Women in Leadership Positions in Higher Education: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies for Success

Maria Bowen
University of New Hampshire, mlb1005@usnh.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.unh.edu/ms_leadership

Part of the Educational Leadership Commons, and the Leadership Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholars.unh.edu/ms_leadership/125

This Capstone is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Professional Studies Online at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in M.S. in Leadership by an authorized administrator of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact Scholarly.Communication@unh.edu.
Women in Leadership Positions in Higher Education: Challenges, Opportunities and Strategies for Success
Maria Bowen
University of New Hampshire
LD 850
Dr. Kathy DesRoches
March 10, 2024
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 3

Literature Review............................................................................................................................ 6
  Challenges & Barriers Women Face in Higher Education.......................................................... 7
  Acquiring Secondary Education & Career Advancement ......................................................... 8
  Leadership Retention and Hiring Practices .............................................................................. 14
  Sexism & Sexual Harassment in the Workplace ....................................................................... 16
  Global Issue: Women Underrepresented in Higher Education Leadership ........................... 23
  Achieving Gender Equality in Higher Education ................................................................... 24
  Women-Focused Leadership Programs .................................................................................. 25
  Mentorship ............................................................................................................................... 27
  Personality, Mindfulness, and Resilience in Women ............................................................... 31
  Changes in the Cultural Environment in Higher Education .................................................... 34

Research Methodology ................................................................................................................. 36

Findings......................................................................................................................................... 37
  Work – Personal Conflicts ........................................................................................................ 39
  Mentorships and Sponsorships ............................................................................................... 40
  Work Distribution .................................................................................................................... 41
  Sexual Harassment .................................................................................................................. 42
  Leadership Programs and Training ......................................................................................... 43

Discussion & Recommendations .................................................................................................. 44

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... 45

Appendix A ................................................................................................................................... 55

Appendix B ................................................................................................................................... 58
Abstract
This research project is aimed to identify the challenges and barriers women face in higher education while striving to obtain leadership positions and provide possible solutions to resolve the gender gaps found in higher education’s leadership. A literature review was conducted, which informed questions that were asked in an interview setting. Interviews were conducted with leaders that identify as women in higher education and sought to provide personalized accounts of the researched trends. Ultimately, despite higher education being perceived as a progressive industry and having legislature in place to combat gender disparities, leadership positions are not reflective of gender distribution in higher education. In fact, women are faced with significant hinderances to their leadership paths because of sexual harassment, hiring practices, and work-personal conflicts; not for a lack of skills or experience.

Keywords: women, higher education, sexual harassment, family needs, leadership
Women in Leadership Positions in Higher Education: Challenges, Opportunities and Strategies for Success

The United States has built a reputation for being a world leader in many ways, including higher education institutions. Higher education provides students an opportunity to narrow their focus and field of study at the next level beyond secondary education (Higher Ed, n.d.). Options for schooling are expansive within the United States’ geographical footprint with choices between vocational and technical schools, community colleges, and universities (Higher Ed, n.d.). The United States has become a popular destination for students across the globe, as explained: “Many international students are drawn to U.S. schools for their high academic standards and training they provide, which can be advantageous for employment opportunities anywhere in the world” (Durrani, 2021). A leading factor for international and domestic students is to pursue their education further in hopes of landing employment opportunities that provide a secure and prosperous job. For some, advanced degrees may also support their ability to advance into leadership roles at their organization. Education is particularly powerful for women, both for them individually and their countries (Schrader-King, n.d.). Schrader-King (n.d.) states, “A recent World Bank study estimates that the limited educational opportunities for girls, and barriers to completing 12 years of education, cost countries between US$15 trillion and $30 trillion in lost lifetime productivity and earnings. All these factors combined can help lift households, communities, and countries out of poverty”. Post-secondary education for women does have an even more significant impact and uplifting them towards these accomplishments should be celebrated. For women, the lifetime value of achieving a bachelor’s degree in comparison to a high school diploma is $180,000, a graduate degree is $310,000 (Social Security Administration, n.d.). However, even in highly developed countries, women that do have access to education still face challenges in their occupational fields.
In the United States, women are earning more advanced post-secondary degrees than their men counterparts, with more than 40% of women in the workforce having college degrees (Cañas et al, 2019). Women also make up 58.2% of the United States workforce (Cañas et al, 2019). Despite women obtaining advanced degrees and actively contributing to the workforce, they are not equally represented in leadership roles within forward thinking industries such as higher education. As Azizi et al. (2022) explains, “Women were overall less likely to be in a senior leadership role than men” (p. 705). Despite interest in advancing their careers, researchers attribute the unique barriers that women face as explanations for their absence in leadership roles (Cañas et al, 2019). Some factors such as work environments, work-personal conflicts, and invisible rules demonstrate “... that women face more external than internal hurdles that prevent them from advancing within their careers” (Cañas et al, 2019, p.6). These barriers negatively impact women’s career progression and are inhibiting equitable gender representation in higher education leadership. As the issue extends beyond women’s interest and capabilities, an explanation for the gap may be explained by another root cause, “This suggests that while there are many qualified women to progress into leadership positions, the larger issue is systemic” (Cañas et al, 2019, p.6). Taking into consideration many of the issues or barriers women face are systematic, the public can infer that the solutions to address these issues or barriers would also need to be address systematically.

To better understand this gender disparity phenomenon in higher education leadership, I conducted research that examined the barriers and proposed solutions for alleviating the gender gap. The goal in my research was to identify the internal and external factors that stunt women in higher education from advancing into leadership roles. I also sought to offer solutions in
response to the barriers uncovered in my research and analyzing the attempts made to diminish gender gaps in leadership.

**Literature Review**

In the modern era, education as a field has become feminized, a term used to explain that it is a women-dominated field (Anderson, 2021). However, despite women representing a substantial amount of the educational workforce, that is not being reflected in leadership positions within higher education. As presented by Gomez (2020), “The overall percentage of women leading colleges and universities in the United States remains disproportionately low at 26%” (p.85). If institutions factor in the number of women in this occupational field and are striving for diversity in the workplace, leadership roles within higher educational institutions would reflect an increase in women in those roles (Anderson, 2021). Education has been viewed as a feminized field and as such, its value is viewed differently than occupational fields that have a high concentration of men. It is undervalued and when work is undervalued, it shows how society views and invests in that work. As explained by Anderson (2021), “So that helps to explain why we have, for example, still issues around teachers being substantively underpaid, why buildings are in disrepair, and why we say we value education, but we consistently underfund it…” (p.1). Women educators are not viewed as valuable as the concept of achieving academic excellence.

Higher education does not proportionately reflect the number of women that are in the workforce, “While 58.2% of the United States workforce are women, they are still unequally represented in most fields. In 2016, more than 40% of women in the labor force obtained college degrees. As of 2017, 30% of university presidents in the United States were women” (Cañas et
The education field is predominantly women both as students, administrators, and educators, another example that fields that are predominantly women are undervalued.

When considering the role of a leader, it is the individual that has the most authority in a specific setting and uses their knowledge, authority, and power to influence others they oversee (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). Often in higher education, this refers to department heads, divisions, working groups, or even the institution. Even within a few years of large social movements such as the “Me Too” and “Black Lives Matter” movements, that advocated to increase workplace diversity and combat injustices minority groups face, the percentage of women in leadership roles at universities ranges between 30% or lower (Cañas et al., 2019).

Research consistently indicates that women have limited opportunities to participate as leaders in higher education, understanding the challenges for seeking leadership and how to change that is where information is still being gathered. Women face additional barriers that impact their career progression that their men colleagues on average do not need to overcome. Barriers and challenges such as inequality in the workplace, harassment, and family needs can be disruptive to career progression for women.

**Challenges & Barriers Women Face in Higher Education**

In the United States, legislation exists to minimize discrimination based on sex or gender, related to any educational programs or activities that receive funding from the Department of Education. The Department of Education oversaw the creation of Title IX and continues to oversee its enforcement (Eisenmann, 2017). The development of Title IX statues supported women having the opportunity to pursue their academic pursuits without limitations. Developed in 1972, Title IX made it illegal for colleges and universities to prevent women from enrolling in various degree programs that were being offered (Eisenmann, 2017). Even with this government legislation and regulation, gender inequality persists (Peterson, 2011). Women are pursuing
education at higher rates than men and are protected to do so through Title IX legislature (Carey, 2021, Eisemann, 2017). In the workforce, discrimination of any of the protected classes is also prohibited by law (Hentze & Tyus, 2021). However, upholding and protecting people from discrimination is challenging as many of these displays of discrimination are subtle. Title IX focuses on protecting the student from harassment but leads to discontinuity for professionals within higher education.

**Acquiring Secondary Education & Career Advancement**

Gender disparity in leadership is not a result of women being unable to acquire the education related to their field of interest. In fact, women have outnumbered men in university enrollments and degree completion rates for decades (Carey, 2021; Longman & Lafreniere, 2012). Women are reflected in these trends as receiving more education compared to their male counterparts, but when understanding the historical context, it is for a stark reality (Carey, 2021).

Women surged into college because they were able to, but also because many had to. There are still some good-paying jobs available to men without college credentials. There are relatively few for such women. And despite the considerable cost in time and money of earning a degree, many female-dominated jobs don’t pay well (Carey, 2021, p.1).

In fact, according to Judson, Ross, and Glassmeyer (2019), women in the United States are earning more than half of the earned bachelor’s degrees and represent approximately 50% of faculty but are not represented in higher education leadership roles. In addition to entering fields that are underpaid, it is likely that within their occupational fields women will not advance at the rates of their counterparts, women-men wage gap remains at large (Carey, 2021). This can be explained as,

These disparities play pivotal roles in tenure and promotion decisions wherein research and leadership roles are most valued. There is considerable evidence suggesting that
implicit biases underpin some of these faculty roles differences, particularly in male-dominat
ated disciplines, such as engineering (Judson, Ross, & Glassmeyer, 2019, p. 1025).

As identified by Tessens et al (2011), “It has been demonstrated that career mobility, experience outside academia, the process of appointment, and gender stereotyping may slow down career progression for female academics” (p. 655). The extension of fields outside the realm of academics still interacts with gendering within educational fields. If gender disparity exists within educational institutions, it will likely filter into other industries as so many industries require post-secondary education to advance within them.

This is further explained when dominant groups appear in the workforce, groups that develop through networking and hierarchical power (Tessens et al, 2011). These dominant groups’ control of resources, information, facilities, and opportunities can hinder the ability for women to be involved in these networks. Without inclusion to the dominant groups, women receive a lack of professional support and opportunities for the tools needed to succeed (Tessens et al, 2011). In higher education, this may appear as opportunities for upward mobility, access to grants or additional funds, and expansive professional networks. O’Connor (2019) expands on how dominant groups maintain influence by having direct influence on work-related hierarchies through the concept of inbreeding;” ‘Inbreeding’ reflects an unofficial and unwritten rule that each new member should be selected from the members of the internal dominant group” (p. 12). The dominant group will maintain the highest level of power and influence by continuing a cycle that will benefit them. Ultimately, keeping with the status quo. ‘Inbreeding’ within higher educational institutions controls access to desirable positions and serves as a continuation of men having an advantage in rising to new levels as more men are currently in leadership positions (O’Connor, 2019).
Work Distribution & Personal Conflicts

Another complication women face is the work distribution amongst men and women. The work women perform appears to derail focused work-related achievements. In higher education, women are expected to take on various additional roles compared to their male counterparts. Women are known to take on additional administrative tasks and supporting roles like dedicating more hours to mentor students (Judson, Ross, & Glassmeyer, 2019; Tessens et al., 2011). According to Tessens et al (2011), “Men were able to focus on their primary leadership roles - for academics focus on their leadership” (p. 662). Whereas women are shown to be impacted by personal factors more than men are (Cañas et al., 2019). Women take on these additional roles likely due to systematic, societal, and personal pressures.

Women tend to experience more work-personal conflicts, often contributing to the demands expected of women to support their families. Pyke (2013) explained, “As commonly identified, a major barrier to women’s progression in academe is about discontinuous and interrupted career paths that do not conform to the traditional male model of academic career progression” (p.448). A four-year study conducted by the University of Colorado found, “The results from this determined that women leaders in managerial positions experienced more work-family conflict and health risks as compared to men in the same positions” (Cañas et al., 2019, p.9). This was heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic as described by “Rising care demands created by COVID-19—specifically those brought on by remote working, a lack of childcare, and the virus’ particular risk to aging populations—are disproportionately incurred by women and impede their ability to work” (Oleschuk, 2020, p. 503)

Even when women are active contributors to the workforce by maintaining employment, they are still heavily relied on as the predominant providers for family members (Sharma,
Predominant providers for families also extend beyond having children, it can include elderly or ill relatives. This demonstrates that even women who choose not to experience motherhood still have familial obligations (Sharma, Chakrabarti, & Grover, 2016). This infers that even women that want to focus on their career may be sidetracked by familial obligations. When faced with the difficulties maintaining work-life balance, those serving in provider roles may face conflict between the demands of the various roles they play, as explained by Sharma, Chakrabarti, and Grover (2016), “Role-strain occurs when one is unable to meet the expectations and obligations of multiple roles. Role-overload sets in when these competing demands overwhelm the person’s ability to carry out his/her role” (p. 1).

Many women experience role-strain or role-overload while working and caring for their families (Sharma, Chakrabarti, & Grover, 2016). Women that choose to have families have to consider a plethora of professional and personal conflicts that may occur. As described by Barton et al., 2019),

The decision to grow one’s family as a woman in academia brings with it a number of logistical and conceptual challenges, from timing parental leave and managing new financial obligations to wrestling with anxieties over scholarly productivity, degree completion or promotion, becoming a parent, and the overall balancing of personal goals with professional ones (p.1).

Men do not experience this same frequency of disruptions to their career progression.

Women experiencing these various demands may endure role-overload or by extension their families may be negatively impacted. Many families, when faced with role-overload, may choose to have the breadwinner become the sole earner for a household pushing the provider to focus on the family (Sharma, Chakrabarti, & Grover, 2016). Often this creates a pause in this
individual’s career projection, women are typically the ones to take this step away because they may be earning less or already leading the care. This harbors additional challenges for women because “Women appear to experience greater interference and limitations in their work and social life because of their role as caregivers. They are generally believed to experience greater role-strain due to the more intense care they provide” (Sharma, Chakrabarti, & Grover, 2016, p.1). Taking care of their family, women may choose to not return to the workplace or choose to maintain a position that allows for more flexibility to accommodate the time constraints of being a care provider (Sharma, Chakrabarti, & Grover, 2016). Employers that recognize the needs of families and their employees can offer additional assistance that would minimize the impacts on women’s career advancements. Role-strain and role-overload can be addressed to not only benefit families but also the caretaker, usually women. A way employers can mitigate role-strain is through employee assistance programs and having these programs has shown increased employee loyalty. As described in an article related to workplaces that support women, “They all offer meaningful employee assistance programs (EAPs) with a lot of solutions that can help workers arrange care, or even subsidized backup care—not only for children, but also for elders, both in-home and at a center” (Leonhardt, 2022, p. 1). Higher education institutional leaders may be missing this link because they are not directly experiencing it to the same extent as their workforce.

A further examination of this terminology was on display during the recent pandemic. The recent COVID-19 pandemic also exacerbated many of the gender disparities in academia, this created a hindrance in academic women’s productivity (Flaherty, 2021; Oleschuk, 2020). Many households relied on women to manage many of the home responsibilities and maintain regular work productivity. While many families were researched (primarily heterosexual, two -
parent households) despite both parents being home women still managed most of the family’s needs. When observing how working hours were affected between men and women it was found that, “Looking at dual earner heterosexual parents, find that mothers with children under 12 have reduced their work hours four to five times more than fathers (by about 5 percent or two hours a week, while fathers work hours generally remained stable)” (Oleschuk, 2020, p. 508). Women are also leaving academic employment at higher rates than men at each career progression stage (Pyke, 2013).

Additionally, while overall men increased their at-home contributions, they largely overestimated how much they contributed (Oleschuk, 2020). With the COVID-19 recency it is unlikely research exists that with certainty knows the lasting impact this work distribution will have on women moving forward. However, predictions have been based on the available information, indicating women will most likely be impacted by disruptions in their workday (Flaherty, 2021; Oleschuk, 2020). Meanwhile, women may not be aware or may underestimate their contributions. “Female faculty (especially female faculty of color) have also been shown to perform more unpaid, emotional labor in universities such as through their disproportionate departmental and institutional service demands and the emotional labor they perform in the service of their students” (Oleschuk, 2020, p. 507). These additional demands create more barriers to women achieving promotions and tenure (for faculty members) as they redirect their focus elsewhere (Oleschuk, 2020). This is also compounded by, “A further complication arises from the fact that women are frequently in female dominated areas of the organization: areas that are perceived as low status and not ones for the identification of future leaders” (O’Connor, 2019, p.11).
Leadership Retention and Hiring Practices

While it is also difficult for women to reach positions of authority, it is also challenging to maintain a level of leadership. Research indicates that retaining women in leadership positions is another challenge and barrier for increasing women representation in leadership positions. Pyke (2013) identifies,

There have been a number of studies that explore the ‘leaky pipeline’, the metaphor for how circumstances collude to cause women to leave academic employment at greater rates than men at each key stage of career progression. This process serves to progressively diminish the potential recruitment pool of women for senior academic appointments (p.44).

However, the leaky pipeline phenomenon better explains the structural dishonesty occurring in higher education. Manongsong and Ghosh (2021), describes the leaky pipeline as “...phenomenon where structural inequalities of sexism and racism, such as bias from recruitment to performance evaluation, as well as a lack of support for work-life balance challenges cause them to abandon their career aspirations” (p.444). The terms described and defined in this section are beneficial in understanding the attitude in how we discuss women's occupational barriers and the phenomenon used to reflect their disconnect to men counterparts.

The unique barriers women face related to hiring practices and retention are affiliated with the challenges they face in their daily roles to seek career advancements. Key indicators that impact the retention of women leaders according to Coetzee & Moosa (2020) are

Barriers to advancement, capabilities of women, acceptance of women as leaders, work-life balance, advancement opportunities and success beliefs. All of these factors were significantly related to retention factors, such as fulfillment of unique needs, growth
opportunities, recognition, and pleasant work conditions, sound relationships and support (p.1).

As Pyke (2013) indicates, many women identified that their experiences with previous leaders have negatively impacted them, deterring them from seeking leadership opportunities. Through past experiences, women have been victims of discrimination, isolated from critical decision-making networks, and been bullied by their leaders (Pyke, 2013). Women may also be discouraged from taking on leadership positions because in academia a promotion may result in losing enjoyable aspects of their roles like conducting their own research (Pyke, 2013). This aspect of leadership is not a unique challenge that women face but Judson, Ross, & Glassmeyer, (2019) identified other aspects that are unique to women,

Four themes inhibiting female leadership roles in academia: lack of equivalent recognition and award when women do take on leadership roles, the daunting time requirements of leadership positions that are especially intimidating when a spouse is not available to take on domestic responsibilities, less active recruitment of women into leadership roles, and women being excluded from social networks that promote mentorship (p. 1029).

In addition to retention challenges, application and hiring processes may compound the issue of women making career advancements. Through hiring processes, organizations attempt to duplicate the qualities and skills that the previous individual in the position held (Williams, 2014). This duplication process is problematic for women’s career advancements because of the disproportionate number of men filling leadership positions compared to women. Additionally, higher education institutions, “...rely on established signals of excellence, such as publishing in specific journals or favoring certain teaching and service activities” (Williams, 2014, p.80). This may be explained by more career disruptions occurring among women (Pyke, 2013). This is
particularly challenging when men have typically published more research than women, increasing their likelihood of appearing in journals or award recipients. Men are able to do this because women have taken on more teaching, advising, and administrative tasks (Judson, Ross, & Glassmeyer, 2019; Ramohai & Holtzhausen, 2022). Moreover, women often impacted by poor timing, situations in which an organization has made changes to promotion policies or women are not meeting certain criteria. Timing accompanied with the demands of workload and work-personal conflicts (Pyke, 2013, p.450). Poor timing extends to when women acquire leadership as referred to as a glass cliff, “There is also evidence that women are more likely than men to be put in leadership positions during periods of crisis when the chance of failure is high: ultimately affecting women’s perceived suitability for such positions” (O’Connor, 2019, p.11). Women are perceived as the quick and temporary fix, as previously explained they tend to take on more responsibilities beyond their role (Judson, Ross, & Glassmeyer, 2019; Pyke, 2013; Ramohai & Holtzhausen, 2022).

**Sexism & Sexual Harassment in the Workplace**

Gender disparity refers to the differences women and men face particularly in their ability to access resources, advancement, and professional statuses (Baker & Osanloo, 2022). In higher education, gender disparity is demonstrated by the differences in which women are represented in leadership positions, their ability to experience career advancements, and access to resources that support their work (O’Connor, 2019). The existence of gender disparities between women and men is undisputed, understanding this gap and how to address it remains an issue in higher education.

Language to specifically interact with this phenomenon does seek to explain its occurrence and many colloquialisms are used to describe these occurrences. Gender disparity between women and men is likely a result of the glass ceiling phenomenon occurring in higher
education (Baker & Osanloo, 2022; Williams, 2014). Higher education, despite its persistence for intellectual advancements, faces challenges that can also be found in other occupational fields. The glass ceiling refers to the seemingly invisible barriers women are faced with that prevent their advancement in their fields and achieving managerial positions (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020).

The glass ceiling addresses language relating to barriers or challenges women may endure when wanting to reach leadership whereas, other language exists to address the struggles women face when they’ve already advanced to higher level management (Baker, & Osanloo, 2022). The glass ceiling is a metaphor used to describe the commonly known barriers and challenges women face that men do not experience such as increased sex discrimination and increase personal-work conflicts (Baker & Osanloo, 2022). Another layer of defining the gender disparity relates to the glass cliff.

This concept explains that if a woman is able to break the glass ceiling, the unique challenges that they face when they have succeeded in attaining a leadership position (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020). While a leadership position may be in place for them, it often can be set up in a way in which they are intended to fail, with little support and facing struggles like sexism (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020). This can be attributed to many women taking on leadership roles during a crisis or interim (Baker & Osanloo, 2022; O’Connor, 2019). Moreover, women that attain these roles are often left without a professional support network because the number of women in leadership is few compared to the mentorship men may face when experiencing the same career high point (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). Barriers that exist in breaking the glass ceiling may evolve when or shift to new challenges when entering into a leadership position.
Challenges that women may face once in leadership roles and how they acquired the position test their merits.

To elaborate on this, women may feel an increasing need to prove their merits and put additional stress on succeeding in their area of expertise but when they do achieve these elevated statuses, it can often feel undeserved. A term used to describe this train of thought is impostor phenomenon (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). This term is used instead of the well-known impostor syndrome because, “Scholars use the term phenomenon rather than syndrome, as Clance and Imes originally coined the term, because this psychological concept is not recognized by psychologists or therapists as a mental disorder” (Manongsong & Ghosh, 202, p. 438). Women, especially women of color, exhibit impostor phenomenon when they are able to succeed based on their internal contributions but instead attribute their success on external factors (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). This term explains why women may feel additional pressure or on edge for not wanting to appear as a fraud that was mistaken for an opportunity (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). This phenomenon is an internal perception women may hold; it does not explain how others may perceive their accomplishments.

A term that addresses external perceptions of women succeeding that has been presented in the research to indicate that only women of certain status are able to succeed is defined as the golden skirt syndrome (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020). The golden skirt syndrome is explained, “Related to the barriers preventing women from advancing beyond a certain level, the golden skirt syndrome refers to a situation in which only a few well-connected women are selected to serve on multiple boards” (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020, p.3). Concerns that women that utilize these advantages in their favor, dismiss the advancement of other women. The golden skirt syndrome places blame on women. Many professionals that possess power, influence, or connections use it
to advance their careers. This is often referred to as using your available assets to progress (Cole, 2019). Naming a trend that is specific to women for the same concept undermines their advancements and further stigmatizes their professional contributions (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020). This term does not capture how organizational structures may push women that have these connections to utilize them. The golden skirt syndrome term is another example of sexist terminology that places blame on women.

The working environment women experience is also critical in their employment retention. In circumstances where women may experience harassment, they likely will not stay long term at their workplace. Women continue to face sexual harassment in the workplace and at higher rates than men. “Some studies find that more than 50% of women employed in academia have experienced or witnessed behaviors that meet the definition of sexual harassment. Higher education is often viewed as a progressive industry, however, to put it in context the industry with the highest reported rates of sexual harassment for women at 71% is the food services industry (Pasternak, 2023). In comparison, other industries such as finance and healthcare, women report rates closer to 26% - 35% (Pasternak, 2023). Yet, employees are highly unlikely to report these experiences through official channels” (Banner et al., 2022, p.1). As Acquadro, Varetto, and Civilotti (2022) identified, “The International Labor Organization (ILO) describes sexual harassment in the workplace as a series of repeated, unsolicited, non-reciprocal, and fully imposed harassments by the perpetrator that can have serious undesirable effects on the person” (p.1). Thirty-eight percent of all women and 14% of men have reported experiencing sexual harassment at work (SHW) (Kearl, Johns, & Raj, 2019). Sexual harassment usually appears as gender harassment, “…this conduct aims to put people down and push them out, not pull them into sexual activity” (Cortina & Areguin, 2021).
An unfortunate reality many women face is having to be prepared for harassment to occur, as described “women seeking advancement in male-dominated academia, with its historic tolerance of such abuses, have increased opportunity for exposure to harassment. Prior research indicates greater risk for workplace sexual harassment in male-dominated professions and environments, including medicine, where advancement opportunity depends on a hierarchical power structure (i.e., advisors and mentors)” (Raja et al, 2020, p. 6). Sexual harassment is likely initiated by those in positions of power, making victims less likely to file formal complaints (Acquadro, Varetto, & Civilotti, 2022). Cortina and Areguin (2021) confer “That is, organizations in which men outnumber women, leaders are mostly men, or jobs and duties are stereotypically associated with men (e.g., construction, finance) tend to have more problems with sexual harassment” (p. 295).

When sexual harassment is present in a work environment, it can negatively impact the individual target and the organization as a whole. For the victims of workplace sexual harassment, the behaviors can cause psychological and psychosomatic symptoms (Acquadro, Varetto, & Civilotti, 2022). Some symptoms are exhibited through the deterioration of relationships, particularly those between other members of the organization. The organization will likely witness more absent employees, poor job performances, and greater turnover rates (Acquadro, Varetto, & Civilotti, 2022). Cortina and Areguin (2021) reiterate, “...that women targeted with sexual harassment were 6.5 times more likely to change their jobs than their nontargeted counterparts” (p.293).

This in turn will contribute to a stressful workplace. As Acquadro, Varetto, and Civilotti (2022) explain, “Organizational culture also suffers, sexual harassment at work creates a stressful environment in which victims experience important effects such as loss of trust, confidence, and
sense of justice toward the organization and its leadership, a reality in which workers ultimately conclude that they count for nothing to the organization” (p.2). The harm of these behaviors extends beyond the individual directly impacted; all members of the organization that observe sexual harassment are impacted. According to research conducted by Acquadro, Varetto, and Civilotti (2022), “Correlation analysis showed that when participants (women and men) witnessed sexual harassment at the workplace, life satisfaction decreased” (p.7). Some researchers have defined this concept as bystander stress, additional stress occurs when sexual harassment has been observed and can predict job and life dissatisfaction, as well as negatively impact mental health (Cortina & Areguin, 2021).

Higher education is susceptible to sexual harassment despite existing regulations such as Title IX; some universities have taken additional steps to address it from various angles. Raja et al. (2020) identifies the approaches some universities have chosen to address employee sexual harassment, “More broadly, institutions of higher education implement a variety of means to foster cultural change to address gender and racial inequalities, such as creating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices and mandating education and training sessions for faculty and staff” (p.1). Institutions have taken more robust approaches to not only intervene when sexual harassment has risen to a level of quid quo pro, sexual attention, and gender-based harassment, but also in addressing the more subtle environmental factors that may influence a level of acceptance for sexual harassment. As explained, “…less visible, practices are also hazardous, such as telling sexist jokes, displaying sexual images, or making comments about women’s competency. Higher education decision-makers face challenges when attempting to create cultural change around these subtler behaviors” (Banner et al., 2022, p.1). This can be particularly challenging as it is more likely sexual harassment occurs in fields where women are
under-represented especially in positions of power (Banner et al., 2022). Based on that, the likelihood of harassment in specific areas of higher education like upper leadership, or predominately men departments (STEM) may create additional challenges. Banner et al (2022) identifies that “Women continue to be less present at the top of academic fields and over-represented in the ranks of contingent faculty” (p.1). This imbalance of power and representation increases an environment that may excuse or not address the subtle aspects of sexual harassment (Acquadro, Varetto, & Civilotti, 2022).

Another component of sexual harassment is how it can impact women differently. The identities that women hold beyond their gender identity can contribute to an increase likelihood of sexual harassment in the workplace or confounding discrimination (Cortina & Areguin, 2021). For example, women of color who experience sexual harassment are also likely experiencing racial/ethnic inequities (Banner et al., 2022). This would create a double-impact on their ability to persevere and work in that environment.

Women that identify in the LGBTQ+ community and present a certain way can be impacted, “LGBTQ+ employees, women who exhibit traits generally thought to be more masculine, and women who endorse egalitarian beliefs are also more likely to experience workplace sexual harassment than their counterparts” (Banner et al., 2022). Age or level of experience is also disadvantageous for women in higher education due to a concept termed “paradox of power” (Banner et al., 2022). Women faculty members while advancing in their career are more likely to be harassed; “...advancement to supervisory positions often places women at greater risk of sexual harassment” (Banner et al., 2022, p.386). This is often due to the belief that the reporting party fears the disruption in their career would have a larger impact on them than the benefit of reporting the negative behaviors associated with harassment (Banner et
In short, when women overcome the barriers to reach a leadership position, they don’t want to jeopardize their position or disrupt their career, even if it is to report harassment. Similarly, women may be less likely to report sexual harassment in fear that it would be more disruptive to their career aspirations and less beneficial for them as the reporter (Banner et al., 2022). As McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone (2017) explain, harassment can negatively impact women’s careers, “As our qualitative data suggest, some women quit work to avoid harassers. Others quit because of dissatisfaction or frustration with their employer’s response” (p. 351). Women are also unlikely to report because “Organizational culture is largely responsible for the silence surrounding workplace sexual harassment. Though it would seem to be in an organization’s interest to challenge sexual harassment, many women believe that their employer would not support them if they were to report an incident” (Spiliopoulou & Witcomb, 2023, p. 1854). Working in an environment with these forms of disruptions and barriers may deter women from advancing to leadership roles or removing themselves from the higher education field.

**Global Issue: Women Underrepresented in Higher Education Leadership**

Despite this issue being well known, research presents and acknowledges that the number of women in positions of power and influence in higher educational institutions are disproportionate to men. This issue is observed around the world. Gender gaps exist outside of the United States and research is being conducted to better understand the persistence of these gaps in higher education and propose solutions to shrink gender disparities. As a global concern, it is beneficial to understand how various efforts to address or understand the issue may be applicable in other settings. However, a challenge in accessing this information can be attributed to language barriers as some research has been conducted in non-English speaking countries. Amongst available research in English, information demonstrates a similar pattern.
Australia faces a similar problem as the United States, even with the existence of the Equal Employment Opportunity legislation, women are faced with a pay gap in universities and are underrepresented in senior management (Tessens et al, 2011). For countries that acknowledge gender disparity and are seeking solutions to address the issue, there are countries that aren’t informed what data exists to understand the depths of the gender gap. South African research acknowledges that a significant challenge that they face is that the Department of Higher Education and Training will not provide statistics of the problem (Coetzee & Moosa, 2020). Gaps within the global community exist in how gender disparities are viewed in importance and urgency in addressing higher education. The response differs between nations on how to intervene, if they are intending to at all. In better understanding the dilemma the United States is faced with, comparable studies exist in other countries. As the issue exists internationally, proposed solutions do as well.

**Achieving Gender Equality in Higher Education**

The most notable strategy that has extended beyond the legislature has been developing supportive measures for women. An example of a support strategy that universities have used are programs intended for women participants to gain skills to develop professional advancement. A proposed program demonstrated in Australia has described a program featuring networking opportunities and developing skills that will support leadership endeavors (Tessens et al., 2011). As described, “Women only programs are one strategy used by Australian higher education institutions over the last two decades to address gender equity concerns and are currently experiencing a revival in popularity” (Tessens et al, 2011, p. 654). In theory, this is a supportive measure to help women, but it also roots women as the problem when the issue is beyond the control of women.
Women-Focused Leadership Programs

Other countries have also made similar attempts in creating women-focused programs, signifying that gender disparities are not confined to a single region of the globe or specific institutions. European and American universities were finding that despite increasing women's representation in employee positions in their higher educational institutions, leadership positions continued to have a disproportionate number of men (O’Connor, 2019). Ghouralal (2019) states “… 57% of all college students are women, but on the other hand of that, only 26% are full professors, and at the time of her study, only 23% of presidents were women” (p.1). A further complication to disproportionate leadership was also that women were identified as achieving higher academic degrees (O’Connor, 2019). European and American researchers conducted their own research to confront why women are professionally advancing at slower rates and promoted less often than their male counterparts considering their influx in non-leadership positions and accomplishments (O’Connor, 2019).

Two programs of significance were developed, a European program, Scientific Women's Academic Network (SWAN) and an American program, ADVANCE; both following similar intentions as discussed in (Tessens et al, 2011; O’Connor, 2019). The SWAN program focused on rewarding and recognizing universities that had fostered more gender equality practices and policies (O’Connor, 2019). While this incentivized universities to incorporate these procedures, it did little change the make-up consisted in leadership roles. The American program, ADVANCE, was structured differently to enforce leadership as a key component in organizational change (O’Connor, 2019).

Change management can serve as the catalyst in shifting the perception and continuation of gender disparity in higher education. ADVANCE signified that interventions like unconscious bias training and mentoring can help universities close the gap. In order to educate the
organization at large, bias training can be incorporated in a few ways. Those in leadership positions that have the most influence on the organization can make the commitment to changing policies, training requirements, and having accountability (O’Connor, 2019). Bias training would bring awareness to the issue of gender-based discrimination and bias, but it may not change the behaviors displayed because of the bias. Expanding on policies related to discrimination like the incorporation of Title IX, could have a larger impact on that shift. Organizational hiring practices would create a focus on increasing gender diversity in all positions within the university. Bias training may minimize hiring panels from consistently favoring men candidates, “…found that in a US research intensive university, in an experimental study, both male and female applicants when presented with identical CVs, favored appointing the male candidate and at a higher salary than the identical female candidate” (O’Connor, 2019). This stigma will continue to persist without clear accountability to shift this mentality. Hiring panel chairs should challenge these gender-biased perspectives in order for universities to increase gender diversity (O’Connor, 2019). Moreover, hiring panels should evenly value and assess qualitative and quantitative measures when considering promotions (Galán-Muros, Bouckaert, & Roser, 2023).

Incorporating training related to diversity can be challenging as it is often in direct conflict with those in the dominant group. When dominant groups are in charge, they are unlikely to draw attention to matters that to their knowledge are not impacting them or the people around them (Allen, 2021). In a paradoxical manner, dominant groups would also be forced to reevaluate their own legitimacy in maintaining their leadership roles (Allen, 2021; O’Connor, 2019). The challenge is diversity concerns are impacting organizations as described by O’Connor (2019),
For many of those in formal leadership positions in higher education institutions (predominantly white, male, middle class, middle aged) gender inequality is not a really important issue. Some have begun to register the ripples coming from campaigns such as “Me Too” and increasing pressure from the European Union (2012) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2012) as regards the impact of a lack of diversity at senior levels in HEIs on research and innovation” (p.29).

An expansion to providing training to all members of an organization is supporting individuals through informal knowledge exchanges, like mentoring.

Mentorship

Mentorship has also been a popularized solution for increasing women in leadership positions. Manongsong & Ghosh (2021) define mentoring as, “... an interpersonal relationship where more experienced organizational members provide psychosocial (e.g., affirmation, counseling, friendship) and career support (e.g., sponsorship, advocacy, coaching) to their junior colleagues” (p.439). The key dilemma with it is finding the right mentor to truly add value and have substantial enough expertise to support women effectively (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). This is particularly challenging when few women are leaders, making it difficult for them to offer mentoring to those seeking to advance in their careers (Pyke, 2013). Most mentors seek to mentor individuals that remind them of themselves, while leaders of various identities can be mentors to women it is not as common (Kurtz-Costes, Andrews-Helmke, & Ülkü-Steiner, 2006). Mentor – mentee relationships are often formulated by, “People look to individuals they perceive as similar to themselves in terms of personality characteristics, background, race and sex as models to emulate; thus, women role models would demonstrate and legitimate the professional role for women students” (Kurtz-Costes, Andrews-Helmke, & Ülkü-Steiner, 2006, p. 139).

Cañas et al. (2019), explains this barrier, “Without access to representative mentorship, women
in higher education administration are often left to navigate through the academic hierarchy on their own” (p.9). Aside from this challenge, mentorship has adaptability potential.

A mentoring network can be created that expands beyond a single department or even institution, giving mentees a support system despite limited eligible mentors in their area. Institutional leadership can help facilitate or incorporate mentorship into diversity initiatives (Baker & Osanloo, 2022). Manongsong & Ghosh (2021) explain having a network for mentorship,

... was noted to be beneficial for women and women of color, especially if they lacked mentoring opportunities within their universities, as different mentors/developers from multiple domains (e.g., university, professional association, community, family) could fulfill different roles, such as sponsor or confidant or role model (p.455).

This mentor network can be expansive and without institutional bounds, so even if women feel isolated or have little sponsorship in their own university, they can have their skills be validated.

In addition, creating a professional network and receiving validation in a mentorship relationship can support career advancement. Career advancement may appear as addressing the limitations women experience like, impostor phenomenon (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). Mentors can confront internal impostor perceptions by providing positive affirmations to individuals, identify ways to foster advocacy techniques, and navigate intersecting identities (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021).

In reference to identifying a compatible mentor, mentorships that diverge from the stereotypical woman leader to a younger professional woman have been found to have unique advantages to them. Namely, the knowledge and skills that are often acquired from working in diverse organizations. For example, mentors with diversified identities tend to develop more
empathy and cultural intelligence (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). They are also able to share and
understand similar struggles. Through their time-consuming and in-depth relationships between
mentor and mentee, both parties can benefit from better understanding the privileges, challenges,
and insights that correspond with the personal identities they hold (Manongsong & Ghosh,
2021). While not all colleagues share these factors they can show career support through other
means. An elevated mentor role for an individual that holds a significant amount of power is a
sponsor (Gebel, 2023; Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021).

Manongsong & Ghosh (2021) describe sponsors as those, “who has the power and
authority to influence others’ perspectives can legitimize the image of a minoritized woman as a
high-potential leader through vouching for her ability and competence to important others in
their university, field or discipline (i.e., granting by the sponsor can result in collective
endorsement of leader identity by others)” (p.459). The role a sponsor can play in a workplace
can make or break one's upward mobility. Sponsors hold separate influence than mentors on
women’s careers by championing that woman’s contributions to their workplace and using their
influence to share that information with significant colleagues (Gebel, 2023; Manongsong &
Ghosh, 2021). Sponsors use their reputation and influence to help advance a colleague’s career
(Gebel, 2023). Sponsors are able to do this by, “Sponsors can divert opportunities away from
minoritized women or discourage others from “taking a chance” on them because of their
stereotypes-based biases” (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021, p. 461). Women that have colleagues
that act as sponsors can legitimize women of color and influence others to recognize their talents
and see past biased views (Gebel, 2023; Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). This diverges from the
traditional role of a mentor because mentorship focuses more on developing skills or role
modeling (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). These roles are demonstrated through university presidents that identify as women and what they partially attribute to their success.

Available research sought to better understand what women identifying university presidents attributed to their success and through interviewing eight of them stated mentorship was valuable. Mentors occurred throughout the stages of one’s career path and with someone that held a higher position in the university (Hill & Wheat, 2017; Reis & Grady, 2020). The key distinction that made someone a mentor was,

According to the participants, the mentor relationship emerged informally or as a collegial connection. However, key to the relationship dynamic was the “ask,” or the point where the mentor directed the participant to take action. The “ask” was more than a simple request or suggestion, it was a stronger effort on the part of the mentor to capitalize an opportunity for a participant (Reis & Grady, 2020, p. 35).

An extension of this key mentoring factor was also the social network or capital that these individuals gained through their mentors (Reis & Grady, 2020). While women mentors were limited, men mentors largely contributed to career support. It is likely as women continue to hold and obtain leadership positions at universities more women mentors will become available for the next generation of professionals. In the meantime, many women, lacking mentoring experiences especially by other women may need to take the initiative themselves to seek and obtain non-traditional mentors through personal relationships outside of work (Hill & Wheat, 2017).

It is indisputable that women seeking to advance their careers have to overcome the barriers and challenges in their path to leadership roles. Recently and in the coming years, the previous generation of university presidents will be stepping down from their roles, opening the
door for new leaders to engage in practices that can be transformative for minority populations (Amey, 2006). While career advancement is largely influenced by an individual’s merit, it is also helpful to acquire leadership skills along the way. Mentors, social capital, leadership programs, and support can all contribute to success. Evidence is still insufficient at providing the necessary formula to ensure leadership positions are acquired. However, while external influences like sponsors and mentors is beneficial, women need to demonstrate their abilities and use their personal characteristics to earn the role. Personality is one factor that could influence their ability to obtain a leadership role.

**Personality, Mindfulness, and Resilience in Women**

Personality identifies ways in which people behave, feel, and think (Psychology Today, n.d.). Several studies have been conducted to better understand personalities that are affiliated with leaders or how personalities interact in a workplace. A few significant studies have attempted to categorize personality types based on certain characteristics. A widely known psychological theory on personality identifies that personality traits can be divided into five categories, commonly referred to as the Big-5. Within these categories women in leadership positions often identify with the following, “Neuroticism and agreeableness are more frequently associated with women. Agreeableness encompasses characteristics like compassion, respectfulness, and trust; while neuroticism refers to anxiety and depression tendencies (Psychology Today, n.d.). Similarly, within a US sample, women were more likely to experience neuroticism, agreeableness and extraversion” (Surtee, Mayer, & Visser 2016, p.2). Women have demonstrated they are able to cope better to chronic stress than men (Goldbaum, 2013). Women that exhibit certain personality traits may have better skills to persevere and cope with stressors, making them prepared for leadership roles.
A proven method shown to help cope with stressors is mindfulness. Mindfulness has been shown to improve leaders’ ability to address situations, including adverse situations, in a thoughtful manner; and coping with the initial emotional responses that come when faced with severe stressors (Pillay, 2020). Components of these actions affiliated with mindfulness provide direct influence on resiliency. As explained, “Mindfulness refers to the ability to actively regulate one’s attention towards the present, in a transparent and accepting manner” (Pillay, 2020, p.3). Another definition of mindfulness “… is defined as a product of spiritual practice, which manifests in non-judgmental acceptance, curiosity, and enthusiasm for life” (Surtee, Mayer, & Visser, 2016, p.2). When leaders are able to accept the changes or struggles, they and their team face, they have a positive effect on the situation (Pillay, 2020). In addition to developing mindfulness practices, personality can contribute to a leader's ability to engage in a thoughtful way.

Individual characteristics can contribute to women’s abilities to persevere through the identified leadership barriers. Key contributing factors that have been identified to motivate women to be persistent through the challenges they are faced with in higher education’s organizational hierarchy are their personality traits, mindfulness practices, and their ability to be resilient. Personality and mindfulness appear to have a positive correlation to a woman’s resiliency. Resiliency is defined as, “resilience consists of a process of effectively coping with and adapting to adverse circumstances, threat, loss and stressful situations” (Pillay, 2020, p. 3). As women continue to face the gender disparity in higher education particularly in leadership roles, women are challenging an environment that is not ideal in helping them succeed (Pillay, 2020). The ability for women to be more resilient can be scientifically explained (Goldbaum, 2013). As described by researchers the enzyme, aromatase which produces estradiol (an estrogen
hormone) explains why women are more resilient to the effects of stress (Goldbaum, 2013). In order to continue to propel forward in their career goals, it is crucial for women to have skills affiliated with adaptability, challenging adversity, possessing knowledge of the challenges they face, and utilizing their natural ability to handle stress (Goldbaum, 2013; Pillay, 2020). Basically, women are better prepared with skills or qualities needed for resiliency.

A recent global example that tested organizations and particularly leaders was the COVID-19 pandemic. One case study conducted by Ramohai and Holtzhausen (2022) observed how women departmental heads coped with the necessary adaptations forced upon higher education to prioritize wellness and safety. Leaders typically burden the magnitude of a crisis, so their followers or subordinates aren’t overly impacted (Ramohai & Holtzhausen, 2022). However, when a crisis such as a pandemic is unprecedented it strains a leader’s ability to hide the challenges the organization faces. This made leaders and other organizational members endure a significant amount of stress. There was chronic stress on everyone to stay safe and healthy. Fortunately, women have higher aromatase levels in their prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain that manages emotional responses and behavior (Goldbaum, 2013).

However, even with this advantage many women leaders during this time were continuing to work while also attending to their family’s needs simultaneously. As described, thus, throughout this pandemic the higher education environment, leaders, staff, and students were exposed to psychological and physical pressures which required resilience and coping strategies to deliver astute management and leadership. The findings of this research confirmed that the duties of all women academic leaders astronomically increased to include additional tasks related to online teaching and learning management (Ramohai & Holtzhausen, 2022, p.94).
To adapt to these challenges the observed academic women department heads had to make adjustments to their leadership styles to accommodate the needs of their teams and the demands they were under. Ramohai & Hotlzhausen (2022), labeled their research heads of departments (HOD) and higher education institution (HEI). Ramohai & Holtzhausen (2022) claimed,

Techniques such as ‘prioritizing written tasks’, conducting ‘strategic planning meetings’ or diffusing a conflict management situation ‘by acting as a safety net for staff’. Another indicated that the success of problem-solving is related to a leader’s ‘work ethics’ which ‘determines how you are going to cope, perceive stress and solve problems’ related to the online work environment (p. 96).

Leaders that were unable to cope with the additional stressors brought on by the pandemic became burnt out and resigned from higher education (Ramohai & Holtzhausen, 2022). A contributing factor was likely the additional administrative work and family needs women were tasked with managing during remote work (Surtee, Mayer, & Visser, 2016; Ramohai & Holtzhausen, 2022).

**Changes in the Cultural Environment in Higher Education**

Additional role-strain can be compounded by unhealthy work environments. A challenge that exists for women in higher education is the culture that has been cultivated in terms of harassing behaviors and reporting those behaviors. Addressing and shifting these experiences for women would be of significant benefit in retaining and recruiting women employees. Implementing preventative trainings on sexual harassment and having supervisors openly support a healthy reporting culture has shown to be beneficial for changing behaviors and attitudes towards sexual harassment, including the subtle forms (Banner et al., 2022). When training extends to discussing the role of an active bystander, it also supports a culture in which the survivor or recipient of negative behaviors does not possess sole responsibility for reporting
(Banner et al., 2022). Shifting to a shared responsibility in the workplace serves as an accountability method between colleagues to report, intervene, and support appropriate interactions. Men can positively contribute to reducing harassment and increasing reporting, as they are often respondents to sexual harassment or can be negatively impacted themselves (Banner et al., 2022).

By extension, when reports are made and referred to the correct channels due process and accountability are necessary to address the concerns. For example, the scope of how a university defines sexual harassment is important in holding someone accountable if they made a violation in those policies. Whether or not the responding party is formally held responsible, it may not change how the reporting party feels about the reported behavior. This is where the university can informally resolve issues, offer supportive measures, and ensure these processes addressing these concerns are procedurally sound.

Higher education institutions may also seek to change their workplace culture to match other higher education institutions’ more inclusive trends. This can help to increase women’s representation in leadership roles, but it does not guarantee that women in these roles will be respected or valued for their newly acquired authority and oversight. As higher education institutions continue to navigate women in these higher positions, it is critical these changes aren’t simply a gesture of tokenism. At their core higher education institutions are a cluster of business organizations, each seeking to outsmart and outperform their competitors (Kasperkevic, 2014). As each institution seeks to gain an advantage over their competitors, they will want to make their institution more desirable to study and work at (Kasperkevic, 2014). Current trends are seeking more diversity in the work and education environments. Higher education encompasses both of these environments. If top ranked institutions are able to diversify their
student body and employees, it is likely more institutions will eventually follow their lead. An observation that demonstrates universities diversifying is making note of the identities that university presidents hold.

University presidents hold substantial influence on a university’s operations. As explained by Reis & Grady (2020), “The university presidency is the highest administrative position in U.S. postsecondary organizations” (p. 31). To be considered for a university presidency, it is typical for candidates to begin as assistant professor and work their way up through academia by moving into administration (Reis & Grady, 2020). During the 2023 year, the United States made history by significantly increasing women and people of color in university president positions (Nietzel, 2023). In fact, “Eleven of the top 20 colleges in America, as ranked by Forbes, will be led by a woman or person of color by next fall, marking a milestone in the demographics of the presidencies at the nation’s most highly esteemed institutions” (Nietzel, 2023, p.1). Additionally, six of the 8 ivy league schools have women presidents (Nietzel, 2023). Taking these numbers into account it appears these changes do combat gender disparities; however, it does not explain why if women are in provost positions at comparable rates to men why they would still be underrepresented in presidency positions (Tehan, 2023).

The gap between percentage of women as provosts and percentage of women as presidents is indicative of a problem in the selection process for presidents, said Andrea Silbert, Eos president. If you have women as 50% of provosts, I would expect to see women as 50% of presidents. Women are in the applicant pool, said Silbert. We should already be there (Tehan, 2023, p. 1)

**Research Methodology**

To further explain the themes identified in my literature review I conducted my own research. The primary methods for this research were a literature review and interviews,
collecting quantitative and qualitative information. My research sought to understand why women are not represented more in leadership roles in higher education, what factors influence the gender disparity, and based on available information, my recommendations for alleviating the gender gap in higher education’s leadership positions.

I conducted interviews with five women working and having worked in higher education to understand what factors influenced their ability to achieve leadership positions and what barriers they had to overcome to acquire their positions. I invited these women to participate in my study through my academic and professional networks. All interviewees participated on a volunteer basis and no identifying information was collected, allowing participants to remain anonymous.

Findings

As of February 28, 2024, five women were interviewed. All interviewees have experience working in higher education. To agree to being interviewed and to protect their privacy research participants are being protected by remaining anonymous and are referred to with pseudonyms. They are only being referred to as leaders, interviewees, or by a their respective pseudonyms. This was intentionally done to provide participants with the ability to respond to interview questions honestly and without the need to filter their responses. Four of the 5 are actively employed at a higher education institution. Each individual has held one or more leadership roles over their career in higher education. Majority of interviewees stated that their current institution’s executive cabinet members were mostly men (if applicable).

Barriers & Challenges

When responding to questions related to barriers and challenges, my interviewees had mixed responses, not only as individuals but within a single response to the question. Eighty percent of interviewees expressed barriers and challenges in attaining leaderships positions.
Leader One (Amelia) described being fortunate to have been able to take on leadership roles early on in their career but not attaining the authority that she expected from these roles and described this being a major challenge to her ability to be an effective leader (Amelia, 2024). Amelia (2024) expressed that it was frustrating to have an opportunity to be a leader but based on her description felt limited.

Leader Two (Bethany) introduced a barrier that I had not exclusively found in my literature review which was that their challenge for leadership opportunity in large part was the organizational instability. As she described, external factors like a decrease in enrollment, higher education institutions determining how to operate post COVID-19 pandemic, available resources, and a lack of intentional leadership (Bethany, 2024). Based on these various factors we can infer that the challenges being presented have little to do with the individual but more so the systematic issues that have a direct impact on advancement opportunities.

Leader Three (Calliope) shared that a component she believed factored into her challenge was not fitting the stereotypical mold of a leader which she described as typically masculine qualities. Calliope expanded on this by describing, “Leadership is rewarded in that you use the right buzzwords and are making the right connections. I am a doer and I’m more focused on the relationships I develop with the people I work with” (Calliope, 2024).

Leader Four (Darcy) appeared to be the exception and stated, “I feel like I've been really fortunate. I have been groomed for possibilities to some extent. I have jumped on applying for possibilities when they've become available in new roles, so I have not encountered barriers” (Darcy, 2024). In contrast, the other leaders described what barriers and challenges they experienced. Leader Five (Eloise) also communicated to having faced barriers and challenges
however, had a similar mentality as Calliope (2024) in that she found a way in despite of the challenges in front of her (Eloise, 2024).

**Work – Personal Conflicts**

A trend I found amongst all my interviewees was that work – personal conflicts did occur but the impact on their careers were largely influenced by the support they received and the balance they were able to maintain through their support networks. Eighty percent of my interviewees are parents and whether it was a partner, other loved ones or their colleagues that assist them, balancing the demands was a critical component to their ability to satisfy the demands they experienced in and outside the workplace. Amelia (2024) found support at their workplace and recalled a fond memory of a past supervisor, “I can remember my supervisor looking at me and saying I think it's a miracle you're able to make it any day” because their supervisor recognized and acknowledge all the roles that Amelia was juggling. As a new parent anything that they were able to contribute to work was more than enough. Bethany (2024) navigated balance outside of the stereotypical and heteronormative family structure by having a partner that served as a stay-at-home parent in the early years of their career.

Calliope, a non-parent shed light on a unique challenge of being a professional that was not affiliated with parenthood. She spoke about the expectations placed on her to fill the workload and emotional support of colleagues or friends that had children, “I am expected to pick up slack for other people because they have families or because they have partners and it’s not as overt as that. And I've found that as I get older, I hold a lot of that emotional space. For not only for a colleague, but also for friends who have families and also my family, who is farther away” (Calliope, 2024).

Whereas, Darcy (2024) found support by creating boundaries and relying on other family as she describes, “I think I work really hard to contain my work within work hours and I don't let
it bleed into the evenings and the weekends for the most part, and I have my child not only in school, but also in after school programs. I am fortunate. I have really supportive parents and they are actively involved as grandparents to cover when I go to a conference or in a workshop that runs late or anything like that” (Darcy, 2024). Eloise (2024) shared she found support by “One of the things that I found helpful was finding a group of female friends who are in similar situations early enough in your career. There are other people who are in the same kind of job that you are” (Eloise, 2024).

**Mentorships and Sponsorships**

All interviewees spoke positively about mentorships and how beneficial their experiences were for having one. Interviewees had a variety of experiences of how these relationships developed from informal circumstances to formally being assigned a mentor.

Understanding the role of sponsorships in their careers was difficult to decipher as many of my interviewees were unfamiliar with the concept and struggled to distinguish sponsors from mentors; additionally, many could not speak to experiencing sponsorship. For Amelia (2024) and Darcy (2024), mentorship and sponsorship were closely linked in their experiences, they did not appear to have a designated individual they viewed as solely a sponsor. Each sponsor also served as a mentor in their experiences. Bethany (2024) described peers as serving in less of a sponsorship role and more so, in terms of advocacy. Her peers supporting her but not necessarily holding the same power or influence that is typical of sponsors. Likewise, Calliope (2024) described observing others having sponsors in their careers but did not recall having the same experience, personally. Eloise (2024) mentioned having a couple of sponsors but did not speak about those experiences.
Work Distribution

As indicated in my literature review, it was unanimous among my interviewees that they were tasked with taking on more administrative duties. For the most part, interviewees responded to my question related to taking on additional administrative duties with a knowing smile or chuckle. Amelia (2024) described her perception of women being asked to take on more, “I think probably the biggest difference that I've seen…my experience and those with other gender identities is that here's always been a default, or an assumption built in that I will do something” (Amelia, 2024). A particular impactful example of this that Amelia shared were moments in her career where she had ghost-written for her supervisor, and he received the recognition for her work at a national conference with no acknowledgement for her efforts (Amelia, 2024).

Similarly, Bethany spoke about the assumptions her institution would make. She said, “I think it is really easy for institutions to sit back and not ask. To wait for someone to step up. To see if someone has the conscience to say well, this can’t be left undone, it needs to be done” (Bethany, 2024).

A couple of my interviewees made interesting points about the accountability to complete these additional tasks but also the assumption that they would do it. Calliope (2024) provided great insight in response to this topic by explaining being asked to do more is an expectation in the higher education industry but what distinguishes these asks is how individuals are held accountable (Calliope, 2024). As she explained, “I've seen the difference in the accountability for that. For some reason, some people escape that accountability. And often it's because you know they have a young child or they're in school and they have a family. But I would say typically those folks who escape that accountability are men” (Calliope, 2024). Darcy (2024) explained, “But yeah, there is an expectation that you'll step up when you can and do those things so that
one is certainly the biggest ask…” (Darcy, 2024). Eloise without hesitation and with a giggle responded, “All the time” (Eloise, 2024).

**Sexual Harassment**

The percentage of my interviewees that had personally experienced sexual harassment was lower than I had anticipated until I made the connection that this may be a result of sexual harassment impacting retention and continuing within the higher education industry. Despite this, 80% of my interviewees were still able to speak to this topic by sharing sexual harassment experiences that they witnessed or experienced in their workplaces or sought to provide another impacted individual advocacy.

Of my interviewees that did speak about sexual harassment, a few trends were identified. Low retention for impacted parties, most did not stay long at the institution where their harassment occurred. Their harassers were men with power and influence in their organization, often the impacted parties were not the only recipients of unwanted behaviors by their harasser. Amelia described an individual coming to her to report the unwanted behaviors, “Ultimately, the person responsible for the inexcusable behavior was let go with the golden parachute. Of course, he left with a golden parachute, but it changed that individual… she did not stay more than maybe 18 months after that” (Amelia, 2024). Bethany expressed how they took their experience and ensured when they became a leader, she wanted people to know how to report or express concerns (Bethany, 2024). Calliope described a situation in which the harasser, “Had a very long career and retired from his position at a very high salary, and it was known how problematic he was. Because she was not the only person who had experienced some of his behaviors and being the target of some of his comments” (Calliope, 2024).

While researching this topic I began to experience some desensitization but when Eloise made the comment, “The reason for my huge pause at the beginning was because of the
significant amount of damage that those relationships and the relationship is not the right word, but they just ruined both women for a while” (Eloise, 2024). It humanized the topic again and presented the variety of how workplaces and women respond to sexual harassment. Eloise shared that it was interesting to learn how women (not directly impacted) responded to sexual harassment claims, some appeared dismissive and referred notions of you just have to deal with it (Eloise, 2024).

**Leadership Programs and Training**

Overall, interviewees thought that incorporating these topics into leadership programs and leadership training would be beneficial but did not know how effective it would be to make change. Amelia (2024) described the content and how it is being delivered can be difficult. Instead of predictable videos, Amelia encouraged content to focus less on women’s’ experiences but treatment of others in general “I just think when you begin any leadership work around the concept of dignity and common humanity. You know that solves a lot of problems. Do you know what I mean? Maybe if you just start with conversations about our mutuality, dignity, and respect” (Amelia, 2024). Bethany (2024) and Calliope (2024) also expressed similar thoughts on training not being only for women to participate in but seeking to change systematic viewpoints.

Darcy stated, “It might be. I think I have found some people like I sort of joke that are professional development junkies and like doing professional development things. So I think there is a circuit of people who do these leadership training things. And I think there's maybe sometimes another subset of people who hunker down and are immersed in their work and not do the training so would it be valuable for the people who go to it? Probably. Would it hit everyone who needs it? I don't know” (Darcy, 2024). Darcy (2024) explains that a challenge for incorporating this into leadership development opportunities is it may not attract a wide net of active engagement.
Discussion & Recommendations

After reviewing the information available in my literature review and hearing the experiences of my interviewees I’m disappointed in the higher education industry. This industry is not only expansive in the United States but globally recognized for the opportunities available to those that are able to access it. Higher education has the ability to make a positive impact and is the foundation for many other industries. As higher education is required to pursue certain occupations it could serve as a role model for other workplaces but instead exhibits many of the same problematic actions.

As much of this project is rooted in sexism, it is critical to expand education requirements to discuss these topics and counteract these patterns. For example, each academic program should have a course that requires some of the topics discussed in this research paper. Awareness and knowledge can be used as a powerful tool. In a similar vein, leadership training and leadership programs should mandate these topics are covered. I think of my own experience in this master’s program, my course Building Diverse & Inclusive Organizations was an elective not a degree requirement.

Another recommendation that Amelia (2024) and Bethany (2024) inspired based on their responses to my interview questions was creating a healthy reporting culture for sexual harassment. This can be as simple as informing individuals in the organization how to report, ensure no retaliation policies are enforced, and creating a healthy workplace environment. Moreover, rooting training on human decency and respect so the discussion is not as one dimensional as discussing gender differences. Expanding on respect and decency, caring for employees and the people they love should looked after.

Employee assistance programs (EAPs) that could be readily accessible to support family needs would aid in reducing career disruptions. Families would be able to access care for loved
ones whether it be daycare for young children, healthcare for ill relatives, or additional support for aging relatives. A lot of career disruptions are created because of work – personal conflicts, EAPs can be the bridge between both of these responsibilities.

Conclusion

The intention behind this research was to bring awareness to the experiences of women in higher education navigating leadership aspirations and the struggles women face once they become leaders in this industry. The experiences shared in the interviews confirm many of the trends that were described in the literature review. This suggests that over the course of their careers in higher education women face several factors that are disruptive to advancing in their careers, factors that deter them from wanting to move up in their organizations, and the suggested means to resolve these concerns are still considered in progress.

As indicated in the literature review and mentioned in the conducted interviews, mentorships and sponsorships were immensely beneficial in women’s careers. These relationships dissolved impostor phenomenon, combated barriers that made upward mobility challenging, provided professional networks to rely on, and gave opportunities for skill building. As such, more institutions should be investing time and resources into mentorship programs. Likewise, providing supports for family care that extend beyond dependents would alleviate career disruptions for women. Work – personal conflicts will always exist but creating and promoting programs that help with children, ill or elderly loved ones is crucial. Implementing the ability for flexible schedules could also foster a workplace culture that incorporates more work – life balance. Women should also be able to feel physically and psychologically safe in their work environment. Sexism and sexual harassment, negatively impact workplace productivity and employee retention. Poor retention also occurs because women are overlooked, overworked, and underappreciated. This factors into the leaky pipeline for women in leadership. While it is easy
to acknowledge a problem exists in the system for the lack of women in leadership positions in higher education and to identify areas of improvement; it is difficult to interpret where to begin in creating the necessary changes to improve women’s experiences in navigating the challenges and barriers they are faced with in higher education.

Systematic change is needed to truly have an impact on the ability for women to consistently pursue, maintain, and advance into leadership roles within higher education. As a global phenomenon, nations need to come together to invest in women through education, family care, physical and psychological safety in the workplace, and creating equitable practices. In short, a clear solution to address these challenges is still undetermined. Based on my limited research into the topic there are several limitations that I have found. First and foremost, this research was limited to a less than 16 weeks for the literature review with approximately a ten-day turnaround within that timeframe to conduct interviews with women in the field. Additionally, the sample size was sparse. Five women while very insightful and gracious with their time does not accurately represent the industry at large. Another factor that was not considered when I initially conducted my research was the intergenerational impact in higher education. Majority of my interviewees had more than 15 years in the industry so that’s not reflective of younger women in the profession. Perhaps, younger women in higher education are facing additional or different challenges to those identified in the literature review. Similarly, how leaders or peers influence workplace culture was not expansively discussed in this paper. As the barriers and challenges women face are mostly systematic in nature there may be more that were not discovered in the research.

Despite this, I hope that women continue to overcome the barriers and challenges needed to become the leaders they are more than capable of being. More so, I hope individuals of all
gender identities are equitably represented in higher education leadership; treated with respect in the workplace and recognized for all their effort.
References


Coetzee, M., & Moosa, M.,(2020). Leadership contingencies in the retention of women in higher education. SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SATydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur,18(0), a1326. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v18i0.1326


Nietzel, M. T. (2023, February 1). The majority of America’s top-ranked colleges will be led by a woman or person of color this fall. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaeltnietzel/2023/01/31/the-majority-of-americas-top-ranked-colleges-will-be-led-by-a-woman-or-person-of-color-this-fall/?sh=56fd88cbbfc0


Appendix A

Human Research Checklist

Use this checklist to determine if your project is “Human Subjects Research” requiring IRB approval.

Name: Maria Bowen  
Email: mlb1005@usnh.edu  
Instructor: Dr. Kathy DesRoches  
Instructor Email: kathy.desroches@unh.edu  
Course Number, Title: LD 850  
Project Title: Women in Middle and Upper Leadership within Higher Education

Read “Does Your Activity Need IRB Review at UNH?” (https://www.unh.edu/research/does-your-activity-need-irb-review-unh) and then refer to it while answering the questions below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NOT SURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Does your project involve human subjects?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is data being collected from or about identifiable living individuals?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is interaction or intervention being used to collect data?</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is data being collected or analyzed that contains identifiable private information? (can the researcher identify the individual directly or is there a key to an identifying code)</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If “No” to all these questions, your project is not research. Attach this form to your proposal and submit it to your instructor.

If “Yes” or “Not sure” to any of the questions, continue to Section 2a.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2a. Is it activity that is specifically deemed not to be research? (45 CFR 46.102 (l))</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>NOT SURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Scholarly and journalistic activities (e.g., oral history, journalism, biography, literary criticism, legal research, historical scholarship) that focus directly on the specific individual(s) about whom the information is collected</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Public health surveillance activities conducted by a public health authority (e.g., CDC, NH Health Dept.) to investigate conditions of public health importance</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Collection and analysis of information for a criminal justice agency solely for criminal justice or criminal investigative purposes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Authorized operational activities in support of intelligence, homeland security, defense, or other national security matters</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If “yes” to any of these questions, the project is not research. Attach this form to your proposal and submit it to your instructor.

If “no” or “not sure” to all of them, continue to Section 2b.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2b. Does it involve any of these? (45CFR 46.107 (a) and 45 CFR 46 Subpart B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Vulnerable population:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children under the age of 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant women and fetuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisoners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons with diminished or impaired mental capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educationally or economically disadvantaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons whose primary language is not English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ii. Questions that could present physical, psychological, emotional, legal or social risk to participants (e.g., illegal activities, sensitive topics)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If “yes” to either of these questions the project will not be allowed.

If “no” to both questions, continue to Section 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Which category is it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Evaluation/Assessment/Service/Reporting - the purpose of these activities is, upon request, to gather data to measure the current situation regarding a specific phenomenon or set of factors. Data gathered may be shared only with the sponsor /client/requesting party and where appropriate, the faculty advisor, or used for internal decision making or informational purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Classroom Assignments/Educational Inquiry/Practice - the purpose of these activities is the education of an individual student through an inquiry or experiential approach to discover known principles or phenomena. Data gathered may be shared only with the course instructor or faculty advisor, presented in class, or in the case of an internship/practicum, the collaborating party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Research - the purpose of the activity is to contribute to generalizable knowledge and data gathered may be shared with a research community or the public at large.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Submit the following “Capstone Human Subjects Proposal Screener” to your instructor for approval and signature, and then send it to gsc.irb@granite.edu.

Complete this screener and give it to your instructor for approval and signature. You will then receive guidance about
Capstone Human Subjects Proposal Screener

**Purpose:** To gather information from self-identified women in higher education, their experiences with leadership within the field. I want to see if my research and hypothesis about what factors act as barriers to women achieving leadership positions exist and how to overcome these barriers (proposed solutions).

**How will you recruit the participants for your study? How many?** (Note that if you are surveying people in an organization, company, or online membership group/forum, you must have the written permission of the manager and attach it to this document.) I plan to utilize my professional network of women in higher education and by extension their professional networks.

**How will data be collected?** I will create a survey using Qualtrics.

**How will confidentiality and privacy of data be ensured as they are collected and retained?**

**When will records be destroyed?** I will ensure appropriate privacy/security settings are in before the survey goes live.

**How will informed consent be obtained?** (It should appear at the beginning of your survey or interview and inform the participant of the study purpose, risks and benefits, how you will maintain confidentiality, that participation is voluntary, and your name and email). It will appear at the beginning of my survey.

**Risks and Benefits to Participants:** Benefits: Participants will contribute to bringing more awareness and understanding to the gender gap that exists in higher education’s leadership positions. Participants may also contribute to proposed solutions that could increase women represented in leadership positions. Risks: None

Attach survey questions with informed consent, or provide a link to the online survey. Please see email attachment.

Attach your UNH Human Subjects Training Certificate Please see email attachment.

**Student Signature:** Maria Bowen  
**Date:** 1/24/2024

**Faculty Signature:** Dr. Kathy DesRoches

*Once your instructor has approved and signed the screener,*

*send this screener to gsc.irb@granite.edu for review and approval.*
Appendix B

Bowen Capstone Sample Interviews

Women in Leadership Positions in Higher Education: Challenges, Opportunities and Strategies for Success

The purpose of these interviews is to collect self-reported data from individuals who identify as women and are working or have work experience within higher education. Thank you for your voluntary participation.

Consent Form

The use of human participants in this project has been approved in compliance with the College of Professional Studies--Online, University of New Hampshire's Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research. If you volunteer to participate in this study, we will ask you to answer the questions presented in an interview conducted over Microsoft Teams or Zoom.

There are no known potential risks for participating in this interview. Benefits may include an opportunity to reflect on your experience working in higher education and how to support women in leadership positions in this occupational field.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw or be withdrawn at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and still remain in the study. No coercion of any kind is used in seeking your participation.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as is required by law. All answers are confidential, and no names or other identifiers will be published.

The primary investigator for this research study is: Maria Bowen

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to gather self-reported data regarding your personal experiences or observations you have made while working in higher education regarding women in leadership positions. This research is intended to better understand what factors influence women in attaining leadership positions and if there are factors that would influence the addition or retention of women in leadership positions. Please answer each question honestly.

Participant’s Demographic Information:

1. Do you identify as a woman?
   a. Yes
   b. No
2. Do you currently work at a higher education institution?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. In your experience working in higher education what gender identity is most representative of the executive cabinet?
   a. Men
   b. Women
   c. Non-binary
   d. Even representation of genders
   e. Other

4. In your experience working in higher education have you experienced barriers that have made it challenging or stunted your ability to achieve a leadership position? Are there reasons or experiences that have deterred you from attaining leadership positions. Explain.

5. Women tend to take on family demands such as caring for children or relatives in need, which can interrupt their work. This is often referred to as work – personal conflicts. Can you describe your experience with work – personal conflicts in your professional career? In your opinion how does that compare to colleagues that have different gender identities.

6. Researchers Manongsong and Ghosh (2021) define sponsors as those that have power and influence over the organization, their support of an individual can legitimize their work. A mentor in contrast is defined as an interpersonal relationship with a colleague that has more experience and focuses on career development and support (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). What has your experience with mentors and sponsors looked like while working in higher ed? Please provide examples.

7. If you’ve had a mentor, how was this relationship established?

8. In your experience working in higher ed were you asked or expected to take on additional administrative duties? How did this compare to colleagues that have different gender identities? How did it impact your work?

9. (Optional) Trigger warning: Women continue to face sexual harassment in the workplace and at higher rates than men. From your own work experience within the field, have you experienced sexual harassment in the workplace and how has that impacted your ability to be an effective professional? Did that impede your ability to continue your work functions or remain at that institution?
10. We’ve discussed many barriers and challenges women face while working in higher education, in your opinion would incorporating some of these topics in leadership programs or leadership trainings be an effective method to change the experiences women face in higher education?