper administration is unwilling to acknowledge the flawed nature of the position, there cannot be change:

I feel like the position is never going to change because it would require introspection on the part of the administration. Obviously, our jobs could be improved. But if you ask any dean, they will all make sympathetic faces and tell you that even though *they* advocated for you to have more authority, it's really the other deans that were against it. How am I supposed to do my job—you want me to enforce policies, but tell me I don't have the authority to actually enforce them? Who is even in charge here? It feels like a spy movie where you are supposed to go out and work on behalf of the government and maybe get killed, but they will disavow any knowledge of you if you get caught. It's like an incredibly boring Bond film. Jillian is identifying a key theme of defenselessness, echoed by several participants. Expected to take the bullet on behalf of the administration (in the form of enforcing unpopular policies), associate deans have no guarantee that faculty will

listen to them or that administration will support them. Participants cited several examples of times they felt their authority was undermined when they attempted to enforce a policy and the faculty member simply went around them to the dean to complain.

In giving associate deans the charge of carrying out college policy without the authority to enforce it, upper administration is now faced with Giddens's (1990) unintended consequences of action. In the absence of authority, associate deans still attempt to enforce policy in the same way that the deans (who *do* have the authority) do in an effort to reproduce the same outcome, but in the absence of any real power, associate deans are unable to effect the same change as deans and, in some cases, undermine their own efforts to establish authority for themselves. As Michelle wondered in her interview, "how can we motivate someone who's not doing their job to do their job? Because coming from me, it's really meaningless."

While most participants agreed that more authority was needed for their positions, many had found ways around their lack of direct authority. Marine, for example, described her approach as "asking for forgiveness rather than permission" and found that her dean was reluctant to challenge her decisions. In wielding her authority judiciously and letting her supervisor know about what decisions she had made, she was able to claim more authority for herself. Jillian took a more direct approach, using her meetings with the dean to advocate for changes and explain why some current policies were problematic. While her dean did not always agree, Jillian felt that she had established communication as a "norm" in their relationship, and she was much less likely to be

blindsided by new policies and directives than her colleagues. Sabrina was much more subtle and claimed authority by setting up meetings with faculty members and asking for their help in her new role, implying that, without help, she would not be an effective leader. Barbara, Sema, and Mara employed a similar strategy—purposefully dropping in on faculty in their offices, singling out faculty to consult, etc. This type of relationship building is often characterized as a specifically female approach (Eddy, 2009), as it is ostensibly aimed at building consensus, but Sabrina’s approach, she admitted, is less about building consensus and more about demonstrating her willingness to listen to and work with faculty. This approach has given her a kind of power in itself, as it has fostered respect for her position and has helped her to establish herself as an authority.

However, as the critical narrative analysis reveals, such strategic action on the part of participants comes at a cost, and the unintended consequences of Sabrina’s and others’ consensus building has the potential to backfire. In asking for help or soliciting input from others, associate deans establish a precedent that is difficult to shake, as Jillian found out when she asked her administrative assistant for input, earning her a lecture on “the way the things used to be.” Thus, attempts to garner power can have the opposite effect and further undermine the authority of mid-level managers.

Left Out of the Loop. Another common theme in participant interviews was a distinct feeling that associate deans were being left out of important administrative conversations and decision-making processes, both literally and figuratively. At the time of this writing, only two of the five campuses were regularly invited to and included as part of the provost’s weekly staff meetings. Other campuses were simply not invited, and

at one campus in particular, associate deans were actually *barred* from attending, with the provost citing concerns about room space. Participants felt that they were left out of important conversations about curriculum, despite the fact that most of them were experts in their respective disciplines, having recently been full-time faculty members.

Interestingly, Nina reported that, according to a conversation with her dean over concerns about a lack of communication, the deans seemed to feel that they too were left out of the loop with executive administrators (e.g., provosts, vice presidents), and that the lack of communication that the associate deans experienced was probably a result of the deans themselves not being told. As Mara discovered, however, being left out of the conversation is not always an accident, as she revealed in the second focus group:

We have our coordinator of student success, and she met with the provost to talk about a few things and she—she can speak to the provost rather candidly about things—said to the provost, “You really need to meet with your associate deans without the deans.” So we went and everything went on as normal. The building didn't fall down. Things got done, and so [the coordinator] she's says to the provost, you need to meet with them frequently because they can be candid with you about what's going on. And the provost said, “You know what, I suggested that to the deans, and they told me it wasn't necessary.” I'm like, oh my gosh.

Why are you asking the deans for permission? Like, just do it; you're the fucking provost.

Mara's frustration is well-founded. Under the impression that she was not invited to the Provost Staff Meeting because of the provost, it turns out that the deans were acting as

gatekeepers specifically preventing her (and other associate deans) access to the provost. At best, the deans' actions were well-intended (if misguided) attempts to shield associate deans from having to deal directly with senior administration. At worst, this action is a deliberate attempt to further undermine the authority of the associate deans and reinforce the distance between senior leaders and middle management. Either scenario is problematic, and neither suggests that deans have the best interest of their associate deans at the forefront of their decision-making processes. Rather, it serves as a reminder that the same institutional and cultural constraints that affect the participants in this study impact the people they work for in different ways.

This communication challenge, surely a hallmark of most academic institutions, does not have an easy solution. Over the course of this study, participants (and, indeed, all the associate deans) repeatedly expressed frustration at the lack of communication between senior and mid-level administrators. One strategy for overcoming this challenge was establishing a monthly meeting for associate deans that, in addition to fostering communication between campuses, served as a kind of informal information exchange. By pooling their knowledge with others, the associate deans were able to get access to information that they might not otherwise have, particularly at campuses where associate deans are not invited to the meetings of senior management.

An Atmosphere of Distrust. Several of the participants in this study expressed concern that their immediate supervisors (deans) did not trust them to perform their jobs. Several months after their positions were created, the associate deans from the various campuses met as a group to discuss how policies were implemented at each campus.

After the first meeting, the group agreed to continue meeting monthly in an effort to foster communication and collaboration between campuses. This decision was met with immediate backlash, with some deans objecting that they had not given their permission for the associate deans to meet. Others expressed concern that this monthly meeting would keep associate deans from their regular duties. Though this dispute was ultimately resolved (a necessary oversimplification of a debate that lasted several months), the damage, so to speak, was done. In the second focus group, Nina voiced concerns that many associate deans expressed at the time:

One cannot but feel that there is a level of political intrigue that's going on at a higher level that trickles down to us...There's this really strange atmosphere of distrust, and does it come from them thinking that we're going to somehow subvert what's going on and cause some sort of a rebellion? Then why? What's the situation that would cause it? Or is it that our job skills are not trusted and, again, we were just hired in these positions, so why would that be? It's so puzzling to me because it's just a very strange work atmosphere to be in.

The atmosphere that Nina referenced came about as a result of the associate deans' taking initiative (read: power) for themselves. There was a sense among participants that the deans were very paranoid about why the associate deans would wish to meet as a group and were taking steps to limit their already very limited authority. This paranoia was exacerbated by the already poor communication between the deans and the associate deans. Rather than meet to discuss how the two groups might work effectively together or even hash out whatever issues existed, the deans insisted that all communication go

through the correct hierarchical channels, meaning that the associate deans communicated with the deans through memos. By engaging in critical narrative analysis, it is immediately clear that this deliberate reification of institutional hierarchy acted to shore up the authority of senior administration and constrain associate deans with the cultural expectation that they will defer to supervisors and behave appropriately or risk being singled out to face consequences. The memo served as both a literal and symbolic reminder that the associate deans' activities were subject to the deans' permission and only deepened the mistrust and strife between the groups.

The resolution to this issue was less an actual resolution and more of a tentative cease fire—a necessary break in hostilities because of the number of important issues administrators were facing at the time (e.g., a presidential search, changes to state funding regulations). This underlying issue, though perhaps temporarily set aside, has continued to influence communication between the groups, contributing to Nina's sense of political intrigue. Until it is directly addressed, it will likely continue to shape—or perhaps, more accurately, erode—the already fraught relationship between upper and middle management.

Chewing Through My Nightguard. The one theme that could be found in all of the participant narratives from the very beginning of the study were the high-stress demands related to the position and the toll these demands have been taking on the participants' personal lives. Participants found themselves overwhelmed with faculty and student issues, and more than one participant admitted that they had strongly considered quitting within the first month. Others found that, though they were able to manage the

stress of their jobs at work, the effects had begun to show in other areas of their lives. As noted during the second interview, Mara, in particular, felt that her stress had manifested itself in a very odd way:

So I had to get a night guard because I clench my teeth now in my sleep. I chewed through it actually. I told my dean that because I told him I have to go back to the dentist on Monday. And I was just telling him why, and I said, “Really, I think that clenching started back around June [when the position began], quite honestly.” In the fall, she was out for six weeks, and if we didn't have a work study, then do you know who sat at the admin's desk? I did. I did and I reached my tipping point last week and I told my dean, I said, “I'm not getting paid to be an admin and an associate dean,” I said. “I cannot do this anymore, I cannot.”

Being asked to do the work of administrative assistants was a reoccurring theme in most participant narratives, and most were resentful of the work. This result is consistent with Bird et al.'s (2004) description of “institutional housekeeping”—the invisible labor performed predominantly by women to improve their situations within an institution. Notably, Mara's counterpart is a male who, she admitted, had never once volunteered to sit at the administrative assistant's desk in her stead.

Other participants discussed how their high-stress work environments impacted their home lives, causing them to be short with their spouses and children and, in turn, adding to their stress levels. In particular, the subject of children came up several times, as participants felt that they were having to switch into their “other full-time job” as a mother as soon as they got home. Some felt obligated to bring work home with them and

guilty for not responding to emails after hours and on weekends. When asked about how they dealt with the stresses of their new positions, the answers were variations on a theme that only Sema addressed directly: “I don’t cope. I don’t cope. There are no coping strategies.” Many participants discussed activities they *used* to do in order to de-stress but no longer had time to do because of their jobs. As Nina wrote in one of her responses, “I feel like I’ve yet to hit a lull at some point, that there hasn’t been any, and I think, my fear is that we’re not going to be able to sustain it if we keep going at the same pace.” Overwhelmingly, participants seemed to feel that they had no choice but to keep going with the hope that work would eventually improve. A few of the participants explained that, though were having a difficult time with the workload, they had worked to establish a support system at work, which they felt made their stress more manageable.

There were other, less common challenges cited by the participants, including those challenges specific to a particular campus—for example, a particularly difficult supervisor or uncooperative faculty member. Two participants discussed the difficulty of maintaining their professionalism in the face of unprofessional behavior from others, and both Black participants discussed the difficulty of dealing with racist and sexist behavior from their colleagues. Only Carolyn did not cite any particular challenges to her position, though she conceded that others “with young children might find the job a bit more stressful.” She was genuinely surprised by the other participants who spoke about their difficult adjustments and seemed to minimize the difficulties that others were facing, particularly with regard to challenges of or related to gender. Unwilling to explore the possibility that many of

the challenges associate deans face are a direct result of their gender, she serves as an excellent illustration of Conefry's (2001) conclusion about the female engineers in that study—that because gender *should* not be an issue, it *must* not be.

How Has the Institution Supported or Hindered Their Success in a New Role?

Given the number of challenges that participants in this study faced in the first year of their new roles, it is unsurprising that most of them identified their institution as the source of much of their difficulty. Many seemed resigned to the fact that their issues and concerns would not be addressed, dismissing this lack of institutional support as “the WCC way.” None of the participants were able to identify ways in which they felt supported by the institution, though a few felt that their specific deans were supportive. In general, participants were able to identify three ways that WCC hindered success in their new roles: poor training, poor communication, and poor supervision.

Poor Training. Though limited training was provided at the beginning, most participants felt that, though well meant, it was generally unhelpful. Most held administrative roles prior to their associate dean roles, so they did not feel that they learned much, if anything, from the training provided. Though a few associate deans were enthusiastic about the training they received, it is worth noting that they had had no prior administrative experience. In her first interview, Michelle described the issue that most participants had with the limited training provided:

Once I got the position, we had some training... We had HR come a lot and other people from the college giving us training. A lot of it I knew already. Some of it

was lengthy training for not a lot of information, to be honest. It would have been better to have more, specifically, “This is what we're expecting of the associate deans; here are your counterparts,” meet and greet. Not just the 15-minute thing with answering the questions about our roles. So I would have definitely liked to have a sit-down with the deans from our campus, have them say, “This is what we expect from you.”

This lack of clear expectation, according to participant accounts, was a salient feature of the interview, hiring, and orientation process, and many participants speculated that it is the root of the issues that associate deans currently face. Many of the rules and policies that guide associate deans seemed to be made up on the spot and, as participants discovered in the focus group conversations, were largely inconsistent from campus to campus.

Participants found training lacking in both quality and quantity. After the initial blitz of human resource (HR) and computer training in the first two months, there was no additional training offered by the college outside of generic training in HR policies. No management or leadership training was offered, and there was no attempt to bring together associate deans and deans for a larger discussion. It is possible that scheduling difficulties made meeting as a larger group impossible, but it became increasingly clear over the course of the associate deans' first year that such a meeting was not desired by the deans. Several participants reported that their deans had told them that they should consider their jobs to be “campus facing”—that is, not

a part of the larger college structure. As such, there would be no need for them to meet with associate deans and deans from other campuses for any reason.

When one participant attempted to organize leadership training for both groups, she was met with a torrent of objections from the deans, several of whom voiced concerns that certain topics could be “embarrassing” or “challenge the authority” of the deans on some campuses. Topics like budget management were considered off limits; specific policies and their implementation on each campus were also not allowed. Michelle wondered in her interview, “If I can’t get the training I need to help me do my job, how am I supposed to do my job? And if I can’t do my job because you didn’t get me the training I need...aren’t you setting me up for failure?”

Poor Communication. The lack of communication between administrative groups has been a recurring theme in this study, particularly in the context of the broader organizational communication problem that exists at WCC (and likely most educational institutions). In terms of institutional support, however, participants were more concerned with the lack of communication from their supervisors about their specific job functions. Participants at one campus in particular voiced concerns that their deans did not really know what to do with them and, as a result, either gave them too much of the work that they themselves did not wish to do or ignored them all together. Matilda felt that her dean was “unable to utilize” her skillset, instead saddling her with low-level administrative tasks.

In the larger focus group discussions, there was a general feeling among participants that the deans, who had little input into formulating the associate dean job description, were concerned that associate deans would have too much power. This idea was not entirely speculation. One participant, who had a particularly good relationship with her dean and a large amount of autonomy, was told to keep that autonomy to herself lest she upset deans at other campuses. Once it became clear that other associate deans were not permitted to sign certain documents, for example, the participant was told that she no longer had that authority either—a new rule she discovered via memo from the dean’s council, not from her own dean. As Barbara said in the second focus group,

...on the one side of your mouth, you talk about wanting to groom people in succession and having all this confidence, and then the other part, you want to keep them from succeeding by limiting their opportunities. To be totally frank, I think they’re afraid that they’re going to get shown up.

This fear of being outdone is consistent with Heifetz’s (2007) and Mooney’s (2005) studies that found that women who advance are often viewed as a threat to both men and women, likely because of the perception that there are a limited number of such opportunities to go around. Because their job responsibilities were not clearly defined, participants felt that their deans were trying to limit their success. Even the participants who had good relationships with their deans felt that they were being limited or prevented from growing in their roles under the guise of protection from overwork. “It’s simple,” Sema concluded after she had shared an anecdote about her dean who had prevented her

from taking meetings with full-time faculty members by herself lest she be overwhelmed, “either you trust me or you don’t. And if you don’t, why’d you hire me?”

Poor Supervision. Participants were generally reluctant to talk about their direct supervisors at the beginning of the study. As the year wore on, however, it became clear that, with one or two glaring exceptions, participants were deeply frustrated with their deans. At two different campuses, the associate deans complained of supervisors who were almost never there and rarely indicated when they would be on campus. This absence meant that associate deans who did not have regular access to the provost were kept out of the loop of important communication simply because their deans were not present. One participant, whose dean *was* present, felt that she was primarily asked to be the “heavy” in difficult conversations with faculty members. “It’s my job to sit quietly while the dean explains things nicely and then interrupt with stark reality. Bad cop, really.” This situation is not dissimilar to Marine’s sense that she was often asked to be the bad guy in such meetings because she is Black and therefore expected to play a role of intimidation.

One source of continuing frustration for most participants seemed to be the sense that their deans were not acting as advocates on their behalf to senior administrators. Top-down communication was poor and bottom-up communication was worse. When given an opportunity and a seat at the table, the associate deans felt that their supervisors did not advocate for them properly. Nina gave the stark example of a communication from the college provosts entitled “Approved Activities for Associate Deans.” The title of the memo (a response to a series of questions

posed to the campus provosts nearly four months prior) sparked quick outrage among associate deans who felt that senior administrators were being condescending and disrespectful. Nina, like others, was angry and felt that the tone of the memo “made it sound like we are something between toddlers and prisoners on early release.” As she noted in the second focus group, Marine was equally outraged:

They have no idea what we do. That’s the problem. How can you tell me what my *approved activities* are if you don’t even know what activities I do now?

Who do they think does the work in this college?

The sense that those in upper administration did not understand or appreciate the work being done by associate deans was pervasive among participants, particularly at smaller campuses where middle managers were not invited to participate in larger administrative meetings. Resistance analysis in this study revealed that, although most participants were angry about their treatment by senior administrators, they felt either unable or unwilling to address this issue with senior management. The identities that some participants—notably, Marine, Alice, and Matilda—formed as powerful, competent women who challenged the hegemonic norm and rejected the compliant female worker stereotype took a serious blow when this memo was released; all three women expressed the feeling that they had been “put in their place.”

Another common complaint among participants in the study was the lack of opportunity for advancement or even the encouragement from supervisors to pursue such opportunities. Many felt that, without a clearly articulated path for advancement, there would be little opportunity for promotion and that, on the whole, supervisors did not

spend enough time mentoring and encouraging additional professional development.

Matilda discovered that, even when she did seek out professional development, it was not sufficient. In spite of her doctoral degree in higher education, she was told by her dean to complete a graduate certificate in community college leadership for additional development. Though she planned to “play the game” in order to advance, Matilda said during her second interview that she realized in that moment that her hard work would never be acknowledged:

I feel like I've got the Rosetta Stone and nobody'll listen. I'm not saying I have all the answers... but I know I am a voice in the room that needs to be heard. And I thought when I got the PhD that would happen. My PhD doesn't matter.

With so little encouragement from her supervisor, there is little reason for Matilda to pursue other positions at the institution, particularly when she cannot be sure that her application will be supported. Matilda's experience is an excellent illustration of the principle of unintended consequences; by developing new positions for associate deans and not creating a pathway for advancement, the middle management pool runs the risk of becoming a farm team for other institutions in the area. In addition, as this analysis indicates, Matilda's strategic decision to play along could backfire; she may not be establishing her willingness to “play the game” as she believes so much as she is establishing her willingness to devalue her education and qualification for a yet-to-be-realized role in senior administration. Matilda was not the only participant facing this conundrum. As of this writing, several participants in the study had already started

interviewing at other institutions, and two participants were considering returning to faculty positions once they became available.

Why Are Women So Strongly Represented in Middle Management Positions in the Community College, as Reported by the Women Themselves?

Of the 24 associate deans originally hired for the newly fashioned associate dean position at WCC (three associate deans having had the title in a previous iteration of the role prior to the restructure), 14 were women. Most of them had previously served as assistant deans (department chairs) at one time in their careers—a position that was also predominantly filled by women at the college. Community colleges are generally seen as “female friendly” because women and men are usually offered comparable leadership opportunities in contrast to their four-year counterparts (Everett, 2011; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Participants in this study were asked why they thought women were so strongly represented in middle management positions at the college. The answer was as consistent as it was unexpected: motherhood.

In every interview that I conducted, participants offered (unsolicited) metaphors to account for their hiring and job performance. All of them made reference to motherhood (albeit different aspects), including their roles as nurturers, discipliners, and support givers. These references are entirely consistent with Madsen’s (2008) study that indicated that women often attribute part of their preparation for their roles as community college presidents to their experiences in raising children, specifically citing such competencies as multitasking, patience, empathy, and conflict resolution. Matilda, for example, focused on the disciplinary aspect of motherhood, explaining that mothers

become better managers (than men) because they “understand the child dynamic and the fighting. In the end, some squabbling will let itself go. Other squabbling has to be dealt with. You know when to invoke your presence as a parent.” Her perception of the ideal manager as an authoritative and controlling figure is consistent with a masculine-associated conception of leadership, often associated with aggression and authority. Dean et al. (2009) argued that this type of leadership style can be an inherent disadvantage to women as they may be viewed as not feminine enough.

Nina’s metaphor, though different, still framed women leaders in terms of motherhood. As she explained, “women partly are selected for leadership because unconsciously, I think, when it comes to being mothers and being problem solvers, they do this better.” Here, leadership is framed as a matter of problem solving, a trait that Nina specifically locates in female leadership. Like Nina, Michelle focused on relationship building when she guessed that women were selected for these roles because they “were the nurturers...were the cheerleaders for these students.” Several other associate deans invoked the image of “administrator-as-nurturer,” and Sabrina used the metaphor to explain her new role as course scheduler to former department chairs, saying “I recognize that these courses are your babies. Treat me like the nanny, teach me what you want me to know about your babies.” On the one hand, this metaphor serves to reassure department chairs that Sabrina will be mindful of their wishes and as gentle and respectful of their previous work as they themselves would be. On the other hand, it sets a difficult precedent with the expectation that, as the nanny, she will not make decisions that might contravene their wishes.

Mara likened her relationship with full-time faculty to that of parent with an absentee spouse—attempting to fill a role meant to be filled by two people, one of whom is never around. Nina thought she functioned more as a stepparent—one to whom authority is rarely and, even then, grudgingly given and who goes largely unacknowledged until the real parent returns. Alice, though she offered a motherhood metaphor of her own, was resentful of the role, which she felt came with more emotional responsibility for students and faculty than her male counterparts were responsible for. Although more women were selected for the role than men, Alice was convinced that gender bias was still deeply entrenched within the institution and that she would always have more challenges than her male colleagues because she is female, as she revealed in the second focus group:

...even though we have the majority of the women that are in leadership positions, I mean we're women, but I think it does matter. I think it clearly does matter...because statistically they've shown that men and women challenge women on a much higher rate than they do their male counterparts. Because we're still seen as women, as incompetent or too emotional to do our jobs, where, you know, men are practical and they think logically and they're not emotional and they're this and they're that ... it would be interesting to see if the male associate deans that we have—if they encounter the same problems that I have. I really doubt it.

Alice's experience illustrates Binns and Kerfoot's (2011) warning that, in classifying some behaviors as feminine (e.g., empathy or emotion), there is a risk that sexist

stereotypes are further entrenched. By describing themselves as parents or mothers, the women in this study run the risk of being dismissed or reduced to stereotypes that may preclude them from being taken seriously by their colleagues and supervisors.

Though less prevalent than “motherhood,” the other frequent answer as to why participants thought so many women had been chosen for the position was that it was difficult work and might not last. Participants described their positions as “unwinnable” and often referred to themselves as “caught” between faculty and senior administration. Sema was certain from the beginning of her new job that she was being “set up to fail” and “purposefully sabotaged,” and Matilda implied that she knew there were faculty members and administrators “actively working against” her. Several participants were skeptical about the position, and some were afraid that the restructure would not last and that they would be left without jobs. Jillian confided in a journal entry that, because she is a woman, she is afraid she might be “expendable,” and Nina, fresh from what she described as a previously “toxic work environment,” was worried that her experience in this role would end in much the same way.

What Factors Influence a Woman’s Decision to Pursue a Career in Higher Education Administration?

Ultimately, this study seeks to understand what factors are at play when women decide to pursue (or not pursue) careers in higher education administration. As of 2016, only 36% of community college presidents were female (ACE, 2017), indicating that, although women are often much more successful in administration at community colleges, there are still very real barriers to advancement beyond middle

management. Over the course of this study, two themes emerged from participant narratives that suggests what these barriers might be: outside obligations and lack of mentorship. Conversely, there were two themes that emerged to indicate what factors might lead to the women in this study pursuing senior administrative roles: a desire to make a difference and professional advancement.

Outside Obligations. Unsurprisingly, the biggest barrier to participants' pursuit of advanced administrative positions was outside obligation, primarily to children, spouses, and parents. All but one of the participants in this study had children, and four of them had children who were still school-aged. These participants spoke about the difficulty of balancing work and life, lamenting how much their time to spend with their children had changed since taking on their new roles. Though, initially, Sema had indicated her desire to eventually be a dean, her feelings changed dramatically over the course of the year, and she expressed that her desire to spend time with her family far outweighed her interest in career advancement. Marine, who was also initially interested in pursuing a more advanced position, admitted that she was considering returning to a faculty position because the hours and demands of her job were taking a toll on her relationship with her children.

Even participants with older, grown children were not immune from obligation, and several of the participants with older children spoke about how they had changed their career plans early in order to be stay-at-home or hands-on moms. Matilda expressed concerns that her decision to be such an active part of her child's life when he was younger cost her important time and opportunities for career advancement. Barbara's

decision to be “more present” in her child’s life during her last year in high school cost her an important opportunity for advancement that has had lasting impacts on her current role. Children were not the only factor. Several participants cited caring for aging parents as a factor that might prevent them from applying for additional opportunities. According to her second interview, Sabrina, in particular, was keenly aware of the impact her relationship with her parents might have on her future in administration:

I’m an only child. I have two parents. They have siblings, and so I’ve been thinking about, would I be able to sustain this if something happened and I had to be a caregiver? So I think that it’s ‘no,’ unfortunately—as nonfeminist as this answer is, which makes me crazy. I think it’s the caregiver role that women are typically thrust upon that creates the scenario of you can only do so much because you feel like you’re taking care of the world also. These are hard jobs to do, to take care of other things as well. Oh, if you could be a narcissistic, selfish man. I think it’s much easier to say, “Oh, well what is my aspiration? I’m going to go for it.”

Sabrina’s assessment that men are much more likely to “go for it” is well documented (Hersi, 1993; Kaplan & Tinsley, 1989; Sims LeBlanc, 1994). Women are often called upon to be the primary caregivers in their relationships and frequently abandon career plans that are not flexible enough to account for caregiving responsibilities. Nina had much the same response, reporting that she knew her advancement options were limited from the outset because she would be responsible for caring for her elderly parents at some point in the future.

Notably, none of the participants in this study expected to receive help or support from the institution for the decisions that they made. All seemed to clearly understand that a choice to focus on their families was a choice to give up part or all of their career goals. None of the participants suggested that their spouses or partners would be equally responsible for obligations that might keep them from advancement, and perhaps, most tellingly, none of the single parents in the study were convinced that having a spouse would ultimately give them more opportunity. As one participant said, “it probably wouldn’t matter. I’d be the one doing all the work anyway.” Women expect to do the heavy lifting, it seems, even in theoretical relationships.

Lack of Mentorship. The other notable barrier to advancement that participants cited was a lack of mentorship from senior colleagues. Only one of the participants in the study felt that she had received mentoring, but she explained that it was much earlier in her career by a previous dean who had asked her to consider administration. “He said I was underutilizing my skills and encouraged me to apply for administrative positions,” she said, adding, “I would never have considered administration unless he had taken an interest in me.” Other participants agreed with her assessment that they had pursued additional opportunities at the suggestion of a colleague, but all bemoaned the lack of active mentoring in their roles, particularly from female administrators. Jillian’s assessment of the situation was simple—everyone is too busy helping themselves to help others:

I think being a female administrator is really complicated. You work really hard to get where you’re going—no one ever talks about women “failing upward,”

only men. So you work really hard to get your position, and you realize you're one of a couple of women there, and at that point, you have to make a choice. Do I spend my time mentoring the women who have come after me, or do I work to preserve and expand the small slice of pie I was already able to get for myself? I feel like most women go with the pie. I wonder if everyone makes the same promise to themselves that I have made—if I get where I want to be, I will help all of the women after me get there as well. And then when they get where they're going, creating opportunities for others doesn't seem as important anymore.

Jillian voiced a concern that many of the participants had—mainly, that the women they reported to were not interested in helping them to advance their careers. Most dismissed what little support they had received as “lip service,” asserting that they had received no practical support or guidance from their female supervisors. One notable exception was a female dean who, as participants who reported to her felt, went out of her way to provide training and support for their roles. Though they had not discussed career advancement with her and did not expect to, they appreciated her willingness to talk them through difficult situations, thus allowing them to learn on the job.

Still, despite the small handful of women in the study who had found at least some limited mentorship, the overwhelming majority of the participants felt that their female supervisors were *purposefully* avoiding mentorship, and many speculated that their deans were threatened by the idea that an associate dean might take their jobs. Notably, none of the participants with male deans felt that they had or would receive mentoring, but none of those participants *expected* to be mentored by their male

supervisors, unlike participants with female supervisors. There was a sense among participants that female deans had an obligation to provide mentorship to the women they supervised. Anything less was construed as hostile or, worse, a betrayal. As Alice said at the close of one of her interviews, “just because we have female leadership doesn’t mean we have female leadership.” While the literature indicated that women might be reluctant to mentor other women for a variety of reasons (Vaccaro, 2011), this study suggests that those women are often additionally burdened by the expectation that they do so.

A Desire to Make a Difference. The one factor that every participant in this study agreed was likely to influence their decision to pursue advanced administrative positions was the desire to make a difference and/or significant contribution. Indeed, this desire to have a positive impact was identified as the most important factor for everyone in the study when they applied for their current positions as associate deans, albeit in different ways. Barbara, for example, spoke of the knowledge she had gained over the course of her career and her desire to put that knowledge to positive use. Several other participants referenced the knowledge they had accrued over the course of many years and their desire to use it to help others.

Matilda, Mara, and Nina all spoke of the importance of using their experience to help students solve problems. Michelle talked about wanting to set new standards for students to help them be more successful in the future since, as she put it, the “bar has been set too low.” The associate deans with no prior administrative experience spoke of their love of working with students in the classroom to help them navigate the challenges of college, which had in turn fueled their interest in becoming administrators to “help in a

different way.” Participants were very student focused and spoke at length about how they felt that their current and future administrative roles would center around improving the student experience.

The desire to help others was not limited to students, however. Several participants also discussed their interest in aiding faculty. Mara, in particular, expressed her concern for faculty well-being during her first interview:

...I feel like morale is really low among faculty...I think back to when I first started back in 2005, and I don't know, like the morale and the atmosphere was just different. It was lighter; people congregated more in the hall here...and so I really, I just really want people to like being here, because I think it's going to reflect their teaching well...You know I want to take away whatever struggles they're facing that aren't related to their teaching directly. I want to just take care of those problems so they can really focus on their teaching because I think that's something I hear from faculty a lot. They always feel like we're throwing more at them.

Mara's belief that it is part of her job to take care of faculty was shared by several other participants, all of whom felt that this level of care was part of their job description, even though it is not. Mara and others perfectly illustrate what Bird et al. (2004) described as invisible and supportive labor. Often taken for granted and unseen by others, this kind of work is almost always shouldered by women. Interestingly, though most participants felt an obligation to care for colleagues and students, several referred to this obligation as

“exhausting.” However, even the knowledge that one is being exploited for their emotional labor does not mean that labor is not performed. As Nina explained,

One of the rewards of the job is when you do get to solve a problem for a student or a person...anyone who comes your way. That’s those little accomplishments that I referred to before. Those little moments do add up.

Professional Advancement. Probably the most salient factor as to whether or not a woman decides to pursue a senior leadership position is the opportunity for professional advancement. All of the participants in this study talked about their new roles as associate deans as chance to further their careers, though some were more direct than others. As previously discussed, women are often reluctant to share their career goals lest they seem too ambitious, and many participants framed their decisions to become associate deans as either trying something new,” a “chance to stretch professionally,” or as previously discussed, “an opportunity to help others.” Only Alice and Matilda were direct about their desire to advance quickly to more senior roles. Matilda was clear from her first interview that she fully intended to be president of a community college by the time she was 65 and felt she would be in that role now, if not for lack of opportunity.

At the start of the study, with little exception (and much prodding), most of the participants indicated that they could see themselves as deans or provosts in the distant future, but over the course of the first year, many of the women in the study changed their perspectives completely, overwhelmed by the emotional toll of their jobs. Sabrina, one of the associate deans who initially did not see herself in a more senior role, had reversed her perspective by the end of the year, as she revealed in her interview:

So when I started this, I thought, I don't know that I want to go higher because I really thought this would be the end all be all. I've actually changed in that...It is a lot of stress, but it's a lot of being told what to do...and not feeling like you're in charge of your own destiny. And the problem, and I've said this to Sema, the problem is, it sounds awful, really awful. I don't necessarily think I want to be the dean, or I don't really think I want to be a provost. What I really think is it needs to be a layer even higher, or I think more of the real thoughtful stuff is coming down. I also recognize you can't really get there without those...In between stepping stones, and there's the rub. I don't know that I could sustain this job for five years even.

Though she has an excellent relationship with her dean and was generally very positive about their interaction, Sabrina began to chafe under her leadership and wished for more autonomy as the year went on. Initially unsure that she could handle the job, she quickly adapted and began to wish for more authority in the role as well as a position that might help her to make positive changes. Jillian agreed with her assessment, expressing her desire to “right wrongs” but finding that she was unable to do so in her current role.

Sabrina unknowingly named another important factor in the decision to pursue a more advanced role—burnout. Nearly all of the participants referred to the overwhelming volume of work that they were expected to perform in their roles, but all seemed to accept it as a natural part of the position. Barbara admitted that her decision to pursue a more advanced position might be contingent on how long she could put up with the stresses of her current role. Whereas Sabrina acknowledged the “stepping stones” needed

for her to advance professionally (and might prove to be too tiresome to overcome), Alice and Matilda dismissed these steps as unnecessary—a dismissal that seemed to add to their frustration with the job.

Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

Implications for Research

From a methodological standpoint, this study makes the case for an extension of critical structural narrative analysis to include intersectionality and resistance. Adding to the model with these additional aspects is an important and worthwhile advance for two key reasons. First, these aspects explained unique and meaningful perspectives in the narrative accounts analyzed, meaning that, even after accounting for participant behavior with cultural structures and unintended consequences of action, there remained unexplored differences in the participants' experiences that the additional aspects were able to explain. Thus, a critical narrative structural analysis model that includes intersectionality, deconstruction, and resistance yields a richer and more complete and complex analysis than one that excludes them. These more complex aspects of narratives allow for the magnification of the gendered dimensions of the stories without the hyper-individualization or pathologizing of the people who tell them (Fraser, 2004, 2008; Fraser & MacDougall, 2017). Likely, the reason these aspects contribute to the model so meaningfully is that they help to distill the unique and distinctive experience that participants describe and offer a more nuanced explanation for actors' behavior—nuances that can be understood as inequitable power relationships rooted in structural inequalities rather than individual identity (Bilge, 2013; Brown, 2012; Carbado, 2013).

Second, adding these aspects as new facets of critical narrative structural analysis is important because it allows for a more complete picture of how outside pressures can significantly impact an actor's choices and subsequent retelling of those choices. Recognizing that actors could always have acted differently than they have acted, in conjunction with the fact that some actors are more constrained in their choices because of cultural and structural barriers (Dennis, 2013; Giddens, 1990), offers critical insight into how marginalized groups are disproportionately affected by such barriers. Nina, Sema, Jillian, and Marine described how they actively covered up, concealed, or downplayed part of their identities in order to be successful in their jobs—something that none of their White colleagues needed to do. The importance of choice—the ability of actors to decide for themselves how to act—is largely ignored in leadership studies, which have a tendency to ignore intersecting identities and the individual experience. However, framing this concept as choice is significant because, as this study revealed, women of color often feel that they *do not have a choice*. None of the participants who felt they needed to suppress their identities for the comfort of others felt that they had the option of *not* doing so.

Implications for Policy and Practice

There is considerable consensus in leadership research that institutions would do well to establish formal and informal mentorship programs, which can lead to career advancement for women (Airini et al., 2011; Ballenger, 2010; Chandler, 1996; Crippen & Wallin, 2008; Paterson & Chicola, 2017; Searby et al., 2015; Wallace & Marchant, 2009). The results of the present research support these recommendations

but also suggest a necessary refinement—the need to establish programs specifically tailored to women and people of color. Additional research is needed to assess the impact of such programs on the careers of these groups, but the present findings make it clear that, without intervention, many otherwise qualified women (in particular, women of color) will choose to forego careers in senior administration due to a lack of institutional support.

In addition to mentorship programs, the results of this study suggest that resources, like childcare, professional development, management training, and mental health and wellness resources, be made available to mid-level managers to help “plug” the leaky pipeline to senior administration positions. The participants in this study were all deeply affected in one way or another by a lack of support from their institution in this regard. For some, this lack of support meant a delay in career goals as they passed on promotion opportunities that they felt would take away from domestic duties. For others, it meant that, after only a year in management, they were considering returning to teaching full time because they felt unprepared to lead others. Support of mid-level managers leads to persistence, which in turn leads to a strong leadership pool (Gray et al., 2019; Pepper & Giles, 2015).

Findings from this study also suggest that higher education institutions should thoughtfully and intentionally design middle management positions to *be* leadership positions, codifying their authority and designing them to complement, not conflict with, more senior administrative roles. While administrative roles necessarily overlap at times, a clear delineation of responsibilities has the potential to reduce conflict and

competition between supervisors and their middle managers. In addition to relationship benefits, this delineation can lead to a more efficiently functioning organization. Clear paths to promotion should also be established. While once there was a clear route from faculty member to department chair to dean to provost, that path has been distorted and muddled to the point that it is almost unnavigable. It seems an unlikely coincidence that this once clear path is almost impossible for women and people of color to follow.

Recommendations for Future Research

The goal of this study was not to produce broadly generalizable findings but rather to amplify the stories of the women who participated in the study, offer evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice, and theorize women's leadership on a glass cliff. A narrative methodology was used because stories are the medium through which individual participants can provide insight about their experiences (Bold, 2012; Chadwick, 2014; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2010), which often reveal patterns that are relevant to others and require further exploration (Clandinin & Connelly, 2010; Mishler, 1995; Polkinghorne, 2005). It is likely that, though many associate deans at other institutions have had experiences similar to those of the participants in this study, many of them have encountered entirely different challenges than the ones presented here. That said, one way to further this study would be to expand its scope to include associate deans at other types of institutions (e.g., rural community colleges, urban community colleges, four-year public and private colleges and universities). This study took

place at a large, multi-campus community college, and the environment and organizational culture are likely significantly different from those at other types of institutions. Another way to expand the scope and, thereby, the implications of this study would be to include other types of mid-level managers to include deans and/or department chairs. Deans in particular wield more power than associate deans, but they are subject to greater scrutiny from senior administration and often have to answer for declining enrollments and personnel issues in ways that associate deans do not.

Perhaps most obviously, this study could be easily expanded to include male associate deans to compare their experiences to their female colleagues' experiences. While I stand by my original assertion that the story of men-as-managers has been exhausted, it could provide an interesting contrast to the experiences of the women in this study. Though it is clear from participant narratives (and research) that the experiences of men are vastly different from the experiences of women, it would be valuable to know how and if men perceive those differences for themselves. The challenges of a mid-level managerial role are likely universal in many respects; for example, long hours and unnecessary meetings are a problem, regardless of gender. However, what might be more telling is how men handle these challenges as opposed to their female counterparts. How do men who shoulder more responsibility for domestic duties than their partners, for example, experience the challenges of outside obligation? Future research might include a larger-scale comparative study that examines best practices across multiple institutions of higher education.

Final Thoughts

I intended this study to contribute to theoretical conversations by offering a deeper, more nuanced method for engaging in critical narrative structural analysis. My goal in undertaking this research was to understand the specific challenges of real people who are struggling with the careers they have chosen and to demonstrate that, like every other profession on the planet, institutions of higher education have a problem with women. More than that, this study demonstrates that community colleges, which are often seen as good places for women to work because of the opportunities they provide, are subject to the same tired gender politics as every other institution. It would be disingenuous to make recommendations for future research without pointing out that, more than research, institutional policy change is needed for any real gains to be made. While I struggled to find studies about mid-level managers in higher education, I found hundreds and hundreds of studies that show that women, particularly women of color, face discrimination in their careers simply because of their gender. This basic fact underscores every research study about women in the workplace, and though it is often framed differently, the bottom line is unavoidable: Women face bias and discrimination in their places of work that prevent them from advancing.

What is needed now, more than anything, is policy change. Institutions need to be intentional in their hiring of women and people of color and provide useful training and career development programs to employees and faculty who seek advancement. Mentorship programs should be established as a matter of course and

additional support services (e.g., childcare, expanded family leave, wellness programs) should be offered to administrators to slow the “leaky” pipeline of mid-level to senior administration. Women of color should be offered programs and training specifically aimed at their career advancement and well-being. While this study has offered an additional way of studying the problem, the results are nothing new and likely entirely predictable by every woman who has ever worked in higher education. This is not to say there is not more to know; cynically, I expect that, in higher education’s increasingly neo-liberal environment, women and people of color are being challenged and discriminated against in even more creative ways than before. Ultimately, however, it remains, not for researchers to continue pointing out the obvious, but for practitioners to make commitment to change.

Appendix A

GMU Approval Letter



Office of Research Development, Integrity, and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-693-5445; Fax: 703-693-9590

DATE: July 8, 2019

TO: Meagan Call-Cummings, PhD
FROM: George Mason University IRB

Project Title: [1286302-3] Associate Dean Interviews

SUBMISSION TYPE: Continuing Review/Progress Report

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: July 8, 2019
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited review category #7

Thank you for your submission of Continuing Review/Progress Report materials for this project. The George Mason University IRB has APPROVED your submission. This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form unless the IRB has waived the requirement for a signature on the consent form or has waived the requirement for a consent process. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the IRB office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed (if applicable).

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This study does not have an expiration date but you will receive an annual reminder regarding future requirements.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of five years, or as described in your submission, after the completion of the project.

Please note that department or other approvals may be required to conduct your research in addition to IRB approval.

If you have any questions, please contact Katie Brooks at (703) 993-4121 or kbrook14@gmu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

GMU IRB Standard Operating Procedures can be found here: http://oria.gmu.edu/1031-2/?_ga=1.12722615.1443740248.1411130601

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within George Mason University IRB's records.

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

ASSOCIATE DEAN STUDY

EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

(To be sent by Co-Investigator after we receive IRB approval)

Project #1286302-1

We are conducting a study about your experiences in your new role as associate dean. If you would like to participate in this study you would be asked to participate in up to two semi-structured interviews during or after the conclusion of the project. These interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. I will also send you up five short questionnaires over the course of the next year to check in on your experience, and invite you to participate in 2 different focus groups with your fellow participants over the course of the next year. If you would like to agree and join this study, you may read through the consent form and sign it and bring it with you to our first interview.

Thank you for considering participating,

Jennifer Rainey

Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to document, describe, and explore the experiences of women as they take on new administrative roles in higher education. If you agree to participate, you may be asked to participate in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. These interviews will be conducted up to two times per participant and take approximately one - two hours per interview. Interviews will be conducted face-to-face in a location of your choosing. Interviews may also be done by phone or Skype if the participant prefers. All interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. You will also be asked to respond to up five different questionnaires about your experience via email over the course of the academic year (approximately 30 minutes to an hour), and invited to participate in two different focus groups (approximately 2 hours each). You will also be asked to allow the investigators use of data, including any reflections on the interviews or prompts.

RISKS

The only foreseeable potential risk is loss of confidentiality, which the research team will work to prevent by using pseudonyms for all identifiable information and securely storing all data in the co- investigator's locked office.

BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits for taking part in the study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. All project materials will be made confidential through the use of pseudonyms. They will not be personally identifiable. Interviews will be conducted in private and involve only the investigators and the participant. You will be asked to communicate a convenient time and place for the interview. If you choose to

conduct your interview(s) through Skype, you may review Skype's website for information about their privacy statement. <https://privacy.microsoft.com/en-US/privacystatement/>. Audio recordings will be accessible only by the research team, and no personally identifiable information other than your name will be collected. Confidentiality of the data obtained will be assured through the use of precautions such as password protecting audio files and transcripts. While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmission. You may ask for all or certain parts of interviews to not be audio recorded and you have the right to discontinue your involvement in the study for any reason at any point in time. You may also ask for any particular piece of data to not be used as a part of the study. We will also use a pseudonym for individual participants and locations. We will never report anything in a way that directly reveals personal information. Furthermore, key identifying markers for participants and locations will be kept out of the report. Only the research team will have access to this information. Files including this information will be password protected. Any notes or other materials including this information will be kept in a locked cabinet/drawer in the office of the co- investigator. Audio recordings will be stored in the principal investigator's computer, in her office, on the George Mason University Fairfax campus, as well as the Co-Investigator's computer, in her office, on the Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale campus. The offices are locked at all times. Data will be stored for 5 years after the study ends. After 5 years, data will be deleted from the computer(s) on which they are stored. Any other data will be shredded.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Dr. Meagan Call-Cummings and Jennifer Rainey, College of Education and Human Development, Graduate School of Education at George Mason University. Dr. Call-Cummings may be reached at 703-993-1718 for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board office at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

_____ I agree to audio taping.

_____ I do not agree to audio taping.

Pseudonym selected: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

ASSOCIATE DEAN INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Lead off question: Tell me why you decided to participate in this project.

Possible follow up questions:

1. Why did you apply for the position of associate dean?
2. What about your experience do you think made you a good fit for this position?
3. Tell me about your interview for this position.
4. What is something that excites you about your new position?
5. What is something that makes you nervous or apprehensive about your new position?
6. Can you give a specific example of how you have prepared for this position?
7. Can you give a specific example of how you think the institution has prepared you for this position?
8. In what ways do you feel unprepared for this position?
9. Tell me about an experience in these first weeks of your new position that you felt you handled well.
10. Tell me about an experience in these first few weeks of your new position that you feel you could have handled better.
11. How do you anticipate your relationship with your colleagues will change now that you are an administrator?
12. Tell me about something that is important to you that you are hoping to learn in your new position. Why?
13. Tell me about something that is important to you that you are hoping to change in your new role. Why?

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BIOGRAPHY

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