Women's Access to Higher Education Leadership: Cultural and Structural Barriers

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Abstract

The Labor Force 2008 projections reflected that the rate of growth for women in the labor force will increase at a faster rate than that of men (Fullerton, 1999). In 2008, the majority of employed women (39 percent) worked in management, professional, and related occupations (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). Although women's participation in the U. S. labor force has increased, and women occupy 44 percent of management jobs in American companies, top management ranks remain dominated by men (Powell, 1999; U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1998). Goodman, Fields, and Blum (2003) refer to the exclusion of women from top managerial positions as evidence of a glass ceiling. A glass ceiling is defined as "…those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational biases that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organizations into managerial-level positions" (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991, p. 1).

This glass ceiling is evident in the supposedly progressive world of higher education. While women have made significant inroads into the senior leadership of American higher education, parity for women presidents has yet to be reached. In 2006, the percentage of college presidents who were women represented 23 percent which more than doubled the 10 percent of women college presidents in 1986. However, the rate of change has slowed since the late 1990s. These trends suggest that higher education institutions have been slow to expand opportunities for women to enter senior leadership (American Council on Education, 2007). This research focuses on the exclusionary practices and lack of access to higher education leadership for women. It is argued that attitudinal and organization biases against women in higher education tend to exclude women from upper-level leadership positions. Therefore, from a social justice perspective, the researcher will examine cultural and structural conditions and practices that create barriers to and opportunities for the advancement of women in higher education leadership.

Introduction

The 2007 report of the American College President Study Series, conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE), described the changes in the presidency during the past 20 years. Highlights of the findings of this 20th Anniversary Edition of the American College President Study related to gender disparity revealed that the percentage of presidents who were women more than double from 10 percent in 1986 to 23 percent of the total in 2006. This percentage suggests that the higher education institutions have been slow to expand opportunities for women (American Council on Education, 2007).

The profile of women presidents was also described in the American Council of Education report. Three significant comparisons were discussed: institutions served, career path and length of service, and family circumstances. In reference to institutions served, it was reported that women were more likely to head associate colleges, followed by baccalaureate colleges and master's colleges and universities. The largest increase in the percentage of presidents who were women represented 8 percent of presidents in 1986 and 29 percent of presidents in 2006. The largest increase of women-held presidencies since 1986 was at public institutions. Specifically, in 2006, women held 34 percent of the presidencies at public baccalaureate colleges, 30 percent at public special focus institutions, and 29 percent at public associate's colleges. In relations to career path and length of services, women presidents in 2006 had spent less than their male counterparts in their current positions—an average of 7.7 years for women compared with 8.8 years for men. In addition, women were more likely than their predecessor in 1986 to have previously served as presidents or provosts. Women presidents were more likely than their male counterparts to have earned a doctorate. In relation to family circumstances, 89 percent of the male presidents were married compared with 63 percent of female presidents. In addition, more women presidents reported they were divorces, separated, or widowed - 19 percent in 2006 compared with 16 percent in 1986. In 2006, only 5 percent of male presidents were divorced, separated, or widowed (American Council on Education, 2007).

The data from the American Council on Education 2007 report show that women continue to increase their ranks of colleges and universities leadership; however, the gains have been slow. This report confirmed that the impending retirements among presidents, the rapidly changing economic demographics, and political condition of the current environmental climate suggest the need for adaptability and diversity in education institutions and their leaders; however, the report failed to address ways to increase the number of women ascending to the presidency.

According to *Title IX: A Sea Change in Gender Equity in Education* (1997), "women now make up the majority of students in America's colleges and universities in addition to making up the majority of those receiving master's degrees. Indeed, the United States stands alone and is a world leader in opening the doors of higher education to women (Title IX: 25 Years of Progress, 1977, Para 4). Bradley (2000) echoed this fact by noting that women's representation in colleges and universities throughout the world is increasingly approaching the gender parity of 50 percent. Additionally, the U.S. Census Bureau reported today more women than men are expected to occupy college professor's positions, as they represent 58 percent of young adults, age 25 to 29, who hold an advanced degree (U.S. Census Bureau News, 2010).

Kaplan and Tinsley (1989) concluded, "More women are in colleges and universities, in professional schools—all poised to leap into positions of power in upper leadership" (p. 18). However, Kaplan and Tinsley (1989) reminded us that upper leadership in higher education

administration has a pyramidal structure and women are clustered at the bottom of the pyramid. Consequently, women are far more likely to be associate deans, directors, deans, vice presidents or provosts. Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of the current status of women in higher education leadership is that concern for these issues is no longer on the agenda of the leaders of our profession. The Commission on Women in Higher Education of the American Council of Education recently issued its report setting forth a new agenda for women. Paradoxically, the Bell Commission and the Friday Commission charged with making recommendations on the broader agenda for higher education, have chosen to ignore any comments on the unfinished agenda for women (Kaplan & Tinsley, 1989).

Call it a glass ceiling, glass wall, or a glass floor, there appears to be a barrier blocking senior women leaders in higher education from ascending to the presidency (Clark, 2006). This glass ceiling appears to be a form of discrimination affecting women in higher education and is an important area of study identifying women's lack of access to power and leadership status in higher education administration. The term "the glass ceiling" refers to invisible or artificial barriers that prevent women from advancing past a certain level (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission- FGCC, 1997; Morrison & von Glinow, 1990). The glass ceiling is a problem that many women in higher education leadership encounter, invisible barriers, created by "attitudinal and organizational prejudices", which block women from senior executive positions (Wirth, 2001, p. 1).

According to Dominici, Fried, and Zeger (2009), women under representation in academic leadership positions raises the questions about root causes for the persistence of gender inequity at the highest ranks of academic leadership. However, fewer studies have formally probed the experiences of women occupying the positions of presidents, vice presidents, chancellors, and provost to allow their voices to be heard in reference to this phenomenon called the glass ceiling.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions
For the purpose of this paper, it is argued that certain attitudinal and organization biases against women in higher education administration leadership exist and tend to block women's access to higher education leadership. From a social justice perspective, the researcher examined barriers, as well as opportunities, that women leaders in higher education encountered in their career paths to the presidency, the highest leadership position in higher education. The research questions guiding this study are: (a) What cultural and structural conditions and practices posed barriers for you in obtaining your current position of leadership? (b) What cultural and structural conditions and practices have created opportunities for you in obtaining your current position of leadership? (c) What was your career path to this current leadership position? and (d) What mentoring experiences have you had?

Theoretical Framework

A social justice perspective frames this study. The definition of social justice is a shifting concept. It depends upon the context in which it is used. Within the context of education, Adams, Bell and Griffin (1997) defined social justice as a process and a goal:

> The goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. The process of attaining the goal of social justice should be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change. (p. 4).

A social justice perspective allows one to emphasize moral values, justice, respect, care and equity. The crucial question of social justice is what ends are being pursued, whom do they benefit, and whom do they harm? The notion of social justice is an ethical framework in which equity and achieving a primary social objective is given priority. Rawls (1972) argues that social justice is defined by two principles. The first is based on individuals having an equal right to basic liberties of the total systems. The second involves giving (a) the greatest social and economic benefits to those least advantaged, and (b) attaching those benefits to the offices and positions in a fair and equitable manner. The notion of social justice suggests that treating all people equally may be inherently unequal. Rawls embraces this perspective and persuasively argues that organizations are obligated not only to safeguard individual's rights, but also to actively redress inequality of opportunity.

In adherence with the social justice philosophy espoused by Rawls (1972), boards of regents of higher education should work for the equality of fair opportunity to ensure that all persons have access to basic liberties. They also should ensure that equality of fair opportunity exists—all offices and positions should be accessible to all persons under conditions of equality of fair opportunity (Rawls, 1972). Persons with similar abilities and skills should have equal access to leadership positions in higher education administration—they should have equal access to economic and social capital (Bogotch, 2002). The emerging social justice discourse calls for higher education leaders to question the assumptions that drive university policies and practices that may pose insurmountable barriers and invisible ceilings for women leaders aspiring to the presidency of colleges and universities.

Literature Review

Women leaders are ascending to the presidency in colleges and universities, albeit at a slow rate (Kaplan & Tinsley, 1989; Wirth, 2001; American Council on Education, 2007; Clark, 2006). The literature review will address factors that explain conditions and practices that create barriers to the advancement of women in higher education leadership. These factors are: (1) individual,

(2) cultural, and (3) structural or institutional influences. In addition, the literature on mentoring will be discussed as a practice that creates opportunities for advancement of women in higher education leadership.

Ragins and Sundstrom (1989), and Fagenson (1990) utilized the three aforementioned factors as a framework to explain women's under representation at higher job levels. This framework is quite appropriate to address the conditions and practices that pose barriers as well as opportunities for women advancement in higher education leadership. According to Timmers, Willemsen, and Tijdens (2009), "Ceilings indicate that due to individual factors women do not reach the highest ranks. Hurdles refers to institutional barriers, and thresholds indicate that once women have passed a certain stage gender differences disappear, thus reflecting cultural factors" (p. 720).

Individual Perspective

The individual perspective' overarching them is that men and women are different. This perspective is also referred to as gender-centered. Gilligan (1982) espoused that whether women's unique qualities are derived from sex-role socialization, from actual life experiences, or are biologically, determined women are different and view the world differently from men. For example, Gilligan (1982) noted that men are more likely to make moral choices on the basis of impersonal rules of fairness and rights. In contrast, women are more likely to make decisions out of concern for specific individuals and within the context of the situation. Women, therefore, value connectedness and relationships. In addition, Rothschild (1987) concurred with Gilligan that women have been conditioned to listen and to be responsive to the concerns of others. Thus, women tend to have strong group skills that enable them to turn to group
problem solving, consensus building, and democratic ways of managing operations.

An invisible ceiling for women ascension to upper leadership positions in higher education administration may be stereotypes associated with these perceived differences in men and women. Women are identified with the home and the care of small children, and men are identified with the greater working environment. The work and world of men have generally been valued over that of women, so that work identified with women is perceived as inferior, and stereotypes about women tend to give them lesser status to the public world (Coleman, 2004). However, Grant (1988) noted that the qualities associated with women can be valuable to organizations. For example, women find means of conciliation with others rather than getting involved with confrontation. Feminist theories value women's perspectives and experiences, eliminating false dichotomies or artificial separation (Hooyman & Cunningham, 1986; Hyde, 1989; Weil, 1988). The individual perspectives also includes the leadership styles associated with men and women.

According to Manz and Sims (1991), a traditional leadership style associated with men relies on hierarchical structure of organization in which directives and communications flows through formal channels and decision-making authority is concentrated at the top. However, a relationship-oriented style is considered more appropriate in today's organization, resulting in "increased employee performance and innovation flowing from enhanced commitment, motivation, and employee capability" (p. 33). Interestingly, the preferred leadership style is associated with how women lead (Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990). Organizations are advised to take advantage of women's natural abilities and the qualities they bring. Rosener (1990) exclaimed, "As the workforce becomes more complex and the economic environment increasingly requires rapid change, interactive leadership may emerge as the management style of choice for many organizations" (p. 125).

In summary, while it is an accepted fact that there may be a cross-cultural set of traits distinctive of women, Holmstrom (1990) suggests that there is not truly a distinctive women's nature" (p. 76). She argues that women and men have as many similarities as differences and women do not just belong to a biological or socially constructed group. Holmstrom argues that women also belong to distinct social classes, races, and cultures, and may identify with these groups more strongly than with sex or gender. While there are distinct traits associated with women's nature, it does not mean that every woman has such a nature. De Beauvoir (1952) also acknowledged that women identify with many different groups; therefore, emphasizing the need for women to be examined as individuals.

Cultural Perspective
The cultural perspective suggests that organizational context, which includes culture, ideology, and policies is relevant in explaining women's limited success in attaining high-level positions (Timmers, Willemsen, & Tijdens, 2010). Previous research (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Willemsen, 2002) has demonstrated that while management in organizations is represented as gender-neutral, it often involves practices that are consistent with characteristics traditionally valued in men. Metcalfe and Slaughter (2008) found that women gain in areas associated with peer-reviewed knowledge, but they do not gain as well in rich academic areas associated with commercial research.

Crowley and Himmelweit (1992) found that women managers often confront patriarchal ideologies that link womenhood with unpaid work, marriage and the family, and justify women in lower management positions with limited authority and opportunity. In addition, women managers are often marginalized by a work situation characterized by mostly male peers. These women often feel like "outsiders on the inside" (Moore, 1988).

Another cultural perspective that may influence women's advancement in academia is societal factors. The 1994 World Yearbook of Education, titled, *The Gender Gap in Higher*

Education, highlights societal factors that may influence the advancement of women in academia: the egalitarianism of the national culture and the relative successes of women in gaining access to prestigious positions in higher education. Thus, egalitarianism and empowerment may enhance the potential of women's career advancement. While these societal factors may increase the opportunity for women, the processes in the academy are what determine whether women succeed or fail in storming the academic tower.

Structural Perspective

The structural perspective concerns the nature of organizational structures and the organization of work, rather than individuals or gender roles (Timmers, Willemsen, & Tijdens, 2009). However, over three decades ago, Kanter (1977) argued that, to a large degree, organizations make their workers into who they are. What appear to be sex differences in the work behavior emerge as responses to structural conditions; to one's place in the organization. In other words, Kanter (1977) locates a large measure of the responsibility for the behaviors people engage in at work and their fate inside organizations in the structure of work systems themselves.

Researchers have taken different positions related to the impact of organizations on the career advancement of women. Iannello (1992) suggested that the authoritarian nature of the bureaucracy destroys any prospective organizational benefits for women. Furthermore, she argued that the span of control and singular authority are detrimental to women because they limit access to the decision-making process. Similarly, Acker (1990) suggested that bureaucracies serve to consciously hide the fact that solely masculine traits are needed to be successful in their organizations. Both of these women are suggesting a flatter organizational structure and less bureaucracy. However, liberal feminists do not view hierarchy and bureaucracy as intrinsically anti-feminist while radical, socialist, and lesbian feminists do (Martin, 1990). One's position on the impact of organizational structure on the career advancement of women rests largely in whether or not one holds the belief that the individual makes the organization or the organization shapes the individual. Is the bureaucrat gendered or the bureaucratic structure? The next section of the literature review will discuss mentoring as an opportunity to advance the career of women ascending to upper leadership positions in higher education.

Mentoring as an Opportunity for Career Advancement

Murray (1991) posited that mentoring can develop either in a structured environment or can be a result of spontaneous relationships. Mentoring is an invaluable resource for the recruitment and preparation of women for the college presidency. Research confirmed that women with outstanding credentials can find it difficult to rise for upper leadership positions without having been vouched for by powerful individuals in leadership positions (Moore, 1982). The college presidency is dominated by men and, as a result, men have more opportunity to have access to sponsorships and promotions, whereas women may be excluded from these types of connections.

Thus, mentorship can help women to overcome these obstacles and to break the glass ceiling (Brown, 2005).

Lane (2002) noted that mentorship can help aspiring female college presidents to replace those college presidents who are approaching retirement. It is crucial that women help others to understand obstacles and show appreciation for each other by realizing women's resources, strengths, and skills. Consequently, a need exists for women to encourage others and move forward by building on existing success (Haynes & Haynes, 2004). Preparation for higher administration positions usually does not happen accidentally. Scanlon's (1997) study on women mentoring revealed that women administrators in higher education who had several mentors found their experience valuable in facilitating their movement up the career ladder. Mentoring increased their visibility among those who were in leadership roles and also met a variety of their needs.

Women not only benefited from having several mentors but also from having different types of mentoring relationships (Hansman, 1998; Swobada & Miller, 1986). Furthermore, Hansman (1998) reported that diverse mentoring relationships can address women's psychosocial, career, and personal development needs. Psychosocial mentors can enhance mentees' self-confidence and provide emotional support. Career-related mentors can provide career advice and mentees exposure and visibility; whereas, peer mentors can offer collegiality, friendship, and emotional support (Hansman, 1998; Johnson & Huwe, 2003; Quinlan, 1999). In summary, mentoring and being mentored are career development activities that help women to advance up the academic administrative ladder (Brown, Ummerson, & Sturnick, 2001).

Mentoring studies. A few studies document the significance of the relationship between women mentoring activities and academic career development (Bolton, 1980; Atcherson & Jenny, 1983; Cullen & Luna, 1990). Cullen and Luna (1993) interviewed 24 women in executive or administrative positions. These women selected for the study were from Arizona and California. The findings from this qualitative study revealed that only 3 of the 24 women lacked a mentor, of the remaining 21women studied five identified a female mentor and eight identified a male mentor. Mentorship activities identified by the women in this study were: sponsorships, coaches, counseling, role-modeling, and offer of friendship. A barrier to women's mentoring revealed that too few women were available to mentor other women. One other study on mentoring conducted by Brown (2005) found that a majority of the college presidents in the study had received mentoring. These results suggested that mentorship plays a critical role in advancing female college presidents up the administrative ladder.

Methodology

The purpose of this quantitative survey research was to examine the barriers as well as opportunities that women leaders in higher education encountered in their career paths to the presidency. The research questions guiding this study were: (a) What the cultural and structural conditions and practices have posed barrier for women in upper leadership, (b) What cultural and structural conditions and practices have created opportunities for women in upper leadership, (c) What career paths did women in upper leadership take, and (d) What mentoring experiences, if any, did women in upper leadership receive? In this section of the paper, the research design, the participants' criteria for selection, the survey instrument, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques will be discussed.

Data Collection

A quantitative survey research design was used for this study. Survey research involves collecting information to answer questions about participant's opinions or perceptions on some issue (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). This survey was designed to obtain women perceptions of barriers or opportunities for career advancement in higher education leadership. The next section will describe the participants and their demographics and the survey instrument.

Participants. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants for this study. The criteria for selection were: (a) women serving as president or other upper administrative positions (i.e., dean, chancellors, directors, provosts) in higher education, and (b) in four-year public college and universities with enrollments of 8,000 students or higher. With these criteria in mind, the participants were purposively selected from The 2010 College Blue Book, 37th Edition, Volume, 2. The selection process was: (a) Using the College Blue book, I determined whether the President/CEO was male or female. If male, I eliminated the institution. If female, I moved to the next step. (b) I determined whether the institution was a 2-year or 4-year public institution. If it was a 2-year institution, I eliminated it. If it was a 4-year institution, I moved to the next step.
(c) I determined the student enrollment. If the student enrollment was under 8,000, I eliminated the institution. If the student enrollment was 8,000 and above, I selected the institution. Of the 4,200 college and universities included in the 2010 College Blue Book, I identified 97 female Presidents/CEO who met my criteria.

Demographics of participants. The participants in this study were comprised of 35 women. The women administrators were aged 46 and above. The majority of the women were aged 56 and above (61 percent) with 39 percent of the women in the age range of 46-55. Most of the women participants were White or European American (89 percent) with 5.6 percent of the women African American, 5.6 percent other, and zero percent Hispanic or Latino Asian/Pacific Islander. In response to the question related to marriage, 66.7 percent of the women were married and 33.3 percent were single. Most of the women held a tenured faculty position (66.7 percent), while 33.3 percent did not hold a tenured faculty position at the time of the study. Additionally,

Most of the women had been in their leadership position for ten or more years (33.3 percent), while 22.2 percent had been in their leadership position for less than two years.

Survey instrument. I developed the survey instrument, which was designed similar to the survey used by the American Council on Education (ACE) in their American College President Study in 2006. The survey instrument consisted of seven demographic questions and six open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were developed by the author based upon a thorough review of the literature on invisible barriers and opportunities for career advancement of women in higher education leadership. Before the survey was completed, university professors and the woman provosts reviewed the survey questions and made helpful suggestions to enhance the content validity.

A cover letter was developed, which included the objective of the survey and deadline for returning the survey. I also asked the participants if they wanted a copy of the paper as well as if I could use their name and the name of their university in the paper. The cover letter and survey instrument were typed into the SurveyMonkey template by my research assistant. The survey was first administered using e-mail invitations during the last week of May 2010. Three follow-up survey e-mail invitations were sent to the participants in the month of June 2010 and one follow-up survey e-mail invitation was sent to the participants in August 2010. Also, the research assistant followed up with telephone calls to the secretaries of the women presidents and administrators to remind them to complete the survey. Of the 97 surveys that were e-mailed, 12 were returned either due to incorrect emails or that the participants were no longer serving in their current leadership positions. Of the 85 surveys delivered, 35 participants completed and returned the survey, with a 41 percent return rate. Of the 35 surveys returned, 19 included responses to all of the open-ended questions.

Data Analysis

One of the benefits of using SurveyMonkey is that data are easily downloaded into statistical and spreadsheet programs such as SPSS and Excel. Data can also be viewed through SurveyMonkey in graphic or table form. Section I of the survey included the demographic data in which the aggregated results were reported by response counts and response percent for each closed-ended question.

Section II of the survey included six open-ended questions. The women responses for each of the six questions were downloaded and printed in a narrative report. I had to make sense of this narrative data. Merriam (2009) noted, "Making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning" (p.176). I used Merriam's (2009) constant comparative, step-by-step process of analysis. The qualitative data consisted of 15 participants' responses to each of the six questions. I began this analysis by first reading each of the 15 participants' responses

to all six questions. As I read the transcripts, I would jot down notes, comments, observations and queries in the margins related to the research question, the literature and other insight. These notes were particular relevant to answer the research questions. Merriam (2009) calls this process open coding. Assigning codes to pieces of data enabled me to begin to construct categories. After the coding of each transcript, I began to combine and group codes together, which is called axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Each transcript was scanned in the same manner. I looked for patterns and regularities that emerged into categories and themes. Merriam (2009) acknowledged the challenge of "constructing categories or themes that capture some recurring pattern that cuts across the data" (p. 181). These categories and themes that emerged from the data resulted in my findings, which will be reported in the next section of this paper.

Findings

The purpose of this research study was to examine barriers, as well as opportunities, that women leaders in higher education have encountered in their career paths to the presidency, the highest leadership position in higher education. The research questions guiding this study are: (a) What are the cultural and structural conditions and practices posed barriers for you in obtaining your current position of leadership? (b) What cultural and structural conditions and practices have created opportunities for you in obtaining your current position of leadership? (c) What was your career path to this current leadership position? and (d) What mentoring experiences have you had? These findings will be framed around the research questions.

Research Question One: What are the cultural and structural conditions and practices that posed barriers for you in obtaining your current position of leadership?

The main themes that emerged from this section of the transcript data were: (a) Lack of mentoring, (b) Good Old Boy Network, and (c) Gender Inequities. Fourteen women provided responses related to cultural and structural barriers encountered when obtaining their leadership positions. It was surprising that 6 of 14 women (43 percent) reported no barriers in their ascension to upper leadership in higher education.

Lack of Mentoring

Research has shown that mentoring and being mentored are important career development activities that can help women advance (Hansman, 1998; Johnson, 1998; Moore, 1982; Brown et al, 2001). An earlier research study by Cullen and Luna (1993) examined senior female administrators and found that "few women were available to serve as mentors" (p. 661). This current study also supports Cullen and Luna (1993) earlier findings. Of the 14 women who responded to this research question, five (36 percent) reported the lack of women mentors during their ascension to upper leadership. One woman exclaimed, "Men mentor and promote other men. Men are more comfortable and relaxed with other men." One other woman confirmed this absence of women mentors by noting, "In my first academic position where I served as an

assistant professor up through full professor and regents' professor, there were virtually no women administrators present in the scientific field of study I entered." It was apparent that the field of study these women entered was also a factor impacting the lack of mentors available.

The Good Old Boy Network
The "good old boy network" was also found to serve as a barrier to women's career aspirations. The good boy network is aligned with Byrne's (1971) concept of similarity attraction. Byrne (1971) found that most men managers tended to sponsor other men because they were attracted to and tended to prefer those similar to themselves. The women in this current study confirmed Byrne's (1971) earlier findings. One woman stated, "The good old boy club is a limited circle where decisions on persons and positions are made. Another woman reported, "This is a very male-dominated society. Many of the men go to lunch together and share information that the females are not exposed to until after the fact." Yet another woman confirmed the concept of similar attraction that explains the good boy network by stating, "The good old boy networks are not welcoming and/or inviting to women, e.g., going out for drinks, golfing, hunting, fishing, etc." Furthermore, this woman noted, "I don't play golf or watch football and don't intend to do so."

Overall, the majority of the women in this study felt the lack of mentors and lack of support for women with family responsibilities clearly served as cultural and structural barriers in their career aspirations for upper leadership positions.

Gender Inequities
Fourteen percent of the women spoke of gender inequities. This small percentage compared to other cultural and structural barriers suggest that gender discrimination is not as prevalent today as in the past for the women in this study. According to Cai and Kleiner (1999), gender discriminated was cited as one of the five major factors that affect women's ability to excel in their careers and get past the glass ceiling. One of the women in this current study posited, "There are gender biases. In my former institution, I lost two gender discrimination lawsuits." Another woman stated, "Hiring committees often do not have diverse representation, resulting in biases-differential administrator pay scales, favoring males," In addition, this participant noted, "More females are in non-traditional pathways to leadership, which was necessary to climb the ladder, but also served to justify low pay."

However, gender inequities still exist today. Bartol, Martin, and Kromkowski (2001) acknowledged that "gender identity and differences are acquired through various developmental processes associated with life stages, such as schooling, and work life"
(p. 9). Cultural and structural barriers can be explained through theories such as role theory (Eagly, 1987) and expectation states theory (Berger, et al., 1980). Both of these theories posited that men and women are allocated different roles in society due to their gender. In addition, different expectations are connected to the different roles. To this end, social role theory asserts

that there are biases in the evaluation of women leaders, caused by the raters' beliefs about women and their understanding of leadership (Forsyth et al., 1997; Eagly et al., 2003). On the other hand, expectation states theory acknowledges similar thoughts on behavior and evaluation as social role theory, but adds to this theory by noting, "it is the status element of gender stereotypes that causes such stereotypes to act as distinctively powerful barriers to women's achievement of positions of authority, leadership, and power (p. 638) rather than incongruence of roles held by women. Furthermore, this theory proposed that it is the perceived lower status of women that causes bias in evaluations.

Research Question Two: What cultural and structural conditions and practices have created opportunities for you in obtaining your current position of leadership?

The main theme that emerged from this transcript data was affirmative action. One of the two participants reported no opportunities while two of the women felt that support from upper-level administrators, hard work, and preparation were factors that provided them an opportunity for aspiring to upper leadership positions.

Affirmative Action

Several of the women cited diversity initiatives and former affirmative action policies as cultural and structural conditions and practices that created opportunities for obtaining their current position of leadership. One woman stated,

> It may not be politically correct to say this today, but if there had not been Affirmative Action in the early 70s, women would not have been welcomed into university administration. In fact, when I was first hired in 1971—as an administrative assistant—every one of my female peers had at least a baccalaureate and most had masters or doctorates. We couldn't get hired for professional or faculty positions. On the plus side, of course, we were a very competent staff and faculty and department head responsibilities required little more than showing up for class- and we had that covered if they didn't.

Another woman corroborated the above woman's perception, "Affirmative action laws and awareness of the importance of a diverse workforce have been helpful in my advancement from faculty member to administrator." Another women explained how increase in diversity was achieved as she stated, "Our human resource training and policies require diverse hiring pools, and more diversity on the makeup of hiring committees."

More than two decades have elapsed since the advent of affirmative action in higher education. Currently, affirmative action is viewed as unconstitutional under the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment to the constitution. However, the women in Glazer's (1997) study acknowledged the need to "create a campus culture of support for women faculty and upper-level administrator positions" (Glazer, 1997, p. 70). Glazer concluded that with the low

number of women faculty in top-level leadership positions, enough has not been achieved with earlier affirmative action policies. Thus, women need to assume a central role in pursuing policies that call for appointment and promotion of more women in higher education leadership.

Research Question Three: What was your career path to the college or university administrative position?

The career paths to administrative positions of the women in this study were, for the most part, quite traditional. Most of the women, 57 percent, reported their ascension to upper-level leadership in higher education began as an assistant professor to associate professor to full professor. From full professor, these women entered administration as department chair, dean, vice president, provost and the presidency. However, one woman reported moving from assistant professor eventually to vice chancellor. One other woman acknowledged that her career path was by chance. Still another woman reported moving from a legal council to chief officer position.

Research Question Four: What mentoring experiences have you had? These findings will be framed around the research questions?

Scanlon's (1997) synthesis of major findings in the literature on mentoring revealed that female administrators in higher education who had several mentors found this experience valuable in their climb up the career ladder. These mentoring experiences increased their visibility among women in upper leadership roles and met a variety of their needs. The themes that emerged from this section of the data were:
(a) Positive mentoring experiences, (b) Male mentors, and (c) No mentors.

Positive Mentoring Experiences
Most of the women (79 percent) reported very positive and supportive mentoring experiences. One of the women stated, "The very positive and supportive advisors and informal mentors far outweighed the few negative sorts. I have been fortunate to participate in some structured leadership and mentoring programs. I learned as much from informal relationships and watching talented administrators as well." One other woman referenced mentors from outside the university. She stated, "My mentors have been external to the university. I was involved with a women's leadership group early in my career. I took advantage of leadership opportunities and continued on with my education." Still another woman noted the wonderful mentoring experience from the women president, "My first administrative opportunity was provided to me by a woman president, more than two decades ago. She was a fabulous role model at a time when there were not many women presidents."

Male Mentors

Several of the women, 22 percent, acknowledged males as mentors. One woman noted, "I was mentored by a male president for whom I worked. He gave me plenty of responsibilities, challenged me to go beyond my comfort zone, and had great confidence that one day I would become a university president." On the other hand, one woman voiced a less positive experience with a male mentor by stating, "Male mentors who while were supportive did not fully understand the challenges of being female, a spouse, and a parent because their significant others did not have careers."

No Mentors

One barrier to women's mentoring is that there are too few women available to mentor other women (Cullen & Luna, 1993). This current study supported Cullen and Luna's earlier research findings. Three of the women in this current study, 22 percent, reported that they did not have mentors.

Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this research study was to examine barriers, as well as opportunities, that women leaders in higher education encountered in their career paths to the presidency, the highest leadership position in higher education. The research questions guiding this study were: (a) What are the cultural and structural conditions and practices posed barriers for you in obtaining your current position of leadership? (b) What cultural and structural conditions and practices have created opportunities for you in obtaining your current position of leadership? (c) What was your career path to this current leadership position? and (d) What mentoring experiences have you had?

This empirical study used a purposive sampling technique, and was able to obtain responses from 35 of the 85 women leaders who received the survey. This response rate was 41percent. The glass ceiling is a problem that many women in higher education leadership encounter, invisible barriers, created by "attitudinal and organizational prejudices", which block women from senior executive positions (Wirth, 2001, p. 1). In this study, it can be concluded that invisible barriers encountered by these women leaders in higher education were lack of mentors, the good old boy network, gender inequalities, and slower career paths. In addition, opportunities women encountered aspiring to leadership positions and remaining in leadership positions in higher education were positive and supportive mentors, affirmative action laws of the 70s, and university's awareness and actions related to increasing gender and racial diversity in their workforce.

Four major insights were gleaned from this study. First, the cultural and structural barriers conditions and practices that posed barriers for these women in leadership positions were very similar to what has been confirmed in research, that is, a lack of mentoring, the good old

boy network, and gender inequities. It was surprising to discover that some of the women in this study were still experiencing gender discrimination and the good old boy network. In the early 70s Byrne (1971) developed the concept of similarity attraction. Byrne (1971) found that most men managers tended to sponsor other men because they were attracted to and tended to prefer those similar to themselves. These women in my study also felt that men in the good old boys network in higher education tended to feel more comfortable with others who were similar to them. Later, Moore's (1988) findings also revealed that even though women had reached elite positions in administration, women were still considered "outsiders on the inside" and often felt excluded from networks of all-men colleagues. The good old boy network was one of the factors that impacted the number of mentors available for women in this current study. The women in this current study revealed that the men tended to mentor other men. They went to lunch together, played golf together, and watched football together, often excluding women. During many of these events, the men made decisions about people and positions without obtaining input from women.

Secondly, based on the interview data and analysis, affirmative action and diversity initiatives were seen as cultural and structural opportunities for women aspiring to upper leadership positions. The women in this study acknowledged that without the affirmative action initiatives in the 70s, they would not have made the advances they have made in upper-level administration. Some of the women reported that their human resource training and policies required diverse hiring pools, and more diversity on the makeup of hiring committees. One woman concluded that the university's enforcement of laws and awareness of the importance of a diverse workforce have been helpful in her advancement from faculty member to administrator. The findings in this study that emerged about affirmative action confirmed Glazer's (1997) research findings that acknowledged, with the low number of women faculty in top-level leadership positions, enough has not been achieved with earlier affirmative action policies. Thus, women need to assume a central role in pursuing policies that call for appointment and promotion of more women in higher education leadership.

A third conclusion drawn from this study was that career paths to leadership are slower and sometimes blocked for women. Most of the women, 57 percent, in this study reported that they began their career path as an assistant professor to associate professor to full professor. From full professor, these women entered administration. Several of the women entered administration as a department chair, dean, vice president, provost and the presidency. For these women, they progressed sequentially through these ranks.

Finally, when asked to describe their mentoring experiences all, with the exception of 3 (22 percent) of the 14 women who completed this section of the survey, revealed that they had a mentor during their ascension to and while serving in upper leadership in higher education. Most of the women acknowledged the benefits of having a mentor and described their mentoring

experience in positive terms. In addition, these women felt they were fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in structured leadership and mentoring programs. They acknowledged that they learned as much from informal relationships and watching talented administrators as well as from the formal mentoring settings. This study supports other research on mentoring by noting that not all women have mentors. The 22 percent of women who did not have mentors acknowledged the lack of women in upper leadership positions to mentor them. Three other women in this study acknowledged that they had male mentors. This study does show that while women are increasing in upper leadership positions in higher education, the gender gap is still evident.

In adherence with the social justice philosophy espoused by Rawls (1972), boards of regents of higher education should work for the equality of fair opportunity to ensure that all persons have access to basic liberties. They also should ensure that that equality of fair opportunity exists—all offices and positions should be accessible to all persons under conditions of equality of fair opportunity (Rawls, 1972). Persons with similar abilities and skills should have equal access to leadership positions in higher education administration—they should have equal access to economic and social capital (Bogotch, 2002).

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested for further research:

The findings of this study were based on the voices of a small group of women (a) serving as president or other upper administrative positions (i.e., dean, chancellors, directors, provosts) in higher education, and in (b) four-year public college and universities with enrollments of 8,000 students or higher. It is hoped that this study will provide a basis for further evaluation of cultural and structural conditions and practices that posed barriers encountered by and opportunities for women in upper leadership positions in higher education.

Yin Yim and Bond (2002) acknowledged that discrimination continues to exist in the workplace despite the Equal Employment Opportunity laws that have been in place for many decades in the United States. The women in this current study reported lack of diversity in the hiring committees, resulting in biases-differential administrator pay scales, favoring males. In addition, the women reported that more females were in non-traditional pathways to leadership, which was necessary to climb the ladder, but also served to justify low pay. Therefore, it is recommended that college and universities re-examine their affirmative action and diversity action policies and plans to evaluate the effectiveness of these policies and plans to bring about a more diverse women faculty with structured mentoring activities and professional development programs that will help to prepare these women for ascension to upper-level administrative leadership.

Shakeshaft as early as 1987 confirmed the significance of women mentoring. Research confirmed that women who have participated in in-depth mentoring programs are more likely to receive more promotions and higher incomes (Akande, 1994). Cullen and Gayle (1993) also acknowledged that mentoring was a critical strategy and promised to promote aspiring women up the career ladder. Therefore, it is recommended that women in upper leadership positions take the time to mentor other women who aspire for upper leadership positions. Since mentoring relationships are advantageous to the women mentor and mentee, higher education needs to re-examine their action plans and strategies to mentor women.

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