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Making Meaning of Adversity: Experiences of Women Leaders in Higher Education

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MAKING MEANING OF ADVERSITY:

EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Title: Making Meaning of Adversity: Experiences of Women Leaders in Higher Education

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Despite the fact that women now earn more bachelor's, master's and doctorates than men, a gender gap for women leaders persists in the field of higher education. Women hold only 26 percent of all college and university presidencies with a large variance by type of institution. Women lead 33 percent of associate's level institutions but only 22 percent of doctorate-granting institutions. Extensive research has demonstrated that women aspiring to and serving as leaders face many barriers. The objective of this study was to discover the meaning of adversity in the lives of women leaders in higher education by documenting accounts of women who have navigated through obstacles, barriers and adversities.

This study used qualitative research to understand the meanings which participants gave to their experiences with adversity. Twenty-six women holding senior leadership positions in higher education participated in this study. In-depth interviews were conducted to allow participants to recall their experiences with adversity and to reflect on the meanings of these experiences.

Participants experienced wide-ranging types of adversity, including gender-based leadership barriers. While adversity had a generally positive effect on participant identity, it had disparate effects on self-esteem, power, connections to others and worldviews. The common thread was that adversity can lead to growth and opportunity but such benefits are intertwined with pain and loss.

To make sense of adversity, participants spent time in a sensemaking cycle, in which they attributed meanings, chose actions, updated understandings, and revised predictions and assumptions about the future. Coming to a sense of closure related to participant self-esteem and empowerment. Participants who were unable to make sense of their adversities experienced decreased self-esteem and empowerment while participants who found a meaning or concluded that no meaning exists experienced increased self-esteem and empowerment.

Despite the adversity they have faced, participants in this study have survived, and most have even thrived. In navigating adversity, these women actively reframed obstacles and barriers and increased their resilience and self-efficacy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that women now earn more bachelor's, master's and doctorates than men (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a), a gender gap for women leaders persists in the field of higher education (American Council on Education, 2012; Chliwniak, 1997; King & Gomez, 2008; Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, 2011; The White House Project, 2009). This gender gap includes presidents and chancellors and their senior leadership teams of provosts, vice-presidents and vice-chancellors (American Council on Education, 2012; Chliwniak, 1997; Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, 2011; The White House Project, 2009). Although academia leads all sectors in percentage of women serving in top leadership positions (The White House Project, 2009), this percentage is only 26 percent (American Council on Education, 2012). Extensive research has demonstrated that women serving in a wide range of leadership positions face many barriers (Chliwniak, 1997; Klenke, 1997; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007; The White House Project, 2009), from work-family conflict (Klenke, 1997; Williams, 2001) to gender stereotyping (Hofstede, 2009; Pittinsky, Bacon, & Welle, 2007; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007) to tokenism (Klenke, 1997) to discrimination (Klenke, 1997). While some barriers may be overcome, solutions for others may be out of reach for individual women. How women make sense or meaning of barriers and other adversities that they face is particularly relevant because meanings provide explanation and guidance for life experiences (Chen, 2001). My research objective is to discover the meaning of adversity for women working in senior leadership positions in higher education as they confront and struggle to overcome barriers and adversities in their lives.

This study examines the types of barriers and adversities which women leaders in higher education have faced, the strategies used to get through these adversities, and the meanings given to their experiences. Insights gleaned from this study may prove helpful to women aspiring to leadership positions in higher education or in any other field by creating awareness of the types of barriers or adversities which they may encounter and by providing strategies to get through adverse situations. Women currently serving in leadership positions may also relate to the experiences of participants in this study and gain additional insight into their own struggles or at least knowledge that they are not alone. This study adds to the body of knowledge on women and leadership, specifically providing additional answers to the research questions of why so few women leaders reach the top and how more can do so.

In this chapter, I first define key terms used throughout this study and overview the typical university leadership structure. Then I examine the problem of women's underrepresentation in higher education leadership, followed by a discussion of the rationale and significance of closing the gender gap in higher education leadership. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the evolution of research on women in leadership and lays out the research question and objectives for this study.

Terminology

To setup the context for this study, commonly used terms, such as adversity and barrier, need to be defined to provide a shared understanding of what each term means. In addition, the leadership structure in higher education is somewhat different from other for-profit and not-for-profit organizational leadership structures. Therefore, this section contains the definitions of key terms used throughout this dissertation followed by an overview of the typical university leadership structure including a description of each leadership role.

Definitions

There are five key terms used throughout this study. I provide definitions in this section to facilitate understanding of each term and the study as a whole.

Adversity. Adversity is a state opposed to well-being or prosperity or a condition or circumstance of misfortune, distress, difficulty or hardship (Adversity, 2011). Any barrier which prevents women from succeeding in or advancing to leadership positions is a type of adversity.

Barrier. A barrier is a circumstance, obstacle or anything immaterial which prevents progress or stops advance (Barrier, 2010, 2012).

Gender. Gender refers to the patterned, socially produced differences between female and male, masculine and feminine. The concept of gender as a symbol of power usually includes the subordination of women, either concretely or symbolically (Acker, 1992b).

Gender-Based Leadership Barriers. Gender-based leadership barriers are the barriers and adversities that women leaders may face as they strive to succeed and advance professionally.

Gendered Institutions. Gendered institutions refers to the concept that institutions are organized along the lines of gender and that subordination and exclusion of women occur as a part of ordinary institutional functioning (Acker, 1992a)

Typical University Leadership Structure

Now that key terms have been defined, I will overview the typical leadership structure found in higher education. Universities and colleges in the United States vary based on factors such as institution size (number of students), funding source (public or private), and highest degree awarded (associate's, baccalaureate, master's, or doctorate). Specific leadership roles in universities and colleges also vary but most have roughly similar organizational and reporting

structures (Burroughs Wellcome Fund & Howard Hughes Medical Institute, 2006). The example university organizational chart in Figure 1 displays common senior leadership roles and is followed by an explanation of what each role entails.

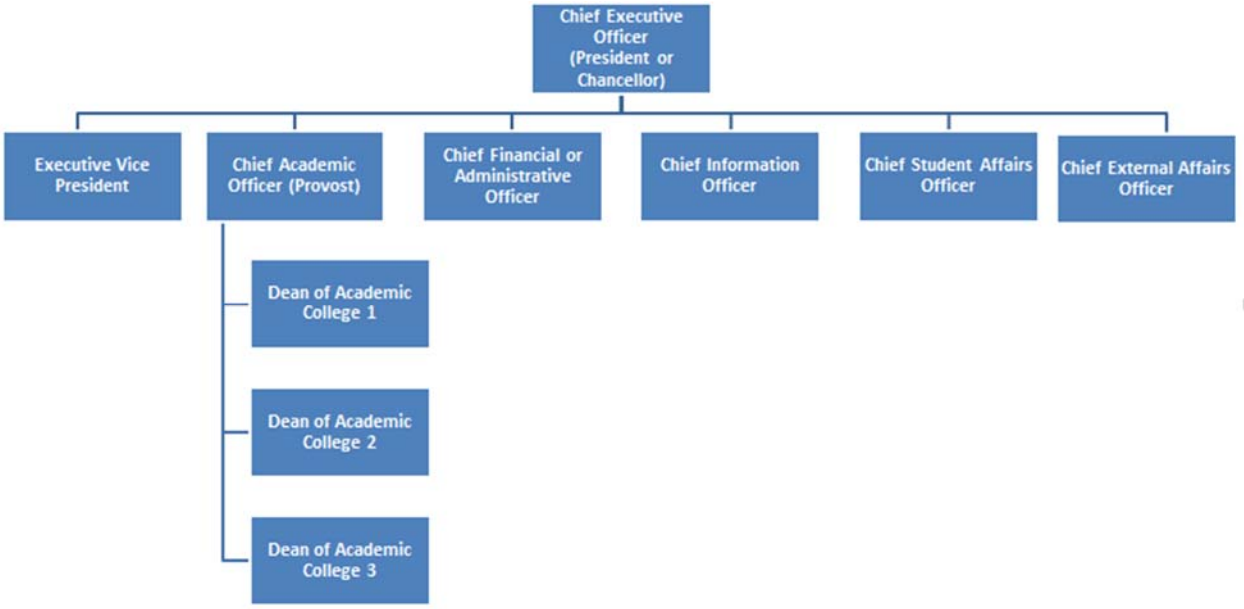

Figure 1. Example University Leadership Organizational Structure.

Chief Executive Officer (President or Chancellor). This individual has general oversight of the university, college, or state university system's academic programs and financial health. He or she is the public spokesperson, dealing with "big-picture" issues such as relationships with the legislature and other funding bodies, alumni relations, and fundraising (Burroughs Wellcome Fund & Howard Hughes Medical Institute, 2006).

Executive Vice President. Duties for executive vice presidents vary. They may have overall responsibility for ensuring services are available to support the many activities of faculty and staff (Affleck-Graves, 2012). They may also provide leadership for university administrative services, such as audit and compliance, campus life, facilities, human resources, safety, adminstrative planning, housing, and dining (Burstein, 2012).

Chief Academic Officer (Provost). As the university's chief academic officer, the provost has programmatic and budgetary oversight over all academic activities. The provost reviews appointment papers of new faculty members and receives reports from the promotion and tenure committee. The deans of the various academic colleges or schools report to the provost for academic-related matters (Burroughs Wellcome Fund & Howard Hughes Medical Institute, 2006; King & Gomez, 2008).

Dean of Academic College. Deans are responsible for the administration of a school or college, which is further subdivided into academic departments. A university may have several schools or colleges (Burroughs Wellcome Fund & Howard Hughes Medical Institute, 2006; King & Gomez, 2008). Deans foster good teaching, represent their schools or colleges, plan budgets, build and maintain good work environments across their academic departments, provide direction, and recruit faculty (Wolverton, Gmelch, Montez, & Nies, 2001).

Chief Financial or Administrative Officer. This individual is in charge of the fiscal affairs of the university. He or she also often oversees facilities planning and construction, human resources, and campus services such as parking, public safety, maintenance, and mail services (Burroughs Wellcome & Howard Hughes Medical, 2006).

Chief Information Officer. This individual oversees the university's computer and information technologies including instructional, administrative applications, e-learning, networking and telecommunication. This individual may also be responsible for the library (Higher Education Information Technology Services, 2012).

Chief Student Affairs Officer. The Chief Student Affairs Officer is responsible for issues of student well- being, including residence halls, recreational facilities, and health centers (Burroughs Wellcome & Howard Hughes Medical, 2006).

Chief External Affairs Officer. This individual manages fundraising, advancement services, development programs, alumni networks, university relations, and government relations (Burroughs Wellcome Fund & Howard Hughes Medical Institute, 2006; King & Gomez, 2008).

Summary. Some divisions in higher education are similar to divisions which may be found in other organizations, such as finance and administration, information technology, and perhaps external affairs. However, others are unique to higher education, such as academic and student affairs. Now that the key terms and typical university leadership structure have been discussed, we can turn to a statement of the problem for this research study.

Statement of the Problem

Women continue to be underrepresented at the top and overrepresented at the bottom of most leadership hierarchies (Haveman & Beresford, 2012; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Many writers have noted this dearth of women in top leadership positions across a spectrum of occupations, fields, and organization types (Chliwniak, 1997; Indvik, 2001; Klenke, 1997; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007; The White House Project, 2009), including higher education (American Council on Education, 2012; Chliwniak, 1997; King & Gomez, 2008; Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, 2011; The White House Project, 2009). In this section I discuss the underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership.

In the United States in 1975, women made up 45 percent of 18- to 24-years-olds in degree-granting institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2010b) but only five percent of university presidents (Women in Higher Education, 1995). In the 1980s, women had caught up with men in attainment of bachelor's and master's degrees (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a) but held only about ten percent of college and university presidencies (American Council on Education, 2012). In 1995, women made up 16 percent of presidents, 25 percent of academic

deans, and approximately 18 percent of tenured faculty members, while accounting for more than 52 percent of the undergraduate student body (Women in Higher Education, 1995). By 2008-2009, women surpassed men in all degree types, earning 57 percent of bachelor's degrees, 60 percent of master's degrees, and 52 percent of doctorates (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a). However, women's progress in gaining entry into top leadership positions at colleges and universities has been slow as shown in Figure 2. By 2011, the percentage of presidents who were women had risen to only 26 percent (American Council on Education, 2012).

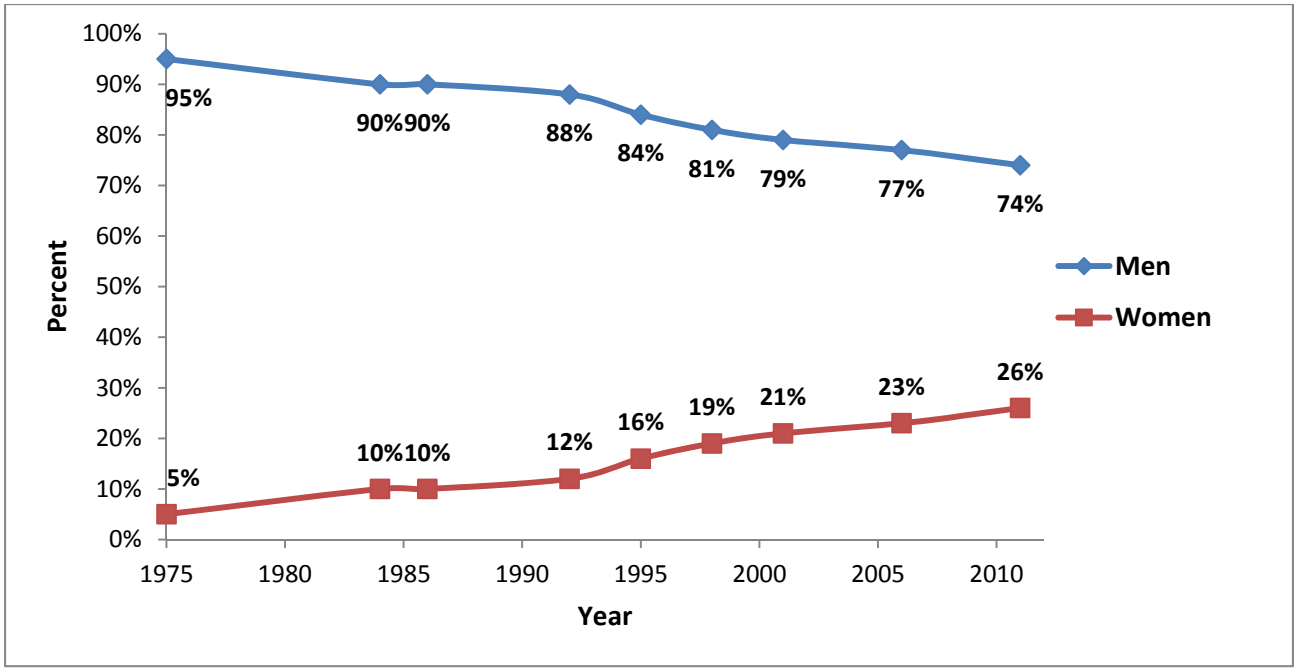

Figure 2. Percentage of University Presidencies Held by Men and Women: Selected Years (1975-2011).
(American Council on Education, 2012; King & Gomez, 2008).

A specific example which illustrates this gap is leadership positions in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) as shown in Figure 3.

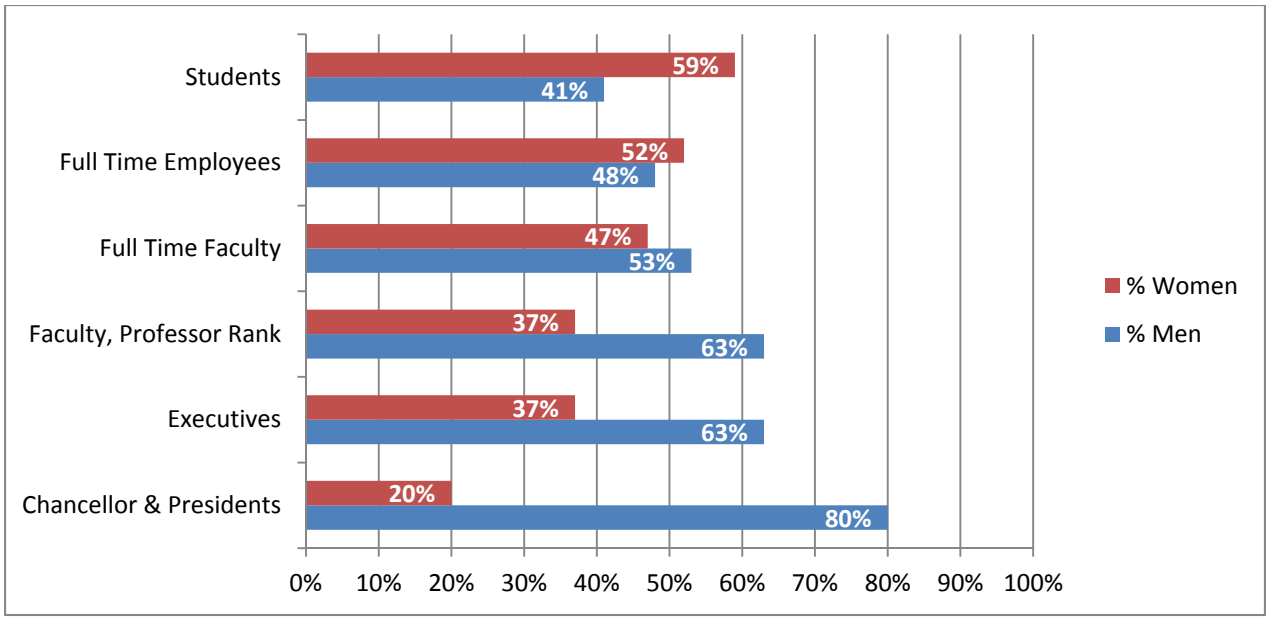

Figure 3. Percentage of Women and Men in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (2009).
(Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, 2011).

Amongst the 14 PASSHE universities, in 2009, women made up 59 percent of 116,935 students and more than half of full-time employees but only 20 percent of chancellor and university president positions (Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, 2011).

This gender gap is also prevalent in senior leadership positions at higher education institutions. As of 2007, women made up only 31 percent of executive vice presidents and 38 percent of chief academic officer/provost positions (King & Gomez, 2008). In addition, 36 percent of academic college deans were women (American Council on Education, 2007a; King & Gomez, 2008**).**

There is also a large variance in percentages of women in senior leadership positions by institution type as shown in Figure 4.

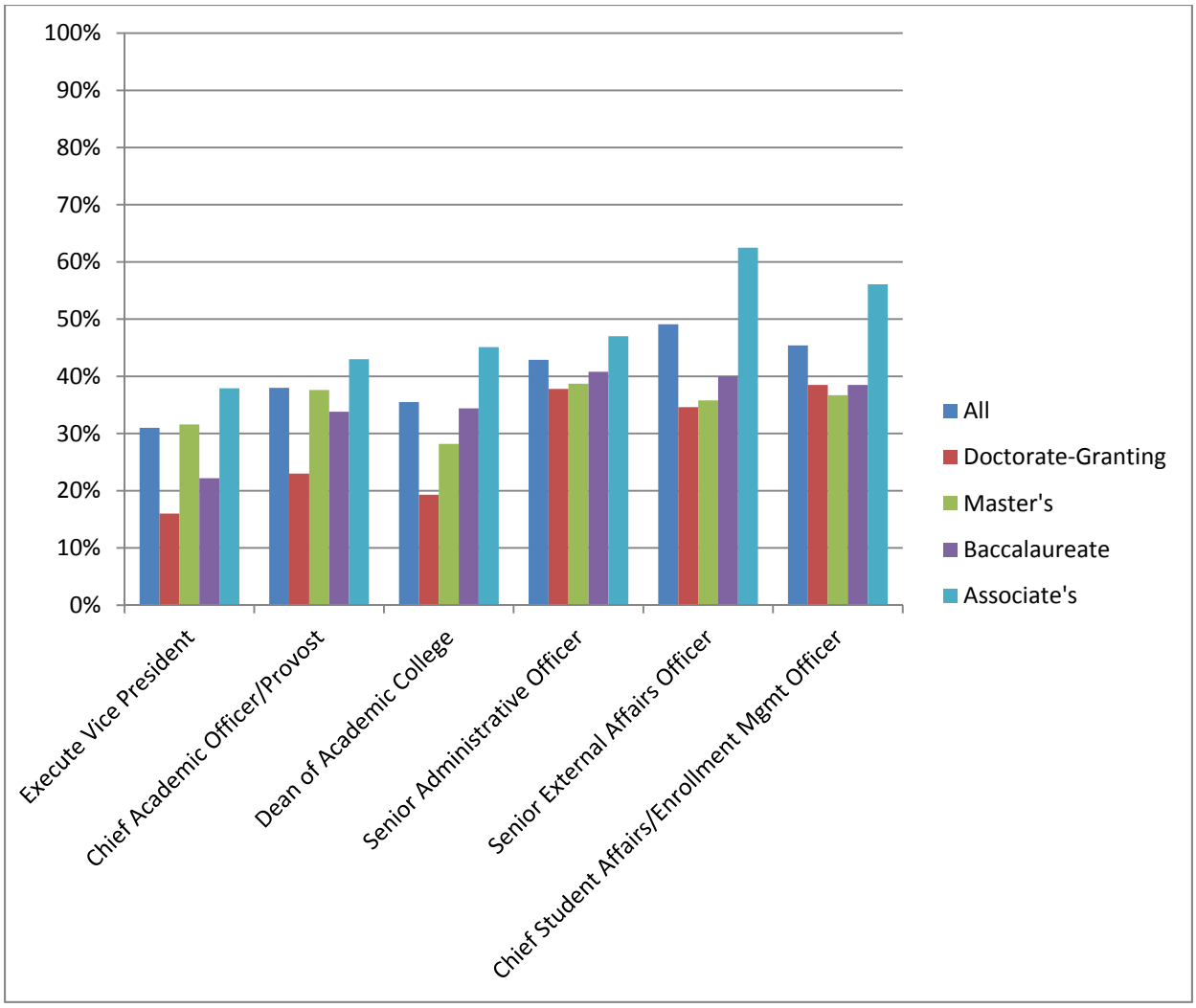

Figure 4. Percentage of Women in Higher Education Senior Leadership Positions by Institution Type (2007).
(King & Gomez, 2008).

The percentage of women holding senior leadership positions is notably higher at associate's level institutions than at bachelor's level, master's level and doctorate-granting institutions. For example, women lead only 22 percent of doctorate-granting, 23 percent of master's-level, and 23 percent of baccalaureate institutions, while they lead 33 percent of associate's level institutions (American Council on Education, 2012) as shown in Figure 5.

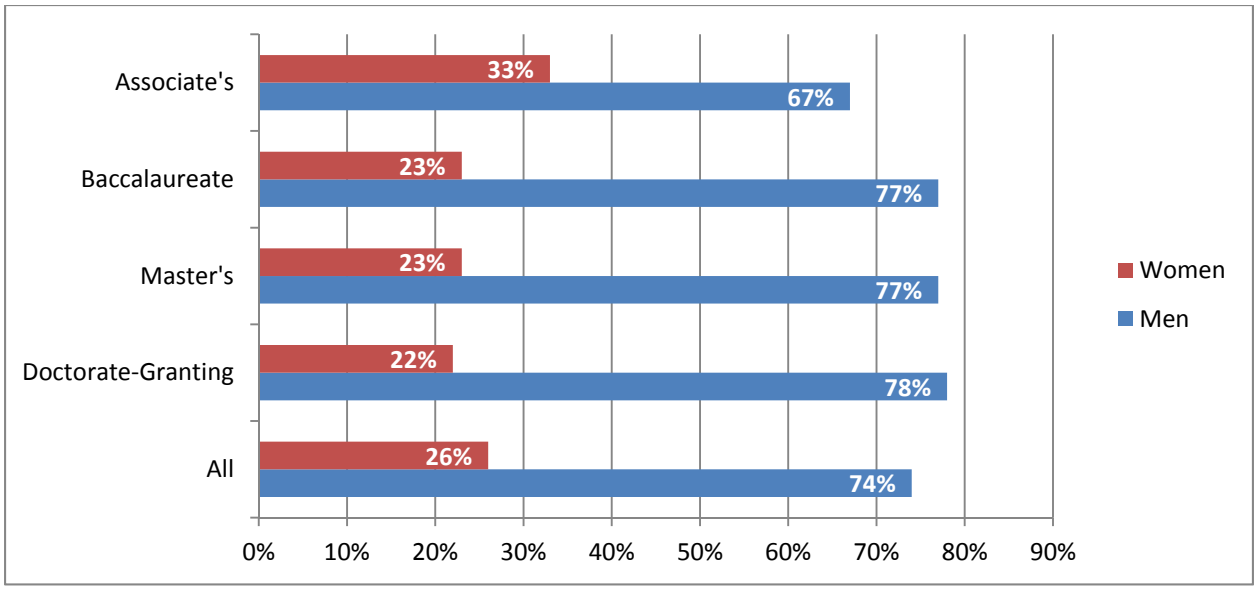

Figure 5. Percentage of University Presidencies Held by Women and Men by Institution Type (2011).
(American Council on Education, 2012).

A similar gender gap exists for chief information officer positions in higher education. In recent years the percentage of women in these positions has declined from 26 percent in 2008 (W.A.Brown, personal communication, February 19, 2012) to 22 percent in 2012, according to the Center for Higher Education Chief Information Officer Studies (Brown, 2012). This decline in female chief information officers has occurred at the same time as the number of female higher education technology leaders (those under the rank of chief information officer) has risen. The percentage of female technology leaders rose from 33 percent in 2009 to 37 percent in 2012 (Brown, 2012). Brown's (2012) survey found that 70 percent of the male technology leaders aspired to the chief information officer position whereas only 48 percent of the female technology leaders had the same aspiration.

Academia leads other sectors in percentage of women serving in top leadership positions, as shown in Figure 6.

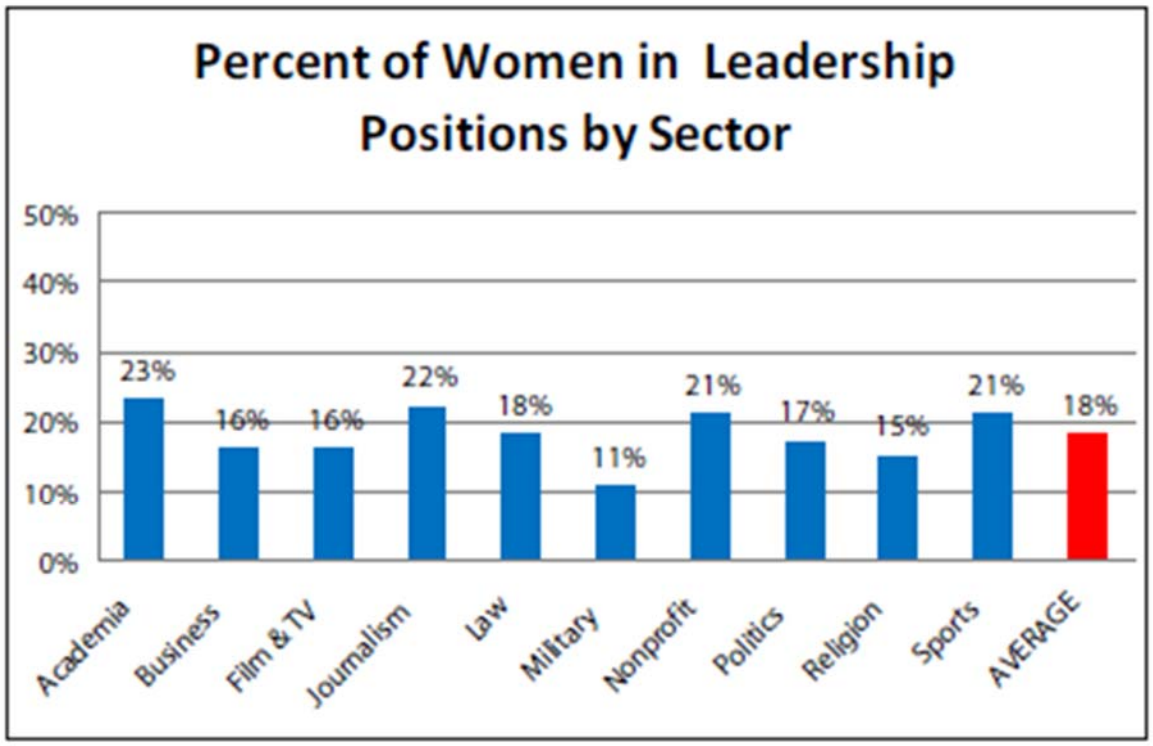

Figure 6. Percentage of Women in Leadership by Sector (2009).
(The White House Project, 2009).

The average across all sectors is 18 percent (The White House Project, 2009). Although academia has the highest percentage of women serving in top leadership, the percentage is still far from parity with men, and it is clear that more must be done to close the gender gap. As we have seen, women are underrepresented in top leadership positions across all sectors. The next section describes the importance of closing the gender gap in higher education leadership.

Rationale and Significance

Why is closing the gender gap in higher education leadership so important? Society can ill afford to lose talented women from its leadership pool (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Because they tend to gravitate toward nonhierarchical, consultative, collaborative, and interpersonally sensitive approaches, women can be assets in many leadership settings (Bornstein, 2007; Chliwniak, 1997; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Working from the assumption that women have a

different voice (Gilligan, 1982) and therefore a different mode of leadership, this difference can bring new and positive values and become incorporated and accepted in our social and cultural systems (Chliwniak, 1997). Advocates for closing the gap in higher education believe that the result would be institutions that are more centered on process and persons rather than tasks, outcomes and masculinized priorities, creating more inclusive, equitable and caring environments for faculty, staff and students (Chliwniak, 1997). In this section, I discuss the concept of gendered institutions, describe feminist standpoint theory, give an overview of gender-based leadership barriers, explain how gender diversity benefits organizations, and describe how barriers and adversities relate to this study. I then conclude with a statement of the significance of this study.

Gendered Institutions

According to Acker (1992a), gender is present in the processes, practices, images, ideologies and distributions of power across society. "Gendered institutions" (Acker, 1992a, p. 567) is the term used to describe the concept that institutional structures are organized along the lines of gender. Historically men have developed and dominated institutions related to law, politics, religion, the academy, the state, and the economy. These institutions have been symbolically interpreted from the standpoint of their male leaders, and as a result, the subordination and exclusion of women has been built into ordinary institutional functioning. Although women have gained entry into all institutions, men's dominance (Acker, 1992a) continues today, as evidenced by the percentage of men in top leadership positions. In the United States in 2009, men held between 77 percent and 89 percent of top leadership positions across all sectors, as shown in Figure 7 (The White House Project, 2009).

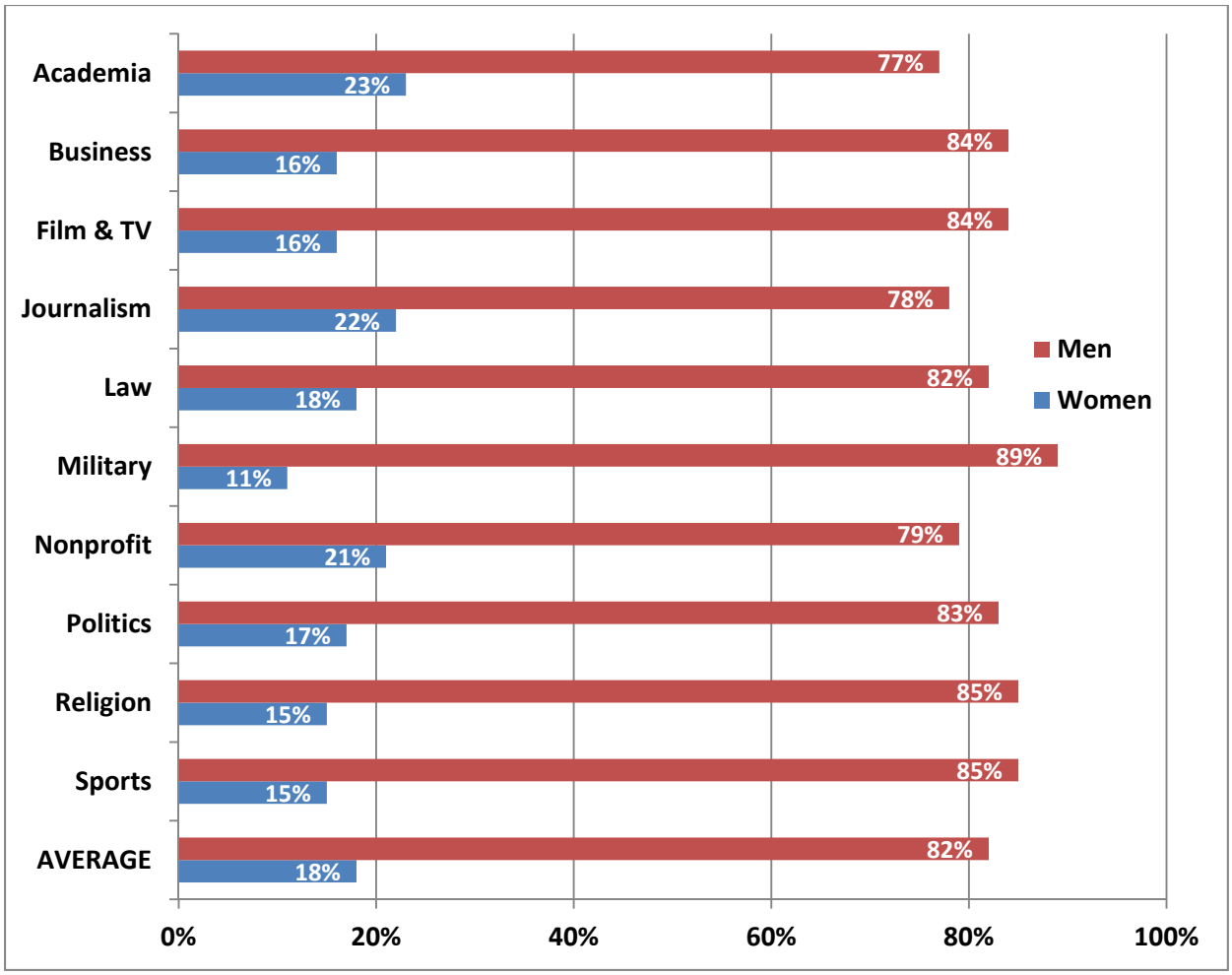

Figure 7. Percentage of Men and Women in Leadership by Sector (2009).

(The White House Project, 2009).

In a couple of these sectors, it may be argued that women are represented fairly in percentages of positions at the top, when considering percentages of women within the entire sector. For example, in the military, women account for 14 percent of enlisted personnel and 11 percent of top five officer categories (The White House Project, 2009). In politics, women hold 24 percent of seats on state legislatures and make up 17 percent of the House of Representatives and the Senate (The White House Project, 2009). However, women are not represented equitably in the majority of these sectors in comparison to the number of women within the sector as a whole. For example, even though the percentages of women serving as state and national legislators are

similar, there is not equitable representation in top political positions when compared to the percentage of women in the entire United States population (51 percent) (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2012). Similarly, though the vast majority of workers in the nonprofit sector are women (73 percent), men hold the majority of top leadership positions (79 percent) (The White House Project, 2009). Although women make up the majority of parishioners in churches and temples (60 percent), men dominate Protestant clergy and rabbi roles (85 percent). In addition some religions, such as Catholicism, Orthodox Judaism and Islam, prohibit women from serving in ministerial leadership roles.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

As Acker (1992a) notes, viewing social institutions as gendered raises the question of what extent the overall institutional structure and the character of institutions have been formed by and through gender. Collins (1986) and Smith (1987), pioneers of feminist standpoint theory, also believed that the structure of society was formed by men and for men. As Smith (1987) discussed, women have been largely excluded from society's ruling apparatus, which include varieties of administration, management, and professional organizations. These are the processes which perform the work of ruling in society. Smith (1987) believes that at best women have played a subordinate role in relation to this ruling apparatus. In other words, they have supported the work of men who have been the actors in the institutional processes of ruling. Individual women have been admitted to the ruling apparatus but only in special cases and never as a representative of her sex (Smith, 1987). With this background on how gender relates to institution structure and power, I next introduce the topic of gender-based leadership barriers which occur as women attempt to advance and succeed as leaders in our social institutions.

Gender-Based Leadership Barriers

How does the historical exclusion of women from society's ruling apparatus manifest itself in organizations today? Though strides have been made to increase representation of women in leadership positions, as we have seen, they continue to hold a minority of top leadership positions across all sectors (The White House Project, 2009). Women leaders face many barriers in their leadership work as a result of their gender (Chliwniak, 1997; Fletcher, 2001; Haveman & Beresford, 2012; Klenke, 1997; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007; Williams, 2001). These barriers provide evidence that institutions continue to be gendered, meaning that subordination and exclusion of women occurs as a part of ordinary institutional functioning (Acker, 1992a).

Women may face gender-based barriers in their leadership work. Gender-based leadership barriers are the barriers and adversities that women leaders may face as they strive to succeed and advance professionally. These barriers operate at different levels of society -- macro (societal), meso (organizational) and micro (individual). Macro level barriers include cultural constraints on women's own choices (Haveman & Beresford, 2012; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007), leadership perceptions (Lord, de Vader, & Alliger, 1986; Lucas & Baxter, 2012; Schein, 2001), and gender stereotyping (Hofstede, 2009; Pittinsky, et al., 2007; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Meso level barriers include tokenism (Klenke, 1997), exclusion from informal networks (Klenke, 1997), lack of mentorship opportunities (Catalyst, 2004; Noe, 1988), the disappearing of relational behavior (Fletcher, 2001), salary inequalities (Compton & Palmer, 2009), and discrimination (Klenke, 1997). Micro level barriers include work-family conflict (Klenke, 1997; Williams, 2001) and communication style (Chliwniak, 1997; Tannen, 1994). These barriers are explored in depth in Chapter 2 in the section entitled "Gender-Based Leadership Barriers."

The purpose of this study was to understand how women leaders in higher education have made meaning of their past or present adversities, which included gender-based leadership barriers they have encountered. In this study, gender-based leadership barriers were not considered as a definitive list of adversities which women leaders have faced. Instead they served as sensitizing concepts, or directions in which to look (Blumer, 1954), in the analysis of participant interviews. Now that I have touched on the concepts of gendered institutions and gender-based leadership barriers, I'll discuss the how gender diversity benefits organizations.

Gender Diversity

Men and women bring different task and interpersonal styles into the workplace due to their socialization. While men tend to be more self-assertive, dominant, independent and self-sufficient, women tend to be more self-less and concerned for others (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). In this section, I will explain the differences in men and women's socialization as it relates to their influence in groups and then discuss why gender diversity in groups (Bear & Woolley, 2011; Umans, Collin, & Tagesson, 2008; Welbourne, Cycyota, & Ferrante, 2007) and leadership (Bornstein, 2007; Eagly & Johnson, 1990) is good for organizations.

Socialization. Both men and women exert influence over groups, but they tend to do so differently due to their socialization. At a young age, girls learn that they are more effective when they phrase their ideas as suggestions instead of orders and give reasons for their suggestions in terms of the good of the group, whereas boys find it easier to use direct orders to gain a high-status position in a group (Tannen, 1994). As Tannen (1994) noted, boys' groups are more hierarchical, and boys tend to compete for center stage. Giving orders and telling others what to do helps boys to maintain their high-status role. Boys also learn to state their opinions in the strongest terms possible and find out if they are wrong by seeing if others challenge them. In

the workplace, many men make use of these strategies to communicate their confidence in order to ensure they are in the one-up position (Tannen, 1994).

Women also exert influence on groups, but they tend to do so in ways which deemphasize hierarchy. Women's typical socialization includes working in groups, expressing empathy, being inclusive, and helping others to succeed (Bornstein, 2007). These skills allow women to encourage relationship building and trust (Bornstein, 2007) among co-workers and stakeholders.

Groups. Various researchers (Bear & Woolley, 2011; Herring, 2009; Umans, et al., 2008; Welbourne, et al., 2007) have found that gender diversity benefits organizational groups. The presence of women in a group is associated with improved team collaboration which benefits team processes and performance (Bear & Woolley, 2011; Umans, et al., 2008; Welbourne, et al., 2007) through better innovation and problem-solving (Welbourne, et al., 2007). Herring (2009) found that gender diversity in the corporate world is associated with increased sales revenue, more customers, and greater relative profits. Welbourne, et al. (2007) conducted an exploratory study to examine the presence of women in top management teams of 534 initial public offering (IPO) firms and found that women had a positive association with firms' short-term performance, three-year stock price growth, and growth in earnings per share.

Although Welbourne, et al. (2007) could only speculate on the reasons for their findings, a prior study by Frink et al. (2003) supports their overall conclusion. Frink, et al. (2003) reviewed organizational performance and workforce composition using a sample of 291 organizations in 1991 and 410 randomly selected publicly traded firms from 1978 to 1992. The authors found a curvilinear relationship between gender diversity and organizational performance, with a point of inflection near the midpoint (equal proportions of males and

females). In addition, profitability was also curvilinearly related to proportion of females. Frink, et al. (2003) argued that increasing workforce participation of any group may result in a curvilinear relationship between demographic composition of the organization and outcomes. In other words, organizational performance may improve as the organization's demographic composition moves from homogeneity to heterogeneity (Frink, et al., 2003).

Whereas homogeneity may lead to greater group cohesion, it can also lead to less adaptability and innovation (Herring, 2009). Diversity often leads to more group conflict which benefits the organization as it forces members to go beyond easy solutions (Herring, 2009). Varying perspectives on problem solving yields different ideas, more creativity and better solutions (Coder, Rosenbloom, Ash, & Dupont, 2009; Herring, 2009; Indvik, 2001).

Leadership. Just as gender diversity in groups benefits organizations, gender diversity in leadership also benefits organizations. According to Rhode and Kellerman (2007), the influence of women holding leadership positions can make a crucial difference in promoting gender equality and improving organizational performance. In a meta-analysis, Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that when compared to men, women use leadership styles that are more participative and democratic and less autocratic and directive. Human-centered management theorists (Argyris, 1957; Barnard, 1938; Deming, 1986; Follett, 1924; Likert, 1961, 1967; Roethlisberger, 1968) have long advocated for this participative style of leadership which uses cooperation and collaboration to build relationships and trust among workers.

Gender diversity in higher education leadership yields specific benefits. Bornstein (2007) noted that as more women fill leadership roles in higher education, they are discarding traditional models of leadership derived from a history of male-dominated institutions and based on hierarchical, top-down, command and control structures. Increasingly, women leaders are

utilizing behaviors that are more comfortable for them, such as interactive, consultative, and relational leadership.

Bornstein's (2007) study of college and university presidents found that 41 percent of women and 25 percent of men applied the style of leadership appropriate to the situation. A situational, flexible leadership approach allows the leader to match her style to the changing needs of the institution (Bornstein, 2007). Increasing the representation of women in higher education leadership can expand ways of thinking and practice that lead to diverse perspectives which bring solutions to complex challenges (Collings, Conner, McPherson, Midson, & Wilson, 2011). For example, women leaders are often comfortable with collaborative and participatory leadership styles (Bornstein, 2007) which contribute to integrative solutions and are linked to high faculty morale (Wilcox & Ebbs, 1992). In addition, efforts to hire and promote women in higher education and the establishment of equitable salaries are two strategies which help to combat both overt sexism and covert discrimination (Wilcox & Ebbs, 1992).

When women in top-level leadership positions serve as role models and mentors to younger women, they can influence and inspire women of this generation and generations to come (The White House Project, 2009). In addition, as the gender balance in the workforce changes, the opportunity to work with talented women is a valuable experience for male students, faculty and staff (The White House Project, 2009).

Significance

Given that women are underrepresented in virtually every senior leadership position type in higher education (American Council on Education, 2012; King & Gomez, 2008) and gender diversity in leadership is beneficial for organizations (Bornstein, 2007; Eagly & Johnson, 1990), research is needed to learn how women can achieve and succeed in leadership positions in higher

education. This study examines how women have navigated through barriers and adversities, including those specific to their gender, to attain senior leadership positions in higher education and how they have constructed the meaning of their adversities. A goal of this study is to provide aspiring women leaders with strategies for navigating through their own personal and professional barriers and adversities. Discovering how women navigate through and make meaning of adversity may help more women reach the top levels of leadership. Closing the gender gap in higher education leadership may advance higher education as an institution and benefit students, faculty, staff and all institutional stakeholders.

Research on Women in Leadership

Now that we have discussed the importance of closing the gender gap in higher education leadership, I will describe the evolution of research on women in leadership. I will then outline the research question and objectives for this study.

According to Indvik (2001), research on women in leadership has evolved since the 1970s. Researchers first asked: Can women be leaders? Once this was answered affirmatively, the research trend shifted to asking: Do male and female leaders differ in their behavior and effectiveness? Any differences in behavior and effectiveness may provide insight into why women have been historically underrepresented in leadership positions. Research on this question alternated between demonstrating differences and demonstrating similarities between male and female leaders (Indvik, 2001).

Several meta-analyses have demonstrated that male and female leaders may be similar in behavior, cognition and affect (Indvik, 2001). In a meta-analysis of 160 prior studies, Eagly and Johnson (1990) found only one sex-related difference in leadership style: women used a more participative or democratic style than men did, although this tendency declined in male-

dominated settings. Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani (1995) reviewed 82 prior studies and concluded that male and female leaders did not differ in their overall effectiveness. Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) found differences in evaluations of male and female leaders. Although male and female leaders were evaluated equally favorably when they used a democratic or stereotypical feminine leadership style, only female leaders were evaluated unfavorably when they used an equivalent autocratic and directive or stereotypical masculine leadership style (Eagly, et al., 1992). This means that although women leaders may be relatively similar to men in behavior and effectiveness, the range of behaviors seen as appropriate for women leaders may be more limited (Indvik, 2001).

More recent research has focused on the following two questions: 1) Why do so few women leaders reach the top? and 2) How can more women leaders reach the top? (Indvik, 2001). Research on why so few women leaders reach the top has focused on the many barriers and adversities women face in aspiring to or serving in leadership positions (Chliwniak, 1997; Fletcher, 2001; Indvik, 2001; Klenke, 1997; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). These barriers and adversities can be brought together conceptually as "gender-based leadership barriers." Researchers studying how more women can reach the top have focused on commonalities of successful women leaders (Indvik, 2001). The outcome of this research has been strategies that organizations and individual women can use to remove barriers, develop effective relationships, and focus on and communicate individual strengths (Indvik, 2001). Commonalities and strategies of successful women leaders are important, but more insight may be gleaned by learning how women leaders make meaning of the barriers and adversities which they encounter, since meanings provide explanation and guidance for life experiences (Chen, 2001).

Given the relatively small number of women who advance to top leadership positions in higher education, there is much to be learned from hearing these women's stories and how they have made meaning of barriers and adversities that they have experienced. To date, there is no published empirical research on how women leaders in higher education make meaning of barriers or adversities they have faced. How do women leaders in higher education construct meaning of their experienced adversities? How has adversity helped or hindered these women in their leadership roles?

This study examines this issue with the research question of "How do women leaders in higher education make meaning of adversity experienced in their lives?" The research objectives included discovering:

- Adversities, barriers and obstacles experienced in the lives of these women
- Commonalities in adversity experienced by the women
- Strategies used to overcome or come back from these adversity experiences
- Meanings which the women construct from their adversity experiences as it relates to their overall lives, personal and professional

The purpose of this study is to understand what adversities and barriers are faced by women leaders in higher education and how these women made meaning of their experiences. What constitutes an adversity or barrier was determined by the women participating in this study. Using qualitative research, this study examines how the women construct their perceptions of experienced adversities, including implications for their lives and their interaction with others.

This chapter has established that women are underrepresented as leaders in all sectors, including higher education, detailed the importance of increasing gender diversity in higher education leadership, and outlined the research question and objectives for this study. The next

chapter overviews existing literature on meaning-making and gender-based leadership barriers followed by a discussion of prior studies on how individuals make meaning of adversity.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to discover how women leaders in higher education make meaning of adversity. In this chapter, I provide a literature review that supports the conceptual framework of this study. This chapter begins with an overview of meaning-making and its theoretical underpinnings (social constructivism, symbolic interactionism, and sensemaking) and examines how meaning-making relates to adversity. Then I discuss the history of women's involvement in higher education, both as students and faculty members, followed by gender-based leadership barriers, which are those barriers which prevent women from advancing to or succeeding in leadership positions. This chapter concludes with a review of previous research related to how individuals and leaders make meaning of adversity.

Meaning-Making

Human beings have a natural inclination to understand and make meaning out of their lives and experiences (Krauss, 2005). In fact, meaning-making is a central and defining activity of an individual's life (Mattis, 2002). According to Chen (2001), individuals draw meaning from and give meanings to their life events and experiences. These meanings provide explanation and guidance for life experiences (Chen, 2001). Meanings originate and evolve from each individual's subjective world (Krauss, 2005). Meaning is the underlying motivation behind thoughts, actions, and the interpretation and application of knowledge (Krauss, 2005). Meaning-making is an umbrella concept which includes the theories of symbolic interactionism, social constructivism, and sensemaking. After explaining each of these concepts, I will examine how meaning-making relates to adversity.

Symbolic Interactionism

The theory of symbolic interactionism forms the basis for understanding how meaning-making works. Individuals act towards people, things and situations based on the meanings they have for them, and not on the basis of the meanings that other people ascribe to the same people, things or situations (Blumer, 1969). In other words, the nature of any object or situation consists of what it means to the individual for whom it is an object or situation (Manning & Smith, 2010). To understand the action of an individual, it is necessary to see the object or situation as the individual sees the object or situation (Blumer, 1969).

According to Blumer (1969), meanings are central in their own right. Meanings are social products, derived from social interaction with other people. Individuals use interpretive processes to identify or modify meanings when dealing with people, things and situations. The process of interpretation has two steps. First, the individual uses an internalized social process to point out to himself that the things have meaning. Second, in communicating with himself, the individual selects, checks, drops, or modifies the meanings in response to his particular situation. This is a formative process in which meanings are used and revised to guide and direct action (Blumer, 1969). Therefore, meanings are produced as a continuing and contingent achievement (Manning & Smith, 2010).

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is another theoretical underpinning of meaning-making. From a social constructivist viewpoint, individuals make multiple subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell, 2009). Every individual makes their own sense of the world by constructing meanings in their mind of their unique experiences (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002). Each person's "way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other"

(Crotty, 1998, p.58). According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), individuals construct knowledge, including common sense knowledge of everyday reality, from social interactions. When people interact, they do so with the understanding that their respective perceptions of reality are related, and as they act upon this understanding, their common knowledge of reality is reinforced (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). There are three components to the process of social construction which individuals use to develop their social reality: externalization, objectivation, and internalization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Externalization. The stage at which individuals construct a piece of cultural knowledge about some aspect of the world is called externalization (Newman & Smith, 1999). According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), since the institutionalized world is already established, individuals experience it as an objective reality. Individuals externalize this institutionalized world. Institutions cannot be understood through introspection. Therefore, each individual must go out and actively learn about any aspect of the world which he or she desires to know (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In society, human beings fashion many possible explanations for why a particular situation occurs. The process of externalization occurs as individuals discover society's externalized explanations for why things happen (Newman & Smith, 1999).

Objectivation. Externalization leads to the second stage of reality construction: objectivation, which occurs when externalized products of human activity obtain objectivity (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The objectivity of the externalized world is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In other words, objectivation occurs when the "facts" that were originally an individual's ideas, speculations, or theories take on an objective reality of their own, independent of the individuals who first created (externalized) them (Newman & Smith, 1999).

Internalization. Internalization occurs when an individual interprets an objectivated event in the externalized social world as having or expressing meaning (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The individual finds a personal meaning of the event (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), which becomes embedded into the individual's subjective consciousness (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Johnson, 2008).

Sensemaking

In addition to social constructivism and symbolic interactionism, sensemaking theory also helps us understand the concept of meaning-making. According to Weick (1979), sensemaking occurs when humans form cognitive maps or images of particular aspects of their experience, and then order these experiences so that their lives make sense (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). This concept of cognitive maps is grounded in psychologist Frederic Barlett's (1932) idea of schemas. Schemas are organizations of individuals' past experiences and reactions (Bartlett, 1932). When there is an order or regularity to behavior, a particular response to a new event or stimuli occurs because it is related to previously organized responses which are operating as a single unitary mass or "schema" (Bartlett, 1932).

According to Demers (2007), these maps or interpretive schemes are very difficult to change significantly. Interpretive schemes act as organizing devices which constrain us from thinking in novel ways about situations. They focus our attention on elements which correspond to an existing schema at the expense of other non-corresponding elements, thus neglecting information that could challenge our worldview. These mental frameworks allow us to economize on time and effort and reduce anxiety as we make sense of the world. Therefore, we spend much effort trying to incrementally modify our mental structures to avoid having to discard them (Demers, 2007).

Although Weick (1995) was mainly concerned with collective sensemaking within organizations, his work offers some insight into how individuals make sense. As he stated, "people make sense of things by seeing a world on which they already imposed what they believe" (Weick, 1995, p. 15). Reality is continuously formed as individuals make retrospective sense of their own situations (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is not just an outcome; it is an ongoing process. Problems are situations that are "puzzling, troubling and uncertain" (Weick, 1995, p. 13). Individuals attempt to resolve the cognitive dissonance which results from problems through sensemaking, which includes looking for clues in the environmental context. As individuals make sense, there may be new events or triggers which affect the process and the sense. Sensemaking is an ongoing process because problems continue to arise as there is movement through time and space (Weick, 1995).

Sensemaking of surprise. Similar to Weick's (1995) assertion that sensemaking is an ongoing process, Louis (1980) also described sensemaking as a "recurring cycle comprised of a sequence of events occurring over time" (p. 241). Louis (1980) developed a model which describes how individuals make sense of surprise. Surprises occur when an individual experiences events that are different from his or her unconscious or conscious anticipations, assumptions and predictions. These discrepant events trigger a need for an explanation, which can also be thought of as an interpretation or meaning. To make sense, individuals rely on several inputs, including past experiences with similar situations, personal predispositions and beliefs, cultural assumptions and interpretive schemes, and information and interpretations from others. Based on meanings, an individual may select a course of actions for the situation, update his or her understandings of actors, actions and settings, and revise predictions about similar future experiences. The new anticipations and revised assumptions can be thought of as changes

to the individual's cognitive script (Louis, 1980), which is similar to Bartlett's (1932) schema and Weick's (1979) cognitive map. Now that we've discussed the concept of meaning-making in general, we'll turn to a discussion of meaning-making and adversity.

Meaning-Making and Adversity

Individuals may use the process of meaning-making to make sense of adversities which they face in their lives. Frankl (1963), who had been a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp, theorized about the role of meaning-making in promoting adjustment to adversity. Frankl (1963) concluded that the search for meaning is a primary human motivation that enables individuals to retain hope in the face of adversity. According to Taylor (1983), meaning is an effort to understand an adverse event: why it happened and what impact it has had. The search for meaning attempts to answer questions such as:

- What is the significance of the event?
- What caused the event to happen?
- What does my life mean now?
- How can I keep this or a similar event from happening again?
- What can I do to manage the adversity now? (Taylor, 1983)

Armour (2010) noted that meaning-making is essential when individuals experience adversity or trauma which violates their core assumptions about how the world works. An experience of adversity may cause an individual to feel insecure and vulnerable and to sense a harsh reality of the unpredictable nature of the world (Armour, 2010). Individuals may feel disoriented or distressed in their efforts to reconcile the reality of adversity with more benign preexisting worldviews (Armour, 2010).

During or after an experience of trauma, an individual uses meaning-making to attempt to adjust an existing interpretive scheme or to create new beliefs to achieve a closer match to an experienced reality (Armour, 2010). This corresponds to Weick's (1979) sensemaking theory. Sensemaking is particularly important in the process of making meaning of a traumatic event. The ability to make sense facilitates long-term adaptation by reducing fears of the recurrence of the experienced adversity (Armour, 2010).

Now that we have seen how meaning-making works and how it relates to adversity, the next section examines the history of women's education and their experience as faculty in institutions of higher education. Then I will discuss adversities and barriers which commonly affect women leaders, which will be followed by an overview of prior studies which relate to how leaders make meaning of adversity.

Historical Background

This section covers a brief history of women's education and an overview of the status of women faculty. Women's historical low rates of involvement in higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a) and faculty ranks (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a, 2010c) form a background for understanding the gender gap in higher education leadership which exists today (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Women's Education

From colonial times to the mid 1900s, women were excluded from various educational systems in the United States (Madigan, 2009; National Women's History Museum, 2007; Rosenberg, 1988; Solomon, 1985). Today women surpass men in earned bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a). This section provides a brief

overview of how this monumental shift took place and includes a discussion of women's preparedness for the leadership pipeline.

Pre-1800s. Harvard College, the first institution of higher education within the United States was founded in 1636. During the 17th and 18th century, eight more colleges were opened. During this period in American history, college was beyond the reach of most men due to their social status and women due to their gender (Solomon, 1985). At that time, women were often viewed as intellectually inferior to men, and there was a general belief that they belonged in the home (Rudolph, 1962). Education was reserved for cultured gentlemen (Chliwniak, 1997).

1800s. Common schools were opened in the 1820s to all children regardless of gender, socioeconomic class or race (Gutek, McCarthy, Quinn, Howey, & Post, 2002). However, the goal of educating women at that time was to cultivate skills related to making them better wives, homemakers and mothers (Chliwniak, 1997). Academies for girls, also known as seminaries, began to flourish in the early 19th century (National Women's History Museum, 2007). These were secondary schools which had the goal of offering women an education comparable to that of men (National Women's History Museum, 2007). By the mid-1800s, coeducation in primary and secondary schools became the norm in order to save costs in public education (National Women's History Museum, 2007).

In 1837, Oberlin College in Ohio enrolled four female freshman which was the beginning of coeducational higher education for women (Rudolph, 1962). However, courses at Oberlin College were restricted in that some courses were only open to men (National Women's History Museum, 2007). The first women pursued diplomas from the Ladies Course (Lasser, 1998), which emphasized motherhood over careers (National Women's History Museum, 2007).

According to Madigan (2009), the limited population in the western territories in the early and mid-1800s made coeducation more economical than single-gender institutions. This was not the case in the east where prestigious higher education institutions, such as Harvard, Columbia, and Brown, remained financially independent (Madigan, 2009). Separate counterparts to these institutions were formed which allowed women to participate, in a limited fashion, in the educational opportunities afforded to men (Madigan, 2009).

Between 1855 and 1870, eight state universities (Iowa, Wisconsin, Kansas, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Michigan and California) began accepting women (Chliwniak, 1997; Solomon, 1985). The private institutions, however, did not follow this pattern. As a result, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Wellesley, Barnard, Radcliffe, Vassar, and Bryn Mawr were established in the mid to late 1800s to provide women with single-gender university environments designed to meet their specific educational needs (Madigan, 2009).

By 1872, ninety-seven colleges and universities had decided to admit women (Rosenberg, 1988). Women's enrollment in higher education grew substantially from 11,126 in 1870 to 85,338 in 1900 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a), but there was a lack of role models of married women working outside the home. For example, only single women were able to teach at women's colleges (Chliwniak, 1997).

1900s. Despite the emergence of single-gender colleges for women, most public secondary schools and colleges had become predominantly coeducational by the turn of the 20th century (Madigan, 2009). However, at this time, only women of a pioneering spirit combined marriage and career (Solomon, 1985). Prejudices toward the employment and advancement of married women limited their professional opportunities (Chliwniak, 1997).

After World War II, the number of women in higher education increased both as a proportion of the age cohort and as a share of total enrollments. The expansion took place across curricular domains and included the most elite institutions (Meyer, Ramirez, Frank, & Schofer, 2007). Despite the expansion of women's role in society, as late as the mid-1960s girls were channeled into occupational choices that were limited to four categories: secretarial, nursing, teaching, or motherhood (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

A new women's movement began in the 1960s (Walter, 2003) which altered the role of women in American society (Walsh, 2010). More females than ever were entering the paid workforce, and this increased the dissatisfaction among women regarding gender disparities in pay and advancement and sexual harassment in the workplace (Walsh, 2010). The passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 prohibited sex discrimination in employment (National Archives, 2013). On college campuses, this movement led to demands for curriculum reform and an examination of the status and treatment of women students, faculty and administrators (Wirtenberg, Klein, Richardson, & Thomas, 1981).

The women's movement served as an impetus for legislation related to the fair treatment of women in educational settings (Wirtenberg, et al., 1981). In 1972, Title IX made it illegal for any educational institution receiving federal funds to discriminate on the basis of sex in school athletics, financial aid, career counseling, admission practices, and the treatment of students (Madigan, 2009; Wirtenberg, et al., 1981). In addition, the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) of 1974 provided support to assist schools in the recruitment of girls for math, science, and athletic programs (Madigan, 2009; Wirtenberg, et al., 1981). This program provided funding to train teachers in gender-equitable instructional techniques (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Despite federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex, educational disparities between males and females continued throughout the 1970s (Wirtenberg, et al., 1981). For example, in 1970, women made up only 40 percent of undergraduates at higher education institutions (Chliwniak, 1997). By 1979, although males and females were graduating from high school in equal proportions, the higher the level of education, the more likely women were to be underrepresented relative to their proportion of the population (Wirtenberg, et al., 1981). During the 1970s, many parents still saw careers and even professional development as secondary to becoming a wife and mother, which meant that the importance of studying after high school was often discounted for girls (Chliwniak, 1997).

Women made substantial educational progress in the 1980s and 1990s. By 1980, more women (51 percent) than men enrolled in college (National Women's History Museum, 2007). By 1995, the large gaps between the education levels of women and men that were evident in the early 1970s essentially disappeared. Although they still lagged behind males in mathematics and science, high school females on average outperformed males in reading and writing and took more credits in academic subjects. In addition, females were more likely than males to attend college after high school and as likely to graduate with a college degree.

The conversation about the place of women in higher education and society continued near the end of the 20th century. Although it became socially acceptable for women to attain advanced degrees and develop careers, marriage continued to be considered the primary sphere for women in the United States (Chliwniak, 1997). In 1991, young college women placed a long marriage with healthy children at a higher priority than a career (Chliwniak, 1997). According to a *Time Magazine* (2011) poll about what parents value for their own daughters, 63 percent of men ranked a happy marriage with children first as did 56 percent of women. Although parents

may take pride in their daughters' achievements, they may also worry about possible sacrifice of family for a career (Milwid, 1990).

2000s. According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Education (2010a), American women had caught up with men in attainment of bachelor's and master's degrees in the 1980s and now outpace them, as shown in Figure 8. By 2008-2009, women earned 57 percent of bachelor's degrees and 60 percent of master's degrees. Women have also surpassed men in earned doctorates, reaching 52 percent in 2008-2009 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a).

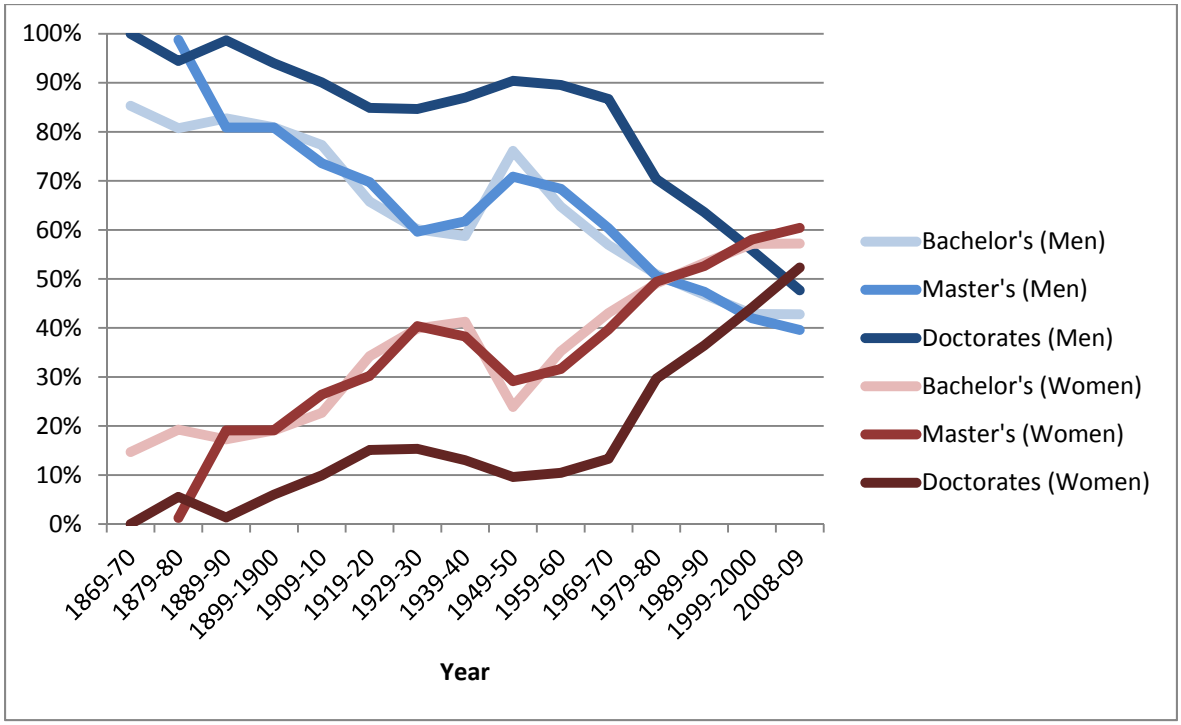

Figure 8. Percentage of College Degrees Awarded to Men and Women (1869-2009). (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a).

Leadership Pipeline. The term "leadership pipeline" describes a strategy for organizations to identify and groom employees at every level to move up to the next rung of leadership (Charan, Drotter, & Noel, 2001). As the rates of educational attainment demonstrate, sufficient numbers of women are acquiring the education needed to qualify for the leadership

pipeline. They are outpacing men in competitive admission to college and in earning post-graduate and professional degrees (The White House Project, 2009). Women are in the leadership pipeline, making up 48 percent of the labor force and 51 percent of all management, administrative, and professional positions (The White House Project, 2009). However, as shown in Figure 6, women make up an average of only 18 percent of top leadership positions across all sectors. This demonstrates what Northouse (2010) has noted--the pipeline for leadership positions is leaking.

Women Faculty

The historical overview of women in faculty positions will help us to understand the current status of the higher education leadership pipeline. Women have gained ground in the past 140 years in their overall representation in faculty positions. In 1869, women held 12 percent of faculty positions, whereas in 2009, women held 47 percent of faculty positions (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a, 2010c). There are almost equal numbers of women serving as faculty members in higher education as there are men, as shown in Figure 9. However, while today they may be almost equal in overall numbers, inequalities continue to exist in promotion, tenure, status and pay. This section will overview the progression of women as faculty members from the 1800s to today, followed by a discussion of the higher education leadership pipeline.

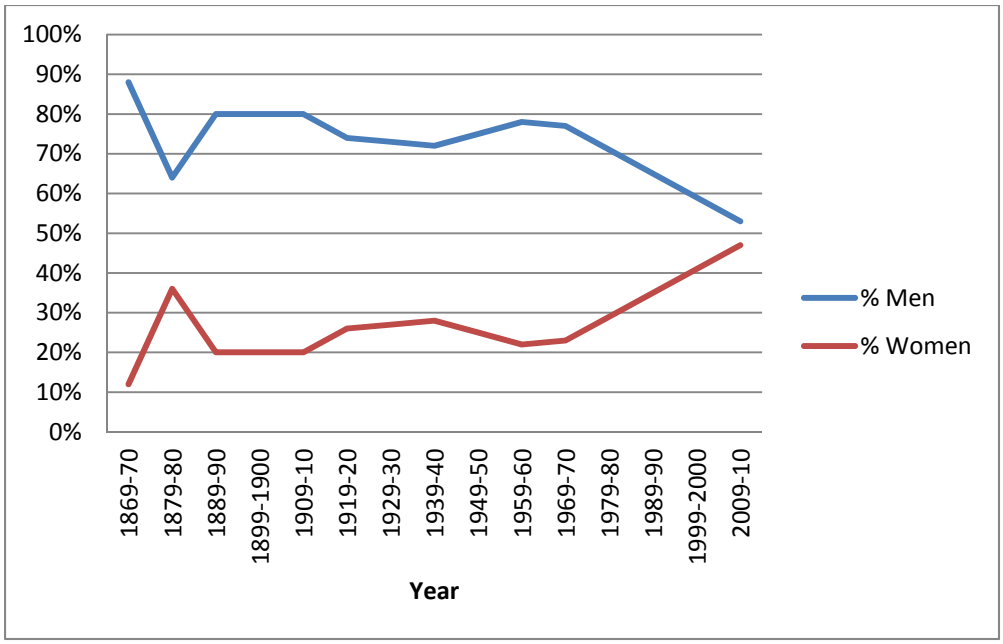

Figure 9. Percentage of Men and Women Faculty in Higher Education (1870-2010). (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a, 2010c).

1800s. Although more women entered colleges and universities during the late 1800s, female faculty at women's schools presented limited role models for their students due to the limitation of only single women having access to academic posts at women's colleges (Solomon, 1985). There was also no model for married, female faculty in public universities (Chliwniak, 1997).

1900s. Growth in the numbers of female faculty was slow at the turn of the 20th century. In 1890, there were 7,358 men and 4,194 women faculty, but by 1910 there were 19,151 men and only 4,717 women faculty (Smith, 1990). Male faculty had increased by two and one-half times to accommodate the growth in higher education, but women had increased by a mere 10.5 percent (Chliwniak, 1997). By 1940 women accounted for 28 percent of faculty, however this percentage was not reached again until the beginning of the 1990s (Solomon, 1985; U.S. Department of Education, 2010a, 2010c).

Salary inequities existed for those women who worked in institutions of higher education in the early 1900s. A study of 50 land-grant institutions revealed that median salaries in 1927-28 for women faculty were $860 less than for men (Graham, 1978). Adjusting for inflation, $860 in 1927 equates to $11,372 in 2012 dollars (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). Salary inequities were more pronounced at higher faculty ranks. In 1927-28, women instructors earned 97 percent of men instructors' salaries, while women professors earned 87 percent of male professor salaries. Women in the faculty leadership position of dean earned only 78 percent of what male deans earned (Graham, 1978).

During the mid-1900s, Ivy League schools, those considered the most prestigious institutions of higher education, were very resistant to the admission of women faculty. In 1976, the proportion of women in the arts and sciences faculties at Harvard was three percent; at Yale, two percent; at Princeton, one percent; at Stanford, five percent; at Berkeley, six percent; at Chicago, five percent; and at Columbia, five percent (Graham, 1978). At this time women made up only 24 percent of college and university faculties across the United States (Graham, 1978).

By the end of the 20th century, women gained ground in their representation in faculty positions. In 1979, 29 percent of faculty were women, and this percentage steadily increased to 41 percent by 1999 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a, 2010c).

2000s. Between 1999 and 2009, women faculty increased their representation from 41 percent to 47 percent. However, there was a disparity by type of institution. In 2008-09, women filled more than 54 percent of faculty positions at associate's level institutions, but only 44 percent of faculty positions in public and private not-for-profit four-year institutions, (U.S. Department of Education, 2010c) which includes baccalaureate, master's level and doctorate-

granting institutions. At doctorate- granting research institutions in 2006, women held only 20 percent of full professor positions (Bilen-Green, Froelich, & Jacobson, 2008).

Higher Education Leadership Pipeline. Statistics of women working in higher education enable us to get a sense of the leadership pipeline in higher education. Although there has been a steady increase of women faculty since the 1960s, and women now make up 47 percent of faculty positions (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a, 2010c), they are not yet on par with men when it comes to promotions and tenure status.

Tenure is a status granted to college and university faculty as a lifetime contract between the individual faculty member and the institution. It serves as the primary safeguard for academic freedom (Hutcheson, 2003). Colleges and universities hire faculty members into both non-tenure-track and tenure-track positions. Although women represent more than half of non-tenure-track positions, making up 53 percent of lecturers and 55 percent of instructors, these positions do not consistently lead to promotions to higher ranks of academia (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d).

Tenure-track positions have defined promotional paths, typically leading from assistant professor to associate professor to full professor. The number of women serving in these positions declines as they move up the ranks. As shown in Figure 10, as of 2009, women made up 48 percent of assistant professors, 41 percent of associate professors, and only 28 percent of full professors (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d).

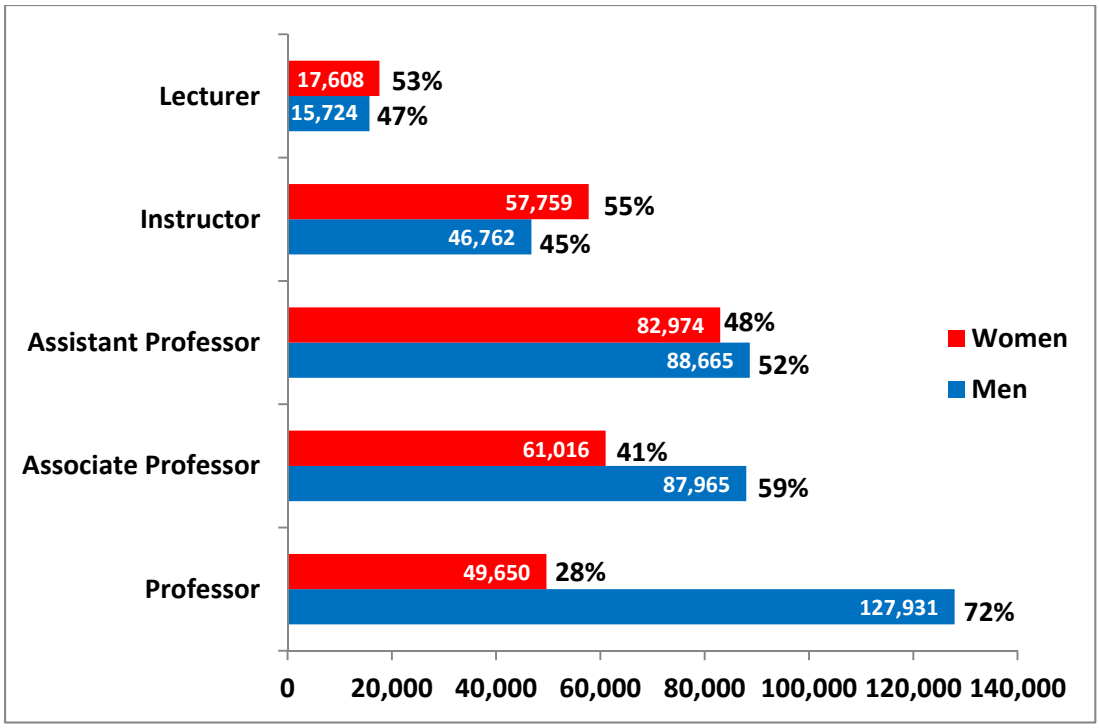

Figure 10. Number and Percentages of Faculty Positions by Gender and Rank (2009). (U.S. Department of Education, 2010d).

Not only do women make up lesser percentages of tenure-track faculty, but they also earn lower pay in faculty positions at all levels. As shown in Figure 11, as of 2010-11, women are closest to parity with men at the instructor level, where they earn 95 percent of what men earn. At the assistant and associate levels, they earn only 93 percent of what men earn. At the highest faculty rank of full professor, women's average salary drops to 86 percent of men's average salary (U.S. Department of Education, 2012b).

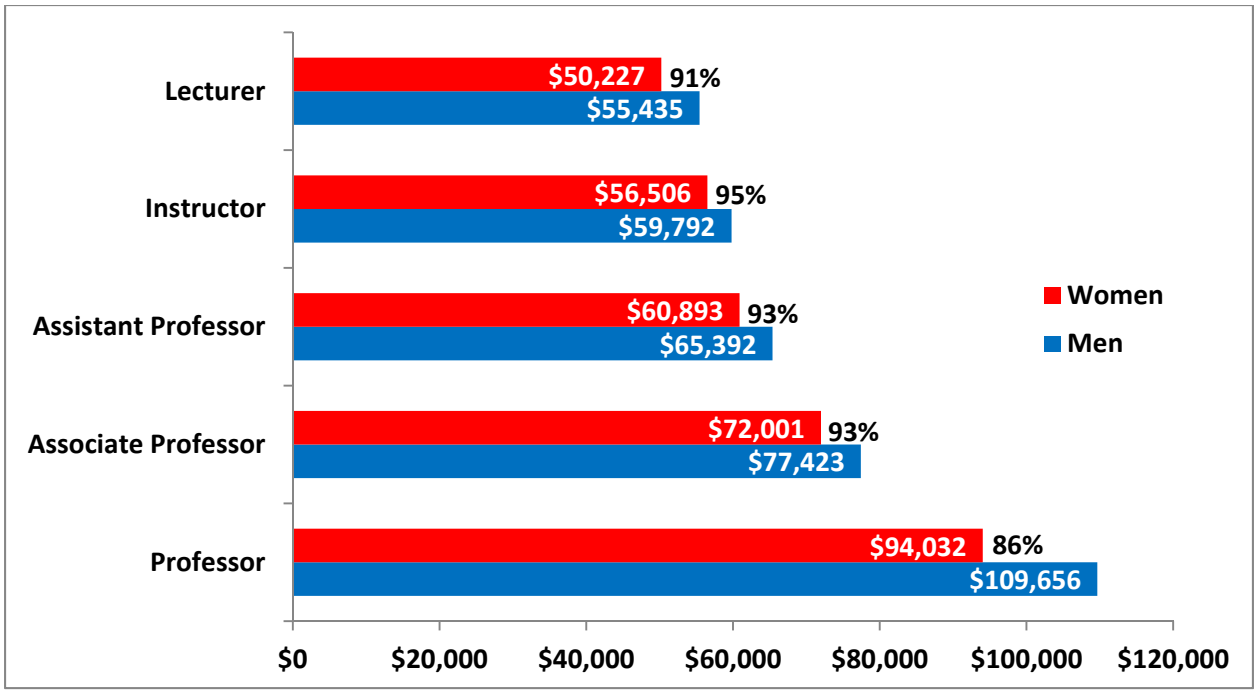

Figure 11. Average Salary of Full-Time Instructional Faculty by Academic Rank and Gender and Female-to-Male Faculty Earnings Ratio by Academic Rank (2010-2011). (U.S. Department of Education, 2012b).

Using data from 1971-1989, Kahn (1993) found that female faculty, entering the job market directly after obtaining a Ph.D., were less likely to enter tenure-track faculty jobs and had a harder time and took longer to achieve tenure once they were in tenure-track positions. Reasons why it is more difficult for women to achieve tenure include career interruptions for child birth and rearing, domestic responsibilities (Bilen-Green, et al., 2008; Goulden, Mason, & Frasch, 2011; Mason & Goulden, 2004), the expectation to work more than a 40-hour week (Easterly & Ricard, 2011; Goulden, et al., 2011; Mason & Goulden, 2004), women's socialization as supportive rather than dominant (Bilen-Green, et al., 2008), and gender bias which leads to unconscious overrating of the work-related behavior men and underrating of the work-related behavior of women (Bilen-Green, et al., 2008; Easterly & Ricard, 2011).

Harvard University serves as an example of difficulties women can face in obtaining tenure. Harvard did not grant tenure to women until 1956, when astronomer Cecilia Payne-Gaposhkin became the first woman appointed to a tenured faculty position. In the early 1980s, Harvard turned down sociologist Theda Skocpol in her tenure bid, even though she was highly regarded in the discipline and had achieved a national reputation for her work (Aronowitz, 2000). Skopcol filed a grievance alleging sexual discrimination against Harvard (Aronowitz, 2000; Jacobs, 2006). According to Jacobs (2006), the Skocpol affair stands as a reminder of a tense period for female scholars at Harvard. In the 1979-1980 academic year, only 12 out of 356 tenured faculty at Harvard were women. By 2006, the number of Harvard women faculty with tenure had increased, but they were still a minority, 90 out of 483, which is a mere 19 percent (Jacobs, 2006).

At a national level, the percentages of tenured women faculty have improved, but women continue to be in the minority. Women made up 20 percent of tenured faculty in 1980, 32 percent in 2006, and 34 percent in 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Women are less likely to achieve a tenured faculty position at doctorate-granting research institutions. In 2006, only 27 percent of women at doctorate-granting institutions were tenured (Bilen-Green, et al., 2008). Since a majority of university presidents are hired from within academia, and 69 percent have faculty experience (American Council on Education, 2007), this gender gap in tenured faculty positions is likely to contribute to the gender gap in higher education leadership positions.

Gender-Based Leadership Barriers

Now that we have reviewed women's historical progress in education and access to faculty positions, we can consider what barriers contribute to the gender gap for leadership positions. Gender-based leadership barriers are the barriers and adversities that women leaders

may face as they strive to succeed and advance in leadership. These barriers relate to women who aspire to leadership or who currently serve in a leadership position.

Taken together, gender-based leadership barriers contribute to the "glass ceiling." The glass ceiling is an invisible barrier built into the social structure of organizations that women face in gaining entry into top management positions regardless of their accomplishments or merits (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986; U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). The *Report on the Glass Ceiling Initiative* (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991) found that the glass ceiling existed at management levels much below the executive suite. Lynn Martin, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, wrote that the lack of women and minorities in management hinders society and individuals, as it cuts the pool of potential leaders by eliminating half of the population. This deprives our economy of new leaders and new sources of creativity (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). As we have seen, the glass ceiling continues to persist today with women holding only between 11 percent to 23 percent of top leadership positions depending on the sector (The White House Project, 2009).

For the purposes of this study, gender-based leadership barriers were used as sensitizing concepts during the analysis of participant interviews. A sensitizing concept is "a starting point in thinking about a class of data of which the social researcher has no definite idea and provides an initial guide to her research" (Van den Hoonaard, 1997, p. 2). Sensitizing concepts are not definitive; they merely suggest directions along which to look (Blumer, 1954). As mentioned previously, each of my participants defined what constituted a barrier or an adversity in her own life.

A review of existing literature reveals that there are many gender-based barriers which women leaders may encounter in their leadership work. These barriers can be organized by the

societal level in which they generally operate. The societal levels are macro (societal), meso (group), and micro (individual). In some cases, gender-based leadership barriers may cross societal levels. For example, a macro level gender stereotype may affect micro level interaction between individuals. However, for the purposes of developing a conceptual framework, these barriers are organized by the societal level in which the barrier generally operates, as shown in Figure 12. Therefore, a gender stereotype is considered a macro level barrier, since stereotypes are relatively fixed and oversimplified generalizations about a class or group of people (2012c) which may operate throughout an entire society.

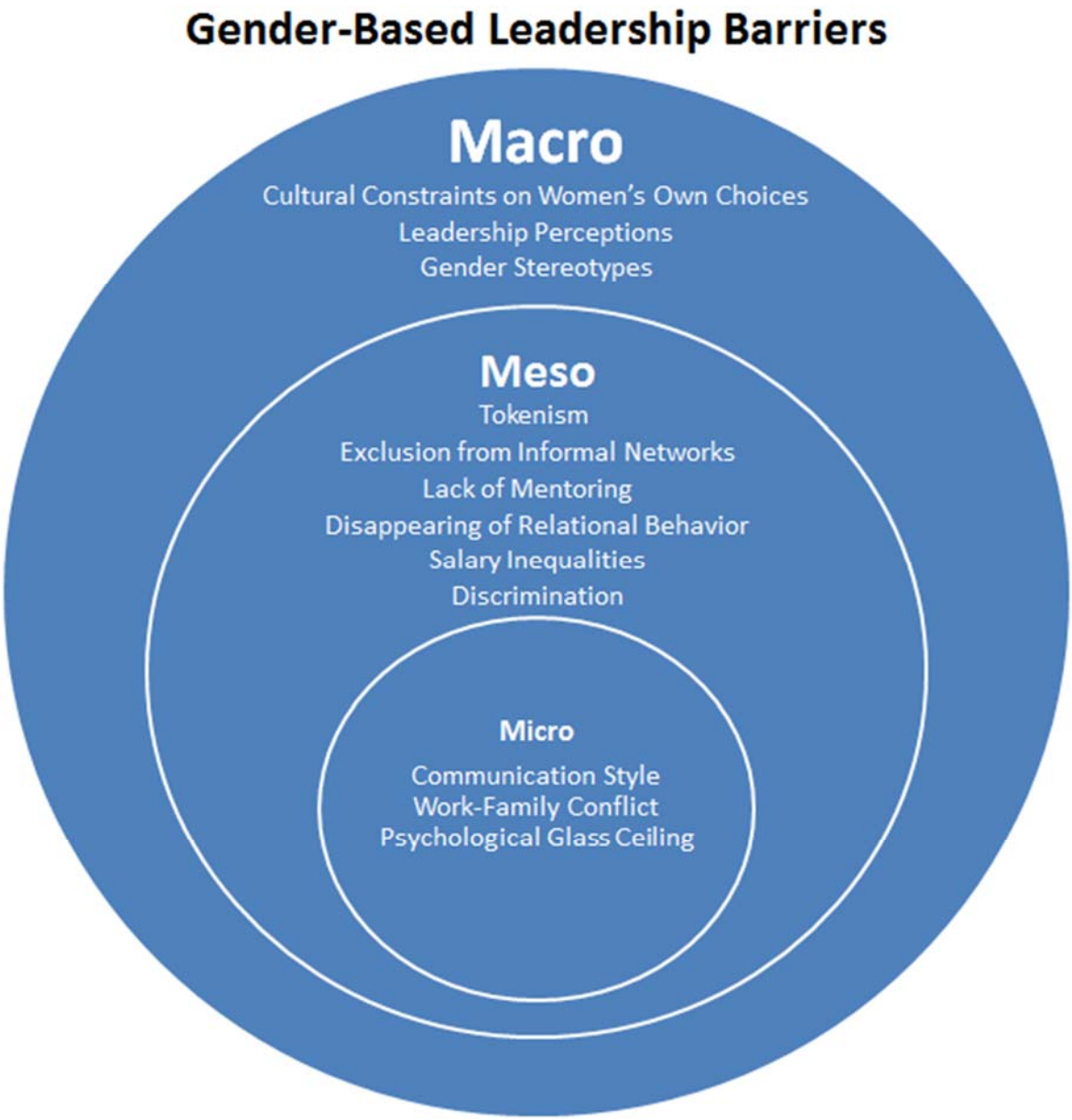

Figure 12. Gender-Based Leadership Barriers by Level of Society.

Macro Level Barriers

Barriers operating in society as a whole prevent women from advancing or succeeding in leadership. Macro level barriers include cultural constraints on women's own choices (Haveman & Beresford, 2012; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007), leadership perceptions (Lord, et al., 1986; Lucas

& Baxter, 2012; Schein, 2001), and gender stereotyping (Hofstede, 2009; Pittinsky, et al., 2007; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007).

Cultural constraints on women's own choices. An initial issue for consideration in explaining underrepresentation in leadership positions involves the role of women's own choices. Women may choose their field of study, type of job, how much to work and whether to work outside the home; however their choices are constrained by culture (Haveman & Beresford, 2012). As Haveman and Beresford (2012) found, cultural schemas related to gender roles and gender norms feed stereotypes of men as managers which can prevent women from aspiring to or attaining top management positions. Cultural schemas which relate to the vertical gender gap in management include the ideas that men are better at math and science than women, that men belong at work and women belong at home, and that men are better managers and leaders (Haveman & Beresford, 2012).

In addition to choices related to their education and work, women may make choices about their family roles. Women who do not opt out of demanding professional positions are more likely to opt out of demanding family obligations. For example, in a study of tenured faculty members in the University of California system, half of the women but only a quarter of the men were childless (Mason & Goulden, 2004). Women's choices must be understood within the broader cultural context and constraints they face, including gender bias in leadership opportunities, gender roles in families, inflexibility of workplace structures, and inadequacies in social policies (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Therefore, it is the cultural constraints on women's choices, and not necessarily the choices themselves, that may form a barrier preventing access to leadership positions.

Leadership perceptions. Leadership perceptions create another macro level gender-based leadership barrier. According to Lord, de Vader and Alliger's (1986) meta-analysis of the relationship between personality traits and leadership perceptions, the traits of potential leaders affect the extent to which they are perceived as leaders by others. These results pertain to leadership perceptions, not effectiveness or group performance. Leadership perceptions are important in their own right as they are a major component of the social fabric of many organizations. Being perceived as a leader allows one to exert greater influence (Lord, et al., 1986). Masculinity-femininity and dominance are two traits that were significantly related to leadership perceptions (Lord, et al., 1986; Mann, 1959).

Masculinity-femininity refers to the extent to which an individual's interests or preferences resemble those common to his own or the opposite sex, whereas dominance relates to dominance or ascendance versus submissiveness or helplessness (Mann, 1959). The analyses of Mann (1959) and Lord, et al. (1986) indicate that having masculine and dominance traits increase an individual's likelihood of being perceived as a leader. Tannen (1994) noted that the very image of authority is also associated with masculinity both in appearance (being tall, heftier build, lower-pitched voice) and linguistic systems (use of authoritative speech without softeners, mitigation or politeness).

The concept of gendered institutions helps us to understand why leadership is associated with masculinity. According to Acker (1992a), images of masculinity pervade many institutional areas. The leader and the successful organization are often portrayed as aggressive, goal oriented, competitive and efficient but rarely as supportive, kind and caring (Acker, 1992a). Although the appearance of gender neutrality may be maintained, in reality gendered structures are present (Acker, 1992a). For example, the concept of a job is gendered, in spite of its presentation as

gender neutral, because only a male worker, whose work is his life and whose wife takes care of everything else, can meet its implicit demands (Acker, 1992b)

In the early 1970s, (Schein (1973), 1975)) identified sex typing as a psychological barrier to the advancement of women in the United States. Put simply, sex typing is a stereotype that associates management with masculinity. This phenomenon can foster bias against women in management or leadership selection and promotion (Schein, 2001). More recent studies have found that while women do not believe that requisite management characteristics are more likely to be ascribed to men, men continue to hold this view (Brenner, Tomkiewicz, & Schein, 1989; Dodge, Gilroy, & Fenzel, 1995). Eagly and Karau (2002) argued that prejudice against female leaders stems from the perception that women, compared to equivalent men, have less agency and are more relational, and therefore women are less qualified for leadership, especially the most senior roles.

Relative social group status also relates to perceptions of women in leadership positions. Lucas and Baxter (2012) made the point that that despite women outperforming men educationally, men retain a higher status in society than women. Individuals in low-status social groups, such as women, tend to be evaluated as less effective when they are in positions of power, such as leadership. In addition, their power is perceived as illegitimate meaning that they must use their power more to show that they have it, and they suffer status loss from the use of power (Lucas & Baxter, 2012).

Gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are another macro level gender-based leadership barrier. Gender stereotypes are exaggerated images of men and women deployed repeatedly in everyday life (2009). Although gender stereotypes can cause effects within

organizations (meso level) and between individuals (micro level), they are considered macro level barriers because they may also operate across an entire society.

Traditional stereotypes in the United States leave women with a double standard and a double bind. What is assertive in a man can appear abrasive in a woman (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). However, female leaders risk appearing too feminine or not feminine enough (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Aspiring female leaders often must choose between being liked but not respected or respected but not liked, in settings which may require both in order to succeed (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). As we will see, gender stereotypes for leadership typically do not correspond with feminine traits and are prescriptive in nature. They may produce a psychological glass ceiling in women, and they form another leadership barrier for women.

Leadership stereotypes. Attitudes toward self-promotion reflect a mismatch between stereotypes associated with leadership and those associated with femininity (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). In United States culture, women are expected to be caring (Hofstede, 2009) and nurturing, not self-serving (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Entrepreneurial behaviors viewed as appropriate in men are often viewed as distasteful in women (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Butler (as cited in Klenke, 1997) found that traditionally women have been socialized to be nurturing, likeable, affectionate, soft-spoken, warm, yielding, selfless, gentle, compassionate, and dependent rather than ambitious, aggressive, dominant, self-reliant, strong, individualistic and independent.

Van Nostrand (as cited in Klenke, 1997) defined the four Ds of gender stereotypes in language: dominating, detaching, deferring, and diagnosing. Men attempt to maintain privilege and entitlement in conversations either by dominating the group or by detaching and distancing themselves from it. Women often prefer to accommodate by deferring to others and diagnosing

dysfunctional group processes. Each of these behaviors represents patterns of speech through which men and women attempt to gain control over group processes (Klenke, 1997).

While men act competitively in organizations (Hofstede, 2009), using language to gain and maintain status, women communicate to create connection. According to gender stereotypes, the "masculine" behaviors (Lord, et al., 1986; Mann, 1959) of assertiveness (Hofstede, 2009), decisiveness (Acker, 1992b; Hofstede, 2009) and dominance (Lord, et al., 1986; Mann, 1959) which are expected of a leader are not typically ascribed to or expected from women (Klenke, 1997).

Switching or adopting behaviors stereotypically associated with male leaders can be problematic for a woman serving in a leadership capacity (Klenke, 1997). Eagly, et al. (1992) found that women were more likely to be evaluated negatively when they exhibited a masculine leadership style than when they exercised leadership in a more stereotypic female way (ie: task vs interpersonal orientation).

According to Pittinsky, et al. (2007), positive stereotypes about women leaders can disproportionately hurt women who do not possess or publicly express those characteristics or traits. Women are often overlooked for leadership situations that call upon traits and styles with which they are not typically associated, and when they particularly excel at leadership not considered feminine, they are penalized. Positive stereotypes place women on a very precarious pedestal, one that may not be adaptive to women's longer-term integration into leadership roles (Pittinsky, et al., 2007).

As Rhode and Kellerman (2007) noted, aspiring female leaders in male-dominated settings are often subject to special scrutiny and polarized assessments. Gender stereotypes are particularly strong when women's representation does not exceed token levels because too few

counterexamples are present to challenge conventional assumptions. The presence of a few highly regarded women at the top creates the illusion that the glass ceiling has been shattered for everyone else. When women in top positions fail or drop out, their departures attract particular notice and reinforce stereotypes about women's lesser capabilities and commitments (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007).

Prescriptive stereotypes. Fiske (2012) noted that the problem with gender stereotypes is that they are prescriptive. A descriptive stereotype says what a group does. However, prescriptive stereotypes say what a group *should* do. Typical gender stereotypes are highly prescriptive, specifying that traditional women, such as housewives and secretaries, are preferable to nontraditional women, such as professional women, feminists, and intellectuals. Traditional women are seen as warm and cooperative but not high in competence. In contrast, nontraditional women are viewed as cold and competitive as well as competent. In short, nontraditional women threaten male dominance. Female professionals, intellectuals, and trades-women compete for traditional male roles while feminists challenge male power. These women are stereotyped as threateningly competent but not nice. In the workplace, agentic, effective women are often viewed as competent but cold when compared to agentic men, and social skills become more important than competence in hiring decisions involving agentic women (Fiske, 2012).

Leadership barrier. Because gender stereotypes operate on unconscious levels, and selections for leadership positions involve subjective and confidential judgments, the extent of the bias is difficult to assess (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). The implications of gender stereotype research are that behaviors that violate gender role assumptions will elicit penalties such as social rejection and negative evaluations (Klenke, 1997). Although women have achieved greater

equity in the workplace, institutions are still gendered in that they continue to be dominated by males (Acker, 1992a). According to Klenke (1997), the social values and enabling organizational structures needed to promote equality will continue to emerge at a very slow pace as long as the debate about women's qualifications for leadership is deeply entrenched in gender stereotypes, perceptions and attitudes, rather than in actual experiences with women leaders. Although the extent that gender stereotypes prevent women from aspiring to and attaining leadership positions is difficult to assess, it is clear that gender stereotypes represent another barrier to women aspiring to or serving in leadership positions.

Meso Level Barriers

Many gender-based leadership barriers operate at the level of groups and organizations. These meso level barriers include tokenism (Klenke, 1997), exclusion from informal networks (Klenke, 1997), lack of mentoring (Catalyst, 2004; Noe, 1988), the disappearing of relational practice (Fletcher, 1998, 2001), salary inequalities (Compton & Palmer, 2009), and discrimination (Klenke, 1997).

Tokenism. One meso level barrier which women encounter is tokenism. When members of a certain gender or ethnicity comprise less than 15 percent of a population in any group, they have "token" status (Kanter, 1977b). The dominant group becomes the defining group, the highest and best category (Keto, 1989). All other groups are judged solely on the majority group standards. Because tokens exist in small numbers, the rest of the group often puts them in the position of representing their entire category, whether the tokens want to or not (Broughton & Miller, 2009; Kanter, 1977b; Klenke, 1997; Powell, 2011).

As Kanter (1977a) described, visibility creates performance pressures on the token. Female token leaders often find themselves in the organizational spotlight (Kanter, 1977a;

Klenke, 1997). Their actions are routinely scrutinized, they have a special set of performance standards, and they are isolated and evaluated on the basis of gender stereotypes (Broughton & Miller, 2009; Kanter, 1977a; Klenke, 1997). O'Leary and Hansen (1982) noted that female tokens are also expected to side with the male majority and conform to the prevailing stereotype. Because the differences between the token and the rest of the group are exaggerated, tokens often have a difficult time gaining group acceptance and may be excluded from group activities (Kanter, 1977a; Klenke, 1997).

Broughton and Miller's (2009) international comparative study of senior managers in five countries revealed that the experience of being the only woman in a senior organizational structure resulted in a sense of isolation and loneliness. Some of the study participants knew that they had been chosen as a token to improve their company's public image (Broughton & Miller, 2009).

C.L. Williams' (1995) study of men who work in fields dominated by women, such as nursing, teaching, social work and librarianship, found that token men do not experience the negative effects of tokenism. Because masculinity is more highly valued than femininity even in predominantly female occupations, it is acceptable for token men to highlight their distinctiveness from the female majority. The token men in the study perceived their token status as either benign or beneficial to their careers, and they felt fully accepted by their female colleagues. They were even included in informal social events such as baby showers and Tupperware parties. In the study, the token men described how their female colleagues cast them into informal leadership roles, which enhanced their authority and control in the workplace (Williams, 1995). This differential treatment contributes to a "glass escalator effect" (Williams, 1995, p. 100), which facilitates token men's career advancement.

Cohen and Swim's (1995) study of male and female tokenism in group problem-solving tasks found that merely anticipating a role as a token woman induces negative expectations. The token women expected to be stereotyped more than the nontoken (male) group members. These results imply that women, particularly those lacking confidence in their abilities, may avoid situations with such unpleasant circumstances, and may self-select out of prestigious positions and careers due to their understanding of the dynamics of male-dominated groups (Cohen & Swim, 1995).

Exclusion from informal networks. Limited access to informal networks represents another meso level gender-based leadership barrier. Networking is an informal process which serves critical functions in career development and advancement. The benefits are information exchange, career planning and strategizing, professional support and encouragement, increased visibility, and upward mobility (Klenke, 1997).

In a study released by Catalyst (2004), a nonprofit research and advisory organization, 77 percent of women in senior corporate leadership positions viewed exclusion from informal networks as a barrier to women's advancement. Only 39 percent of men in senior corporate leadership positions viewed exclusion from informal networks as a barrier to women, suggesting that women are more aware of how their outsider status may hinder their careers (Catalyst, 2004). As mentioned, Williams (1995) found that token men working in predominantly female fields may not experience this same outsider status, as they are often included in informal social events with women.

Women's limited access to informal networks creates multiple disadvantages, including restricted knowledge of what is going on in the organization, difficulty in finding mentors (Burke

& McKeen, 1990; Noe, 1988) and difficulty in forming alliances which, in turn, are associated with limited mobility and the glass ceiling effect (Klenke, 1997; O'Leary & Ickovics, 1992).

Lack of mentoring. Just as lack of access to informal networks creates a barrier to the ability of women to advance in leadership, so does lack of opportunities for mentoring. Mentoring relationships boost employee motivation, career progress, and job performance and enhance promotional decision-making and retention rates in organizations (Klenke, 1997). Zey (1988) found that both the employee and the organization profit from these relationships. Mentoring promotes the development of corporate leaders, integrates employees into the organization, fosters creativity and commitment, and keeps the lines of communication open (Klenke, 1997; Zey, 1988).

Mentoring serves both career and psychosocial functions. In terms of career, mentors can provide nominations for career-enhancing projects, lateral moves, appointments to organizational task forces, and promotions (Klenke, 1997). In terms of psychosocial support, the mentor is a role model who conveys acceptance and models behaviors and attitudes consistent with the culture of the organization (Klenke, 1997).

As Wasburn (2007) noted, mentoring is often thought of as an informal process in which mentoring relationships form spontaneously. Successful mentoring relationships involve common goals, compatible personalities and luck. In many cases, informal mentoring relationships are more effective than formal programs (Wasburn, 2007).

In another study conducted by the Catalyst (2004) organization, 63 percent of women in senior corporate leadership positions viewed lack of mentoring as a barrier to women’s advancement, and 68 percent viewed lack of women role models as a barrier. Recent research related to availability of mentors for women leaders is limited; however, potential barriers to the

establishment of mentor relationships documented by Noe (1988) may well be pertinent today. Noe (1988) identified that lack of access to information networks and potential mentors, tokenism, stereotypes and attributions, socialization practices, norms regarding cross-gender relationships, and reliance on ineffective power bases may contribute to a lack of mentorship opportunities for women.

Disappearing of relational practice. Another gender-based leadership barrier occurs when women's relational practice is "disappeared." Relational practice gets disappeared when there is a lack of acknowledgement of the need or support for relational activities in organizations (Fletcher, 1998, 2001)

(Fletcher (1998), 2001)) shadowed and conducted focus groups with female engineers at a manufacturing firm and discovered that relational practice in organizations is comprised of four categories of activities: preserving, mutual empowering, achieving, and creating team. These relational practice categories, with whom or what they are associated, and their intentions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Relational Practice by Category of Activity

Category of Activity	Associated With	Intention
Preserving	Task	Preserve the life and well-being of a project
Mutual empowering	Another person	Enable and empower others to achieve and contribute to the project
Achieving	Self	Empower oneself to achieve goals and contribute to the program
Creating team	Team	Construct the social reality of a team by creating an environment where positive outcomes of relational interactions can be realized

(Fletcher, 1998).

Relational practice requires empathy, vulnerability, the capacity to experience and express emotion, the ability to participate in the development of another, and an expectation that relational interactions can yield mutual growth (Fletcher, 1998, 2001). Relational practice produces outcomes embedded in other people, such as empowerment, increased self-confidence or increased knowledge (Fletcher, 1998, 2001). Embedded outcomes are invisible because they do not fit the conventional definition of outcomes (Wadel, 1979). With no possibility of identifying a "real" or measurable outcome, relational practices, such as creating the experience of team or enabling others to do "real" work, disappear (Fletcher, 1998, 2001).

In her study, Fletcher (1998) found that all four categories of relational practice got disappeared as work and were constructed as something other than work. There were three ways this disappearing process occurred: misattribution of intention, lack of organizationally strong language to describe relational behavior, and conflating relational behavior with images of femininity.

The first way the disappearing process occurred was through misattribution of intention. Fletcher (1998) found that relational practices of the female engineers were often intentional strategies to enable the team to work more effectively, but were misattributed to personal idiosyncrasies or traits. These misattributions included negative characteristics such as naïveté, powerlessness, weakness and emotional need, and positive characteristics such as thoughtfulness, personal style or being nice (Fletcher, 1998).

The second aspect of the disappearing dynamic related to the lack of organizationally strong language to describe the relational behaviors. This includes using words such as helping, nurturing, nice and polite to describe relational behaviors, instead of using terms such as outcome or competence (Fletcher, 1998, 2001). For example, in Fletcher's (1998, 2001) study,

outcomes embedded in other people did not fit the organization's definition of an outcome. The engineers had no way to describe the output of the relational activities as achievements in their own right (Fletcher, 1998, 2001).

The third aspect of the disappearing dynamic relates to gender. Relational behaviors in the organization in Fletcher's (1998, 2001) study were conflated with images of femininity and motherhood. Because of gender roles, women engineers in the study were expected to act relationally and be soft, feminine and helpful. The women did not feel they had a choice to behave any other way, which made it difficult for them to articulate that their relational activities were the result of an intentional choice (Fletcher, 1998, 2001).

The three aspects of the disappearing dynamic operated together such that the women's relational activities were attributed to personal style or a natural expression of gender instead of to intentional strategies to work more efficiently or effectively (Fletcher, 1998, 2001). This lack of acknowledgement for and the disappearing of women's contributions to the success of other people and their organization using relational practice represents yet another barrier women face in aspiring to or serving in leadership positions.

Salary inequalities. Women who are successful in attaining leadership positions may experience salary inequalities, which is another gender-based leadership barrier. Salary inequalities operate at the meso (organizational) level. As level of education and years of experience rise, the pay gap between men and women widens. Women with high school diplomas earn 76 percent of what men earn, whereas women with doctoral degrees earn 71 percent of what men earn (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). According to Day and Hill (2007), college-educated women earn less than college educated men, when controlling for hours, occupation, parenthood and other factors. One year after college graduation, women working full

time in 2001 earned 80 percent as much as their male colleagues earn. After ten years out of college, women working full time in 2003 earned only 69 percent as much as men earn. This pay gap occurred within almost all college majors; only women history majors earned more than men (Day & Hill, 2007).

According to Hearn (2007), inequality exists in both salaries and resource allocations for women who are working as faculty in higher education. No progress has been made in closing the faculty salary gap in the past four decades. In 1972, female faculty earned 82 percent of what male faculty earned (The White House Project, 2009); as of 2010, they made 82 percent of what male faculty made (U.S. Department of Education, 2012b). The salary gap widens as women move up the ladder to the highest faculty ranks. At the assistant and associate professor ranks in 2010-11, women earned 93 percent of what their male colleagues earned, but at the full professor rank, women drop to 86 percent of male professors' earnings (U.S. Department of Education, 2012b).

Women faculty tend to be concentrated in disciplines, such as education, social work and nursing (Johnson & Lucero, 2003), with the least lucrative labor-market conditions and tend to have less education and experience and fewer journal publications than men (Hearn, 2007). These differences contribute to significantly lower salaries than men as well as lower salary growth (Hearn, 2007). Since a majority of university presidents are hired from within academia and 69 percent have faculty experience (American Council on Education, 2007), pay inequities first experienced at the faculty level are likely to continue when women advance into university leadership positions.

Compton and Palmer (2009) cited lack of salary negotiation skill as one reason behind gender-based pay gaps. Using better negotiating skills both up front and as a part of career

advancements could help women to diminish salary inequities. Compton and Palmer's (2009) study of 22 female administrators in higher education found that participants often did not negotiate because they had been socialized not to. In addition, the women felt that relationships were more important than money; therefore they tended to choose to remain silent instead of damaging a relationship (Compton & Palmer, 2009).

Discrimination. Discrimination, both overt and subtle, is another gender-based leadership barrier. Overt discrimination may take the form of segregation within a particular field. Women in corporations tend to congregate in staff positions in departments such as human resources and community relations, career paths which rarely lead to the executive suite (Klenke, 1997). Kroeger (as cited in Klenke, 1997) observed that when new technology causes a job to become too much like "women's work," men no longer want to do it. This creates occupational segregation.

Declining wages often accompany a gender shift in occupations or professions; bank tellers are an example of this (Klenke, 1997). According to Prather (1971), banking and finance were considered men's domains in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The shortage of men during World War II opened up opportunities for women to move into clerical or teller positions. Although traditional bank policy had been to promote from within the bank, an increase in new banking services brought a need for highly trained officers. Therefore, banks began hiring college-educated men into management training programs. This change in hiring policy caused the status of the teller job to diminish. As more and more women were hired as tellers, the job came to be redefined as "women's work," and the common myth prevailed that women were not interested in careers as men were. Thus bank teller pay remained low, and meaningful advancement opportunities for tellers were largely unavailable (Prather, 1971).

According to Klenke (1997) subtle forms of discrimination can be found in an organization's physical surroundings, status symbols, hidden promotional criteria, jokes that are told at meetings, the information loop, and the organizational culture. These are all potential barriers that must be examined when trying to understand why these factors may make it difficult for women to assume leadership roles. These subtle forms of discrimination are difficult to detect and cannot be litigated away (Klenke, 1997).

Micro Level Barriers

Micro level barriers operate at the level of the individual and include the individual's daily interactions. Micro level gender-based leadership barriers include communication style (Chliwniak, 1997; Tannen, 1994), work-family conflict (Klenke, 1997; Williams, 2001) and psychological glass ceiling (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007).

Communication style. Effective communication is essential for good leadership (Barnard, 1938; De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, & Oostenveld, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Women who aspire to leadership positions face a dilemma over communication styles. This dilemma causes a gender-based leadership barrier which operates at the micro level. According to Tannen (1994), gender-based communications patterns constrain how females express leadership. Tannen (1994) posited that when at work, "conversations rituals common among women are often ways of maintaining an appearance of equality … and expending effort to downplay the speakers' authority so that they can get the job done without flexing their muscles in an obvious way" (p. 23).

At a young age, girls learn that they are more effective when they phrase their ideas as suggestions instead of orders, whereas boys find it easier to use direct orders to gain a high-status position in a group (Tannen, 1994). Girls and women who appear authoritative are thought to be

"bossy"; whereas boys and men are considered "go-getters" (Chliwniak, 1997). Interestingly, authoritative girls are generally not accepted by boys or girls; whereas authoritative boys are accepted by both groups (Chliwniak, 1997).

As Chliwniak (1997) noted, for women who wish to advance in leadership positions, this constraint in communication has made it difficult for women to display their confidence and equality. Being socialized to use communication patterns that elicit cooperation and establish relationships, the difficultly women have in demonstrating competence and confidence can interpreted as a lack of power and authority. However, women in leadership positions have not been supported by men or women when they attempt to carry out leadership in an authoritative manner (Chliwniak, 1997). In general, historical cultural norms have required leadership styles to be assertive, decisive (Hofstede, 2009) and authoritative (Tannen, 1994). Therefore, women have had to choose between violating cultural norms to display assertiveness and confidence or working within cultural norms with the possible misperception that they lack competence (Chliwniak, 1997).

Work-family conflict. Although work-family conflict has roots in both society (macro level) and groups or organizations (meso level), it typically operates at the micro or individual level, as the individual woman makes and negotiates choices about her own family and career. There are many reasons why work and family conflict, including societal norms for ideal workers (Williams, 2001), societal expectations for women's ethic of caring (Gilligan, 1982; Stohs, 1994), standards for working mothers (Poduval & Poduval, 2009), and lack of support systems at home (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Marriage and family statistics for college and university presidents provide evidence that the work-family conflict exists among leaders in higher education (American Council on Education, 2007a).

***Ideal worker norm*.** Career success in many organizations is a sequence of linear, vertical steps up the organizational ladder (Klenke, 1997) performed by an individual, male or female, who fits Williams' (2001) concept of an ideal worker. An ideal worker is one who works full time and overtime, taking little or no time off to have or to raise children. This societal (macro level) norm defines most "good" jobs in the market today, including full-time blue-collar jobs and high-level executive and professional jobs. When work is structured this way, caregivers cannot perform as ideal workers, which effectively cuts them off from most social roles that offer responsibility and authority. Although women enter jobs with promotional tracks, many women lack access to the gender privileges required to devote the time necessary to obtain advancement opportunities. For example, they may have neither the ability to relocate their families for a promotion nor a spouse who can handle domestic responsibilities and raise the children (Williams, 2001).

As Klenke (1997) noted, women leaders who decide to take extended family leave (more than two years) are penalized not only by a discontinuous salary history, but also by being passed over for advancement once they return to work full-time. As long as career systems in organizations are designed around hierarchical progression, the integration of work, family roles, and leadership roles will remain problematic (Klenke, 1997).

***Ethic of caring*.** In negotiating the ethics of household labor, women often choose the ethic of caring, a compelling feeling to respond to the needs of family members over the ethic of equity, the fair division of household responsibilities (Stohs, 1994). Gilligan (1982) theorized that through childhood individuation processes boys form an orientation towards the ethic of justice, whereas girls form an orientation towards the ethic of caring. This means that girls may

develop a basis for empathy that is built into their definition of self in a way that boys do not (Gilligan, 1982).

The ethic of caring is a macro level construct. In society, the choice of caring over equity is often presumed from women. According to Hofstede's (2009) study of national cultural influences on organizations, United States culture tends to be masculine in nature; where men are expected to be assertive, women are expected to be caring. In addition, women are normally expected to be primary caregivers, especially of the very young and the very old (Doty, Jackson, & Crown, 1998; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007).

Standards for working mothers. Within organizations (meso level), working mothers are held to higher standards than working fathers and are often criticized for being insufficiently committed, either as parents or professionals (Poduval & Poduval, 2009). As Rhode and Kellerman (2007) noted, the term "working father" is rarely used and carries none of the adverse meanings of "working mother." Those who sacrifice family needs to workplace demands appear lacking as mothers (Poduval & Poduval, 2009). Women who take extended leave or reduce their schedules appear lacking as leaders (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). These mixed messages leave many women with the uncomfortable sense that, whatever they are doing, they should be doing something else (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Having children makes women, but not men, appear less competent, less agentic (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008) and less available to meet workplace responsibilities (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007).

Support systems at home. Lack of support systems at home is an individual (micro level) issue which may cause women to experience work-family conflict. Rhode and Kellerman (2007) made the point that in principle most men support gender equality but in practice they fail to structure their lives to promote it. Many male leaders in business and professional positions have

spouses who are full-time homemakers or who are working part-time. The same is not true of female leaders, who are more likely to be single or to have partners with full-time jobs. Few of these husbands are willing to subordinate their own careers to assist their wives. Double standards in domestic roles are deeply rooted in cultural attitudes and workplace practices (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007).

Marriage and family statistics in higher education leadership. According to the American Council on Education (2012), of those serving in the highest posts of higher education leadership, more women than men are unmarried, and more women than men are childless. As of 2011, only 72 percent of female college and university presidents were married, while 90 percent of their male colleagues had spouses (American Council on Education, 2012). Eighteen percent of women presidents were either divorced or never married (excluding members of religious orders), whereas only four percent of male presidents fell into these categories. Ninety percent of male presidents have children, compared to only 72 percent of women (American Council on Education, 2012).

Although women are less likely to marry and have children, they are more likely to have taken time out from their careers or worked part time to care for children or spouses (Cook, 2012). Ten percent of women presidents but only three percent their male counterparts reported altering their career for their family (American Council on Education, 2012)**.** In addition, 21 percent of women presidents reported having changed their career progress to accommodate a partner, whereas only ten percent of men reported doing so (American Council on Education, 2012). These statistics demonstrate that women are more likely than men to have made changes in their career path to accommodate a partner. Now that we have discussed work-family conflict, we'll move to the concept of psychological glass ceiling.

Psychological glass ceiling. A psychological glass ceiling, another micro-level barrier, is created when women internalize gender stereotypes (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). According to Rhode and Kellerman (2007), women may appear less willing to engage in self-promoting or assertive behaviors or to take risks necessary for leadership roles. An unwillingness to seem too pushy or difficult and an undervaluation of their own worth often deter women from negotiating effectively for what they want or need. In the workplace, the result is that female employees may be less likely than their male colleagues to gain assignments, positions and support necessary for leadership (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Gender stereotype internalization is one way in which culture constrains women's own choices by preventing women from aspiring to leadership positions (Haveman & Beresford, 2012). Now that we have discussed literature on gender-based leadership barriers, we can move on to discuss existing research on how individuals make meaning of adversity.

Meaning of Adversity Research

As outlined previously in the "Terminology" section of Chapter 1, any barrier which prevents women from succeeding in or advancing to leadership positions is a type of adversity. Therefore, since women face many gender-based leadership barriers, a review of literature on how individuals and leaders make meaning of adversity provides a basic framework for this study of how women leaders in higher education make meaning of adversity.

Relatively few research studies have been conducted related to how individuals make meaning of adversity. Many studies have narrowly construed meaning-making as finding reasons for and benefits from traumatic events (Armour, 2003, 2010; Currier, Holland, & Neimeyer, 2006; Updegraff, Silver, & Holman, 2008). Fewer studies have examined how individuals actually construct meaning of adversity experiences. Several studies examining this process have

been conducted with adult-aged participants (Johnston, 2003; McMillen, 1999; Seery, Holman, & Silver, 2010) but only one study was specific to leaders (Beaty, 2001).

Individuals

Several researchers have studied how adult-aged individuals construct meaning of adversity experiences in their lives. Johnston's (2003) study of 20 adults found that adversity was constructed as a turning toward the adversity, dwelling in the adversity, and a calling out from the adversity. In the study some people viewed their adversity experiences as permanent, inescapable losses, whereas others found hidden opportunities, new directions, liberation and deeper meaning in life (Johnston, 2003).

McMillen (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of prior studies of individuals who had endured health adversities, natural and technological disasters, criminal victimization, grief, and combat and found that individuals have felt that they both benefitted from and were also harmed by adversity experiences. Several processes seem to account for the reports of benefit: purposeful changes in life structure, changes in the views of others and the world, receipt of support, and the search for meaning in adversity (McMillen, 1999).

Seery, et al. (2010) conducted a four year longitudinal study of a national sample and found that individuals with some lifetime history of adversity reported better mental health and well-being than individuals with a high history of adversity and individuals with no history of adversity. Individuals with some prior lifetime adversity were the least affected by more recent adverse events in their lives. Coping with adversity may promote development of subsequent resilience, which can be defined as the psychological and social resources to tolerate adversity. The researchers concluded that while exposure to adversity typically predicts negative effects on

mental health and well-being, adverse experiences may also foster subsequent resilience with advantages to health and well-being (Seery, et al., 2010).

Leaders

Kerfoot (2003) noted that "adversity builds leaders if they have the capacity to reframe the event into a learning experience" (p. 233). However, there is a lack of studies on the meaning of adversity that are specific to leaders. One author, Beaty (2001), conducted a study of six successful female secondary principals and found that their greatest adversities were internal struggles dealing with resistance to established cultural norms. The principals found it easier to deal with adversities derived from external sources, such as issues related to ethnicity, gender and politics. When confronting self-imposed barriers which resulted from accepting the expectations of society as personal expectations for themselves, the principals experienced a sense of hopelessness. In general, these principals embraced failure as essential to the learning process and saw adversity experiences as unclear and messy when they were occurring, but in retrospect as purposeful and strengthening to them as individuals. They perceived that learning to deal with adversity at a young age had the greatest effect on their development as leaders (Beaty, 2001). Beaty (2001) concluded that individuals who have experienced adversity may make meaning by choosing to deny their experiences or by being defined or redefined by them, bringing about an awareness that was not previously known.

Women Leaders in Higher Education

How women leaders make meaning of adversity is particularly relevant because of the obstacles, barriers, and adversities many face as they navigate through their professional and personal lives. No studies were found of how women leaders in higher education make meaning of adversity. Therefore, this research study fills this literature gap by discovering what meanings

women leaders in higher education make of adversity experiences and how these meanings relate to their overall lives, personal and professional.

As we have seen women are underrepresented as leaders across all sectors, including higher education. A review of existing literature has revealed that although women experience many gender-based leadership barriers, no studies have been conducted on how women leaders in higher education make meaning of adversity. The next chapter details the qualitative research design methodology used for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to discover how women leaders in higher education make meaning of adversity. In this chapter, I first describe the qualitative research design and research paradigm of this study and address my own researcher positionality. Next, I describe data collection methods, sampling strategy, and sample size, followed by an overview of data analysis, representation of findings, and data quality.

Qualitative Research Design

To conduct this research, I used a qualitative research design to perform a naturalistic inquiry of real-world situations (Patton, 2002). This type of design allowed for an openness to whatever constructs and answers emerged from the data (Patton, 2002). There were no predetermined constraints on the findings. This approach allowed me as the researcher to discover the meanings and experiences from the standpoint of study participants. This qualitative approach allowed for an emergent research design, without getting locked into predetermined constraints which prevent both responsiveness and the pursuit of new emergent patterns (Patton, 2002). A semi-structured interview guide was used which allowed me to modify questions as needed to help my participants provide rich, illuminative and specific responses that spoke to the overall research question.

Although the inductive nature of qualitative inquiry emphasizes the importance of being open to whatever constructs emerge from the data, no investigator enters an inquiry with a completely blank mind (Patton, 2002). The researcher uses sensitizing concepts, which are starting points in thinking, to help organize the complexity of social experience (Patton, 2002), while permitting the world of social experience to shape and modify his or her conceptual

framework (Denzin, 1978). For the purposes of this study, gender-based leadership barriers served as sensitizing concepts during the analysis of participant interviews.

Research Paradigm

I worked from the social constructivist paradigm to research how women leaders in higher education make meaning of adversity. According to Creswell (2009), social constructivism is a worldview which assumes that individuals seek to understand their world by developing multiple, subjective meanings of their experiences. These meanings are varied and complex and are negotiated socially and historically. Most importantly, individuals form meanings through interaction with others, while basing interpretations on their own historical and cultural norms (Creswell, 2009). This research relied on my participants' views of adversity. I used broad, general, open-ended questions to allow my participants to construct the meaning of their situation, as well as inductive analysis to allow patterns to emerge out of the data (Patton, 2002). My intent was to discover the themes in the meanings that my participants have formed about their experienced adversities.

Researcher Positionality

The position or perspective of the researcher is an important consideration in qualitative research. The traditional sociological paradigm is that objective knowledge exists independent of the researcher's position. Smith (1990/2007) asserts that the standpoint of women invalidates this paradigm. The only way to know and understand a situation is from the inside. Society must be known from within, and it is not possible for a researcher to stand outside of the situation. To correct this, Smith (1990/2007) proposes that researchers should recognize their own position in the world and be constrained by the direct experiences of those being studied as well as the experiences of the researcher herself. Researchers must not impose their reality or conceptual

framework on those being studied. Rather, their reality must be the place where sociological examination starts (Smith, 1990/2007). Using a social constructivist paradigm, researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they acknowledge how their interpretation develops from their own experiences—personal, cultural and historical (Creswell, 2009). As such, I took into account my role as the researcher by identifying any potential biases that I may bring as a white, thirty-nine year old middle-class female leader of information technology in higher education studying the meanings other female leaders in higher education make of adversity.

I have had my own experiences with adversity in my adult life, both personal and professional, which included dealing with anorexia and my mother's battle with breast cancer as a young college-age adult, a verbally abusive relationship in my thirties, and sabotage in the workplace also in my thirties. These were periods in my life in which I struggled to make sense and meaning of what was happening over a period of months or years. During those times it was difficult to understand why adversity was happening to me. I did not ask for it and spent much energy trying to get it to stop. These experiences took some things away from me, most notably a certain innocence and naivety in my understanding of the world and resulted in distrust of others, anxiety and fearfulness in certain situations, and a self-protectiveness which inhibits opening myself up to others in my life. But I am able to see positive aspects from the situations I endured, mainly gained through the process of looking beyond myself and discovering the benefits of reaching out to others for help.

As I am not dissimilar from those I am studying, my reality is the place where my research began. There were differences between myself and my study participants, such as race, educational level, age, higher education institution type, and field within higher education. I

remained cognizant that my own experiences both enhanced and hindered my understanding of the experiences of my participants. I self-assessed my positionality during the interview process by recording details in field notes after each interview and discussing how my position relates to my findings with a peer debriefer.

In addition, prior to beginning interviews, I recorded my expectations for findings. As a result of my analysis, I expected to find that:

- my participants have encountered significant barriers within their professional careers.
- my participants have experienced some type of adversity in their personal lives and that the types of adversities vary significantly (health issues, relationship issues, emotional issues, family issues, etc.).
- each participant has a compelling story to tell about her personal or professional experiences with adversity.
- for those participants who are currently enduring an adversity, the adversity is confusing and distracting and causes them to question their ability to navigate through or rise above it.

I also shared these expectations for findings with a peer debriefer and compared these expectations to actual findings. The comparison is discussed in the Chapter 5 section entitled "Progressive Subjectivity."

Sampling Strategy

I employed maximum variation sampling to capture and describe central themes of adversity that cut across a great deal of variation amongst women serving in senior leadership positions in higher education. There were three primary types of variation for participants in my

study: higher education leadership position, personal characteristics, and higher education institution type and setting. This section provides an overview of the sample method used, the sample size, and then describes the variation in the participants selected for this study.

Sample Method

Finding women leaders in higher education in the Mid-Atlantic with sufficient variation of position type, personal characteristics and institution type was a challenge due to their scarcity. To find participants, I first looked for sections of the Mid-Atlantic region which contained multiple institutions of higher education within a one to two hour driving radius. I then developed a list of institutions in each section. Selecting multiple institutions from various sections of the Mid-Atlantic helped me to maximize the number of women I could interview using limited travel funds. For each section, I developed a list of female presidents, chancellors, provosts, vice-presidents and vice-chancellors based on information available on each institution's website. I then mailed each potential participant an invitation (Appendix A) to participate in this research study. After waiting at least one week from the initial mailing, I sent a follow-up email (Appendix B). As a result of the initial mailing and follow-up emails, 19 individuals expressed interest in participating in the study.

I began scheduling participant interviews as I received responses to the initial sampling. After initiating interviews, I continued to search for additional participants outside of the initial list of sections with the goal of ensuring sufficient variation in the sample. The initial response had yielded only one provost, only one vice president of information technology, and only two non-Caucasians. Therefore, in my second round of sampling, I looked for additional provosts, vice presidents of information technology, and individuals of a minority race or ethnicity using

information available about institutional leaders on institutional websites. I found four additional participants during my second round of sampling.

I also employed snowball sampling as I conducted interviews. Using the snowball technique, I made use of the networks of my participants and my own personal contacts in higher education to locate additional participants. Three additional participants were found using snowball sampling.

Throughout my sampling, I looked for participants who could provide new or different viewpoints and potentially serve as negative cases. Negative cases are instances that do not fit within a general pattern (Patton, 2002). Although it was not possible to know if a particular participant would provide a new perspective prior to the interview, it was possible to choose individuals from different environments and professional standings than the rest of the sample.

Three participants were selected for their potential to be negative cases. Two of the three were chosen because they no longer held their position as a senior leader in higher education. One was retired from her position in higher education while the other participant had recently taken a new job at a larger institution in which she was no longer the senior leader in her division. In addition, since my initial sampling had covered not-for-profit and public institutions, I looked for and found a participant serving in a for-profit degree-granting institution of higher education. Interviewing a participant who worked in a for-profit setting allowed me to explore the perspective of someone working at an institution driven by profits.

Sample Size

Sample size was an important consideration for this qualitative research design. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend sample selection for qualitative research to the point of redundancy, when new participants yield no new information. According to Mason (2010), this

point of saturation can be difficult to identify. New data will always add something new to a study, but after a certain point, there are diminishing returns (Mason, 2010). Given practical limitations on budgets and resources that occur within most research contexts, Patton (2002) suggested that qualitative research sampling design should specify a minimum number of samples based on reasonable coverage of the research phenomenon and stakeholder interests. In addition, according to Patton (2002), sampling design should be flexible and emergent. As new information is discovered, the researcher may add to or change the sample if doing so would be valuable for the purposes of the study (Patton, 2002).

Given practical limitations on time and funding for this study, I had planned to interview at least 20 women leaders of higher education but no more than 30. This allowed me to have a flexible, emergent sampling strategy, while working within practical constraints. I ended with 26 participants in total. My aim was saturation, and I continued to interview new participants until I reached a point of diminishing returns for new information.

I found patterns in the data begin to emerge after a reviewing a sample of ten interviews. I developed an initial thematic structure working with the first ten and then added to and revised the thematic structure using a sample of ten additional interviews. I then coded five additional interviews using the thematic structure, and found that there were only minor revisions needed, primarily to the descriptive names given to each theme. Due to scheduling issues, my last interview was conducted after the first 25 interviews had been coded. I found that the last interview fit within the thematic structure without modification.

Participant Variation

The 26 participants in this study varied in their higher education leadership positions, personal characteristics and higher education institution types and settings. Participation variation is discussed in depth in this section.

Higher Education Leadership Position. The type of higher education leadership position of my participants varied. I selected female leaders in higher education who serve as presidents, chancellors, provosts, vice-presidents, and vice-chancellors, and who work in varying areas of administration, such as academic affairs, student affairs, external affairs, administration and finance, information technology and overall university leadership. As shown in Figure 13, I interviewed women serving in each of the primary areas of university leadership.

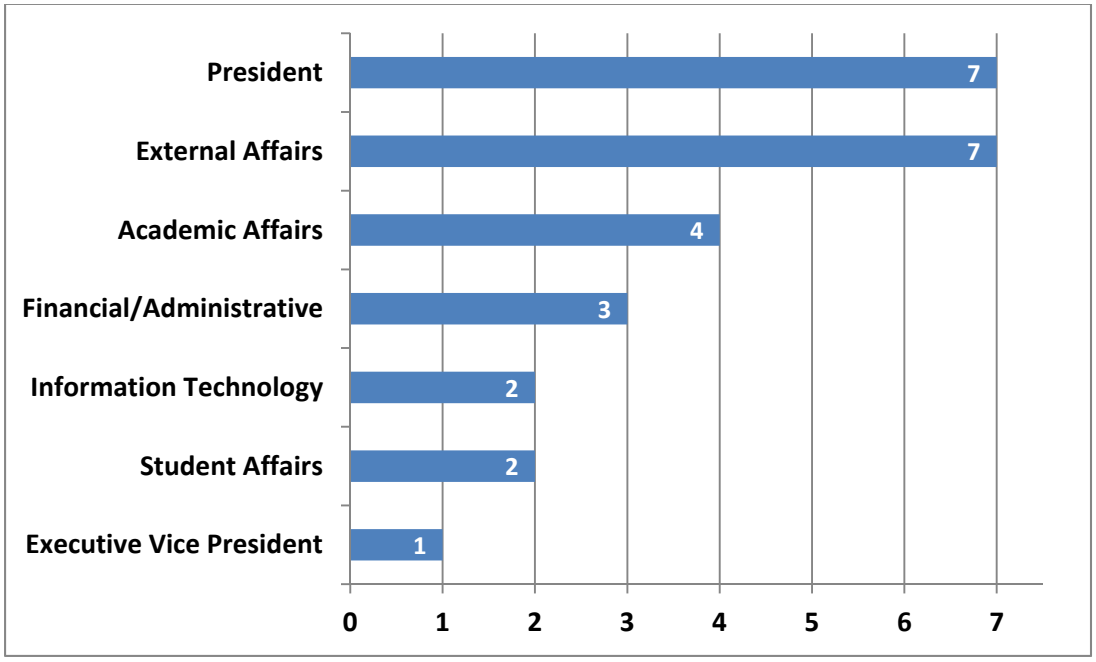

Figure 13. Number of Participants by Higher Education Leadership Role.

Presidents and external affairs officers each made up more than one quarter of participants (7 of 26 [27%]). Academic affairs officers was the next largest group with four participants (4 of 26 [15%]). Additional participants were found who were responsible for financial or administrative

affairs (3 of 26 [12%]), information technology (2 of 26 [8%]) and student affairs (2 of 26 [8%]). In addition, one executive vice president (1 of 26 [4%]) participated in this study.

Personal Characteristics. In addition to variance in type of higher education position, the personal characteristics of my participants also differed. There was variation in age, race/ethnicity, marital status, parental status, education, and professional experience.

Age. The age of participants varied as shown in Figure 14.

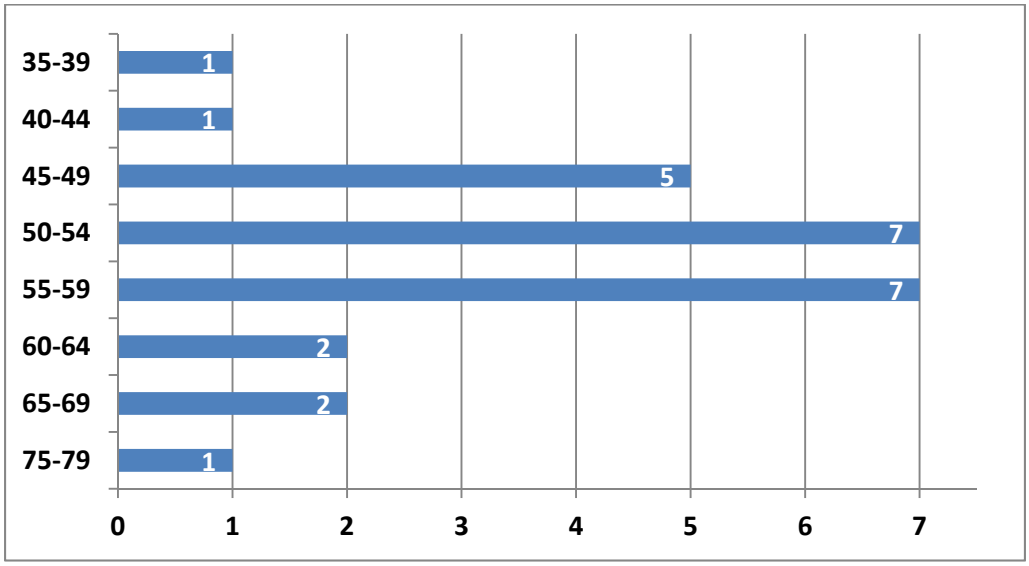

Figure 14. Number of Participants by 5-year Age Range.

The majority of participants (14 of 26 [54%]) were between 50 and 59. The youngest participant was 39, while the oldest was 79. The average age of all participants was 54. The average age of all participants still working in higher education (excluding the individual who is retired) was 53.

Race/ethnicity. At the beginning of each interview, participants were asked to identify their race or ethnicity. The majority of participants (23 of 26 [88%]) identified themselves as white or Caucasian, while the rest (3 of 26 [12%]) identified themselves as black or African-American.

Marital status. The marital status of participants varied. The majority of participants (20 of 26 [77%]) were married. The six remaining participants were divorced (4 of 26 [15%]), widowed (1 of 26 [4%]), or never married (1 of 26 [4%]).

Parental status. Participants provided information on how many children they had, if any. The majority of participants (18 of 26 [69%]) were parents of either two or three children. No participants had only one child. Eight participants (8 of 26 [31%]) were childless. For those participants who had children and who were still actively employed in higher education (excluding the individual who is retired), children's ages ranged from 6 to 38 with an average age of 22.

Education. Education also varied, both in degrees earned and fields of study. The majority (16 of 26 [62%]) of participants have earned doctorates. Of these, most (9 of 16 [56%]) are Ph.D. degrees. Educational doctorates (Ed.D or D.Ed.) and law doctorates (J.D.) make up the remaining doctoral degrees earned by participants in this study. The highest degree earned for five (5 of 26 [19%]) participants was a master's degree, while the highest degree earned for four (4 of 26 [15%]) participants was a baccalaureate degree. One (1 of 26 [4%]) participant did not have an earned degree in higher education.

Fields of study for highest degree earned also varied for participants in this study as shown in Figure 15. Business was the most frequent field of study for participants (6 of 26 [23%]) in this study, followed by humanities (5 of 26 [19%]), educational leadership (4 of 26 [15%]), and social sciences (4 of 26 [15%]).

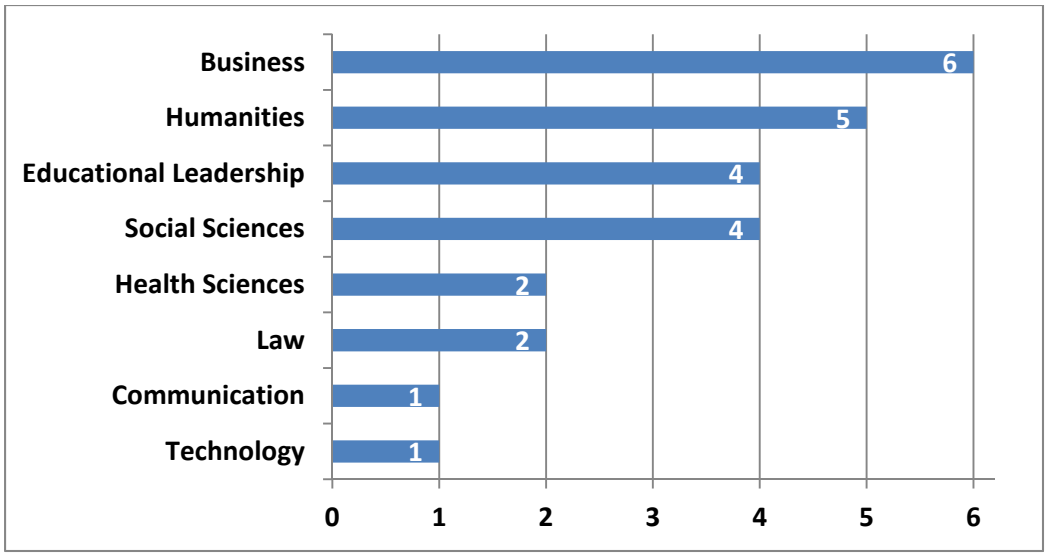

Figure 15. Number of Participants by Field of Study for Highest Degree Earned.

Professional experience. Professional background and length of time served in higher education administration also varied. Professional background is represented by the sector in which the participant worked prior to higher education administration. Most participants (20 of 26 [77%]) served in higher education faculty or staff positions prior to assuming a position in higher education administration. Others came to higher education administration from other sectors, including business (3 of 26 [12%]), not-for-profit (2 of 26 [8%]), and K-12 education (1 of 26 [4%]).

Participants have worked in higher education administration for varying amounts of time, as shown in Figure 16.

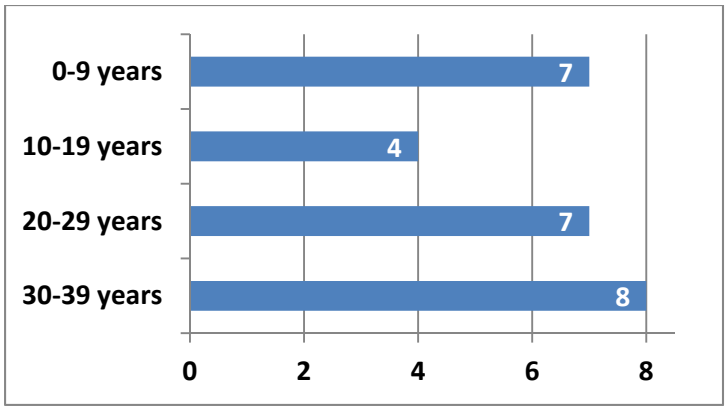

Figure 16. Number of Participants by Years in Higher Education Administration.

The range of time in higher education administration for all participants was one year to 38 years with an average of 20 years.

Higher Education Institution. The last types of variation were higher education institution type, control, size and setting. Participants were chosen from institutions located in the Mid-Atlantic which is the region encompassing Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Washington D.C and West Virginia.

Institution type. Institutional type varied between associate's colleges, baccalaureate colleges, master's colleges and universities, and doctoral-granting universities, according to their Basic Carnegie Classification (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2012). More than half of participants (16 of 26 [62%]) were from master's colleges and universities, which are institutions which award at least 50 master's degrees and fewer than 20 doctoral degrees (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2012). One quarter (6 of 26 [23%]) were from baccalaureate colleges, which are institutions in which baccalaureate degrees represent at least ten percent of all degrees awarded and fewer than 50 master's degrees or 20 doctoral degrees are awarded (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2012). Two participants (2 of 26 [8%]) were from associate's colleges which are those institutions in

which all degrees are at the associate's level or where baccalaureate degrees account for less than ten percent of degrees awarded (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2012). Finally, two participants (2 of 26 [8%]) were from doctorate-granting universities, which are those institutions which award at least 20 research doctoral degrees (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2012).

Institutional control. Institutions also varied by control, defined as public, private not-for-profit, or private for-profit (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2012). Half of participants (13 of 26 [50%]) were from private not-for-profit institutions. Participants from public institutions were the next largest group (12 of 26 [46%]). One (1 of 26 [4%]) participant was from a private for-profit institution.

Institution size. Institution size varied between small, medium, and large based on full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment. Institution enrollments were identified using the Carnegie Classification system (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2012). Half (13 of 26 [50%]) of participants served in leadership positions at medium-sized institutions which were those with student enrollments between 3,000 and 9,999 FTE. Ten (10 of 26 [38%]) participants were from small institutions (1,000 to 2,999 student FTE), while three (3 of 26 [12%]) participants were from large institutions (greater than 10,000 student FTE).

Institution setting. Participants were selected from varying institutional settings including city, suburb, town and rural (U.S. Department of Education, 2012a). There was an almost even distribution of participants serving at institutions located in cities (9 of 26 [35%]), suburbs (8 of 26 [31%]) and towns (8 of 26 [31%]). One participant (1 of 26 [4%]) worked at an institution located in a rural setting.

Data Collection Methods

To collect data, I conducted one-on-one interviews with my participants to find out from them those things which cannot be directly observed (Patton, 2002). Adversity is normally experienced by individuals for an extended period of time and is only truly understood by the person experiencing it. The purpose of interviewing was to enter into each participant's perspective. Interviews are useful because it is impossible to observe everything. Feelings, thoughts, meanings and intentions cannot be observed, nor can past experiences or behaviors (Patton, 2002). In this case, interviewing was used to learn about participant experiences from their standpoint, including how they have experienced or are experiencing adversity, the strategies they have used or are using to overcome it, and the meanings they construct from it.

I traveled to meet with my participants in their own settings. Confidentiality and privacy were important concerns for this research, therefore I asked each participant where they would be most comfortable meeting me. Most participants selected their private campus office as the interview location. A few participants chose to meet me at restaurants located away from their institution. Meeting with participants face-to-face allowed me to establish the rapport, engagement and trust needed for quality data collection. Travel to my participants' locations also allowed me to observe physical and social features of where they live and/or work. As Patton (2002) noted, firsthand experience with a setting and the people in the setting aids in understanding the context which is needed for a holistic perspective.

All participants signed the Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) prior to the interview. The interviews lasted anywhere from 30 to 68 minutes in length and averaged 45 minutes. I used a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix D) to direct the interview. Using this interview guide allowed me to determine the topics to be covered in advance, but decide on the exact

sequence and wording during the course of the interview (Patton, 2002). The interview guide helped to increase the comprehensiveness of the data collected while allowing the interview to remain conversational and situational (Patton, 2002). The interview guide was provided to participants in advance when they expressed interest in reviewing questions prior to the face-to-face interview.

After the first interview, it was clear that I needed to add some additional questions and probes to increase the richness of the data collection. Therefore, I added a question which asked participants to tell me about an additional experience of adversity. I also added probes to help the participant to further elaborate on the supportiveness (or lack thereof) of their spouse or partner.

In qualitative inquiry, the observer's own experiences are part of the data (Patton, 2002). Therefore, after each interview I recorded impressions of the interview and details of the setting in field notes. These notes contained a description of what I observed and my own feelings, reactions and reflections regarding the interview (Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis

Now that we have covered how the participant sample was chosen and how the data was collected, we can look at how the data was analyzed. I used content analysis to analyze the qualitative data contained in the 26 interviews and field notes. Patton (2002) describes content analysis as reduction and sense-making efforts of a volume of qualitative data, with the attempt to identify core patterns and themes. Content analysis allowed me to inductively discover the core meanings of adversity found within my interview and field note data. Patton (2002) explains that inductive analysis allows findings to emerge from the data, as opposed to deductive analysis which would require data to be analyzed using an existing framework. This section describes the four primary phases of content analysis: data collection and transcription, data coding, logical

analysis and interpretive analysis. Then I discuss my use of qualitative analysis software to assist with the organizational aspects of data analysis.

Data Collection and Transcription

I first conducted the interviews and recorded the audio with each participant's permission. All participants agreed to have their interviews recorded. Immediately following each interview, I created field notes of observational details and my significant impressions of the interview. I then transcribed each audio interview recording so that a text transcript could be used for analysis.

Data Coding

The second phase of content analysis was the coding phase. To code my data, I read through my interview transcripts and field notes, highlighting and annotating all areas which spoke to my research question. I then collected all the annotations and organized them with labels which corresponded to themes. Once the list of themes was generated, I examined and revised them to ensure internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. According to Patton (2002), internal homogeneity is the extent to which the data in a single category all speak to the same theme, whereas external heterogeneity is the extent to which there is no overlap in the themes. After my list of themes was refined in this manner, I then reread the interview transcripts, marking all areas of the text which corresponded to specific themes.

Logical Analysis

During the third phase of content analysis, I performed a logical analysis across the themes to explore their interconnections. This allowed me to generate new insights about how the data could be organized by looking for new patterns that did not emerge during the initial inductive analysis (Patton, 2002). This is a logical process in which potential categories were

created by crossing each theme with each of the other themes (Patton, 2002). I worked back and forth between this logical construction and the data to discover the meaningful patterns in the data (Patton, 2002).

Interpretive Analysis

The last phase of content analysis was an interpretative analysis to find the meanings in the data. Patton (2002) noted that interpretation goes beyond the descriptive data by attaching significance to what was found, finding meanings, offering explanations, and drawing conclusions. I used both the data (interviews, field notes, and generated themes) and my own perspective and understandings to make sense of the evidence (Patton, 2002). Both the evidence and my perspective are elucidated so that the difference between the description of the data and my interpretation is clear (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative Research Software

I used NVivo Qualitative Research software from QSR International to assist with the organization and analysis of my data. With the NVivo tool, I imported my interview transcripts and field notes, organized them, and coded my data. NVivo enabled me to work systematically with my data and to add my own insights and notes, as well as to link my findings back to the original data that supports them (2011).

Representation of Findings

Representation of findings for qualitative analysis is grounded in “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). According to Denzin (1989), thick description presents detail, context, emotions, history, and significance. The voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of participants are heard (Denzin, 1989). Thick description makes interpretation possible (Patton, 2002).

My report of findings balances description and interpretation. In Chapter 4, I first describe my themes and the relational patterns among the themes, illustrated with elements of my data. Then in Chapter 5, I provide my interpretation of the findings. This final report includes sufficient thick description to allow the reader to understand the basis of my interpretation, and sufficient interpretation to allow the reader to make sense of the description (Patton, 2002).

Data Quality

Data quality in qualitative research establishes the credibility of findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Patton, 2002). Credibility in a constructivist inquiry focuses on establishing a match between the constructed realities of the participants and those realities as represented by the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To ensure data quality and provide transparency, I used member checks, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and progressive subjectivity.

Member Checks

Throughout the research process, I conducted member checks with my participants. Patton (2002) stated that researchers can learn "about the accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity of their data analysis by having the people described in that analysis react to what is described and concluded" (p. 560). A purpose of my study is to give voice to my participants' meanings and interpretations of adversity in their lives. As Patton (2002) noted, credibility of qualitative analysis findings increases when participants are able to relate to the findings and confirm them.

I conducted three types of member checks. First, during the interviews themselves, I paraphrased what I heard to give the participants a chance to confirm, expand or correct my understanding. Second, I gave a copy of the interview transcript to all participants who expressed interest and solicited their feedback. A few participants shared additional feedback or

clarifications with me. I included the additional feedback in the transcripts used for analysis. Last, I asked participants to review my preliminary findings and provide their reactions. Participants responded that statements attributed to them were "accurate," and that findings were "interesting," "fascinating," and "impressive." One participant stated that "your kindness and caring in the treatment of those who you interviewed [was] simply remarkable." Another participant noted the following:

> I suspect that some of the differences relate to age, but there are clearly many factors, including health, that can shape a career. Some of the women faced and overcame unimaginable hurdles along the way. (Faith)

In general, participants seemed to understand and relate to the findings of this study.

Peer Debriefing

I used the process of peer debriefing to further establish credibility of my findings. A peer debriefer is a "disinterested peer" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 308) who provides a second opinion related to findings, tentative analyses and conclusions of a qualitative research study. Peer debriefing is use to improve credibility of findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), peer debriefing involves extensive discussions about findings, tentative analyses, and conclusions with a disinterested peer. This individual helps to expose tacit and implicit information (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) that is not yet contained in my findings report. By posing questions to help me test working hypotheses (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), my peer debriefer provided a second opinion regarding the meaning of my data, proposed themes (Barber & Walczak, 2009), and relationships between the themes. In addition, I used my discussions with my peer debriefer to reflect on my researcher positionality and to provide a check on my expectations for findings.

My peer debriefer was someone who was not otherwise involved in the study but who had prior experience in qualitative research methods (Barber & Walczak, 2009). During the data collection and content analysis phases of this study, we met monthly to debrief. I shared and discussed proposed themes, draft findings and interpretations with my debriefer.

Negative Case Analysis

Negative case analysis also helps to establish credibility of findings. Negative cases are any instances or cases which do not fit within an existing pattern (Patton, 2002). Negative case analysis involves revising working hypotheses until a given hypothesis (or set of hypotheses) accounts for all known cases (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). After my preliminary list of themes was determined, I analyzed my data for instances and cases which did not fit within the initial framework (Patton, 2002). Negative cases may be exceptions which prove the rule, broaden the rule, change the rule, or cast doubt on the rule altogether (Patton, 2002).

I have reported the basis of the conclusions I reached about negative or disconfirming cases in the Chapter 5 section entitled “Negative Cases.” This allows the reader to make his or her own decision about the plausibility of alternative explanations and why deviant cases do not fit within the dominant themes (Patton, 2002).

Progressive Subjectivity

Finally, I used progressive subjectivity to ensure quality of my findings. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), progressive subjectivity is the process in which a researcher monitors his or her own developing construction. Guba and Lincoln (1989) asserted that it is not possible to engage in an inquiry with a blank mind as the researcher normally has a reason or motivation for a particular investigation. What is important is that the construction of the researcher is not given privilege over that of any other individual (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To provide a check on

my privilege as a researcher, I have stated my position as a researcher in this chapter in the section entitled “Researcher Positionality” and recorded my expectations for findings. As my study progressed, I continued to record the developing construction for my findings (Appendix E) as Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest. I compared my expectations for findings to my actual findings, and I discussed them with my peer debriefer who challenged me in instances when I needed to go beyond an original construction. This allowed me to monitor my developing construction to ensure that my construction was not privileged (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) over that of my participants or anyone else. Now that I’ve discussed the methodology of this research study, I will describe study findings in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to discover how women leaders in higher education make meaning of adversity. This chapter presents findings from in-depth interviews, which allowed participants to share their experiences from their standpoints, including how they have experienced or are experiencing adversity, the strategies they have used or are using to overcome it, and the meanings they have constructed. First, the types of adversity which participants experienced are overviewed, followed by the strategies they used to get through their experiences. Next, the meanings which participants constructed from their experiences are explained in detail. Additionally I will discuss how the findings varied by race.

Types of Adversity

In answering interview questions, participants described the most significant adversity they have experienced in life, either personal or professional. Then, if they had chosen a professional adversity, they were asked to speak about their most significant personal adversity, or if they had chosen a personal adversity, they were asked to speak about their most significant professional adversity. Participants also responded to questions about barriers or obstacles they have experienced in advancing to their current position in addition to barriers or obstacles they currently face. Table 2 summarizes the types of adversities, barriers and obstacles which participants shared, including the number and percentage of participants who discussed each type of adversity.

In total, participants discussed 21 distinct types of adversity. Fifteen of these were professional adversities, five were personal adversities, and one type, work-family conflict, falls

into both the professional and personal domains. Participants discussed between two and seven distinct types each, with an average of four per participant.

Table 2

Adversity Type by Number and Percentage of Participants

Adversity Type	Definition	Example	N	%
		PROFESSIONAL ADVERSITY		
Discrimination	Subtle or overt discrimination or discouragement due to gender, race, and/or age	"The most significant thing … would be early on in my career when I realized that all things equal women had to work a lot harder than men to really get the same chances for promotion." (Phyllis)	12	46%
Unsupportive leadership	Lack of support from institutional leadership	"There was an individual that absolutely needed to be terminated, and I had the authority to do that, and I did it. And [my supervisor] stepped in and undid it." (Evelyn)	11	42%
Perception issues	Struggle with other's perceptions about one's self or work	"One of my colleagues said, 'Well, some people would say your area is kind of that warm and fuzzy area.' And I was frankly shocked. …The obstacle I'm facing [is] a narrow view of the profession that I'm in." (Frances)	10	38%
Advancement difficulty	Challenges in moving to the next professional level	"The hardest professional piece was getting a presidency." (Sherry)	5	19%
Interpersonal conflict	Negative interaction with a colleague in the workplace	"My greatest challenges in life have always been driven by other professional women. They're a little more catty, a little more cut-throat, a little more--just less empathetic for whatever reason." (Eileen)	5	19%
Workplace harassment	Aggressive pressure or intimidation in the workplace	"I really suffered sexual harassment where [a colleague] wanted to date me and was relentless in it. And this was an older man that I was working with and drove by my house and did all these things to intimidate me." (Lillian)	5	19%

Adversity Type	Definition	Example	N	%
Resource shortage	Significant funding constraints which may require program or staffing cuts	"I have gone through this institution being three years from closing and firing 20 percent of the faculty and 20 percent of the staff and being hated for it." (Brenda)	4	15%
Tokenism	Being the sole woman or minority in a work group	"When I first came to [this institution], I was the first woman administrator in the business area. They were all men. And so I had to learn to hold my own." (Phyllis)	4	15%
Lack of mentors	Lack of a significant mentoring relationship	"I didn't have mentors. … I would have been very well served by having a mentor or boss [who could say], 'give it a little bit of thought to how you just handled that.'" (Brenda)	3	12%
Personal insecurity	Lack of confidence	"My husband ... said to me, 'You need to be a president.' ... I said, 'I'm not big enough. I'm not.'" (Marcy)	3	12%
Values conflict	Conflict with personal values	"When we were moving to offer domestic partner benefits, what I wanted to do was to talk very loudly and publicly about how that's the right thing to do. But my end goal was to make sure it happened, and the best way to do that was to talk about how it made so much sense in the business model because we were losing some of our best faculty candidates. But it kind of feels like I sold out." (Darlene)	3	12%
Exclusion from informal networks	Being excluded from unofficial social events	"There are social gatherings, non-university-related, that I'm not invited to. Yeah, you just deal with the exclusion." (Lillian)	2	8%
Salary inequalities	Being underpaid	"I have never made [the salary] the male people ahead of me made and what the male people after me make." (Claudia)	2	8%
Employee performance	Working with under-performing employees	"I don't think I have a very good administrative team at the highest level right now. So trying to decide do they just need more mentoring, or are they really not up to what we need to have done." (Marcy)	1	4%

Adversity Type	Definition	Example	N	%
		PERSONAL ADVERSITY		
Relationship conflict	Significant conflict with partner or spouse	"[I] decided I wanted to go to school…and he felt that I was leaving him behind, so it was a struggle. … [He] would question, 'Why do you want to go law school? There are too many lawyers.' Just was not supportive with that. Wouldn't support me in this job." (Isabelle)	10	38%
Family challenges	Difficulty with parents, siblings or children	"I grew up in a single parent home at a time where that was really unusual. My dad died when I was five. I'm the oldest of three. Just actually growing up, getting myself through college with my definition of adversity was a path." (Carla)	5	19%
Health issues	Serious injury or illness	"I was in a really horrific car accident ... it's a miracle I survived. I had a closed head injury. I had herniated disks through my neck and back. Nothing broke though, but I had post-traumatic stress disorder." (Wendy)	4	15%
Infertility	Struggle or inability to have a child	"I became pregnant, but I miscarried, and I miscarried because I had so many tumors in my uterus that I couldn't carry a child." (Sherry)	3	12%
Child abuse	Suffering verbal, physical or sexual abuse as a child	"I was abused as a child." (Ava)	1	4%
Death of spouse	Experiencing the death of a spouse or partner	"The death of my husband…meant the greatest loss in my life." (Faith)	1	4%
		PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL ADVERSITY		
Work-family conflict	Challenges in balancing professional responsibilities with personal or family responsibilities	"It can be quite a balancing act to raise your children while you're pursuing a career, and I think that is something that often impacts on a professional's ability to advance." (Frances)	7	27%

On the surface, some of these adversities may seem less traumatic or less serious than others. Having an interpersonal conflict with a colleague at work may seem minor in comparison

to losing one's spouse or enduring abuse as a child. However, these were all critical events to the women who experienced them. As Patton (2002) reminded us, in qualitative research individual perceptions are not compared to each other, but are valued as equally real and meaningful.

In some cases, participants shared stories of adversity that contained multiple types of adversity. For example, Nina suffered *workplace harassment* and in addition she was not supported by institution leadership (*unsupportive leadership*) when she sought help. In her workplace, Lillian dealt with both *discrimination* and *exclusion from informal networks*. When a single story contained multiple types of adversity, each type of adversity was coded and included in Table 2.

Many participants shared the idea that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate personal adversity from professional adversity. Personal and professional adversities "are so different and yet they are so connected" as Anne stated. Although personal adversities, such as infertility or relationship conflict, originate outside of work, participants found it difficult to leave them at home. Although professional adversities, such as unsupportive leadership or perception issues, originate in the workplace, participants also found it difficult to leave them at work. A single individual experiences the adversity, and the effects crossover into both the work and home domains. Anne further elaborated on this concept, "We offer tremendous amount of support for employees because you cannot leave [personal adversity] at the door, no matter what, how you think you can, you can't." Kelly explained how her experience with unsupportive leadership at work spilled over into her home life. As she stated, "I certainly came home with less energy and frustrated many a night, so it took its toll, a little bit on my family."

Not everyone in this study reported that they had experienced adversity. Five individuals (5 of 26 [19%]) reported that they had not experienced significant adversity in their life or had

not experienced barriers or obstacles as they advanced in their careers. For example, Beth stated that she had not experienced significant adversity in her life, but did discuss her challenge of juggling work and family responsibilities. Beth viewed work-family conflict as a challenge but not an adversity because she has a husband who takes on duties in the home. As she stated, “If I didn't have a husband that was willing to take as much on as he takes, it would be having a huge impact on my professional life, because I couldn't do it.”

Several other participants discussed not experiencing significant barriers or obstacles as they advanced to their current position. When these participants came across people and circumstances which stood in their way, they did not define such situations as “obstacles” or “barriers.” For example, Anne stated, “I've never faced obstacles because I've been willing to work hard.” Similarly, Wendy said, “I never see something as a barrier.” These participants view would-be barriers something to work with or find alternatives for. As Wendy further elaborated, “I see it more of--as something to understand and figure out how to work with it or get around or turn it in my favor or my department's favor.”

The variance and complexity of human experience is evident in the wide range of adversity and lack of adversity which participants in this study shared. Now that we have overviewed the types of adversities, we’ll turn to the strategies which participants used to get through their adversity experiences.

Strategies to Overcome Adversity

In the course of interviews, participants described strategies they have used or are using to get through or overcome their experiences with professional and personal adversity. Many participants also spoke about strategies they have used or are using to navigate through barriers or obstacles in their leadership. These strategies can be divided into two broad categories: 1)

empowering self and 2) reaching out to others. Participants shared 18 distinct strategies. Thirteen related to empowering oneself, while five related to reaching out to others. Table 3 summarizes the strategies that participants shared, including the number and percentage of participants who discussed each strategy.

Just as participants shared multiple types of adversity, they also shared multiple strategies to get through adversity. Participants discussed between two and nine strategies each, with an average of five. They noted the importance of being willing to try different strategies, including new strategies, when dealing with adversity. Isabelle described how she learned "that it's important to take different approaches to challenging situations and that my way is not necessarily always the way that's gonna work."

Table 3

Strategy by Number and Percentage of Participants

Strategy	Definition	Example	N	%
		EMPOWER SELF		
Alternatives	Seek out options to work around or leave the adverse situation	"If I can't go through the front door, I gotta go in the side door [laughs]--I gotta find a different strategy, a different system, a different way of going to overcome that." (Frances)	17	65%
Speak up	Voice concerns, ideas and opinions	"I was the one who was brave enough to say…'You are very disrespectful of the senior staff, and we feel mistreated. We'll work as hard as you want us to, but you can't…mistreat people and expect them to perform at their optimal performance.'" (Kelly)	12	46%
Perspective	Be optimistic and consider what's really important in life	"There's way more validity in having a positive attitude than it fluffily appears to be. … Imagining the success of it. Seeing it as just a problem to be overcome. Looking it as a part of the journey… Nothing is altogether that important, except your integrity and your love for your family and all that." (Claudia)	11	42%

Strategy	Definition	Example	N	%
Preparation	Anticipate and prepare for obstacles	“I had to, at all times, realize that I had to be über-prepared because the environment didn't anticipate that I was up to the challenge.” (Gina)	11	42%
Persistence	Keep moving and have patience	“I don't let stuff stop me. I'm like, ‘Anything's possible. There's always roadblocks to everything but just keep going.’ That's what I do, I just keep going.” (Wendy)	7	27%
Depersonalize	Don’t take it personally	“You have to be tough. … You can't be soft. You can't be one of those people where your feelings get hurt really easy and you take it personally.” (Evelyn)	7	27%
Refocus	Focus on other parts of life	“I got through it because I had things I had to do. I had to think about [my children]. I had to give them support that everything was okay. Life was gonna be okay. We were gonna be okay. And I had my job.” (Faith)	7	27%
Self-reflection	Reflect on the situation and be open to change	“[I] use some reflection to figure out what is it that is preventing me from getting there. Sometimes there's some truth to what is being said to you. You have to be willing and open to accept that.” (Frances)	7	27%
Self-care	Make time for personal needs and interests such as sleep, exercise and vacation.	“Exercising, staying physically fit. … [My father] always encouraged me to stay healthy because you can take on a whole lot more when you're healthy.” (Frances)	5	19%
Faith	Seek out a higher power	“A lot of it was the grace of God. … It was a lot of my faith getting me through that.” (Kelly)	3	12%
Privacy	Keep adversity private	“It's important for those people who are really in your corner…to know. And other than that, I think a line of privacy where people don't go is important.” (Brenda)	3	12%
Family-friendly workplace	Find a workplace that supports combining family and career	“When I was a faculty member, I received a paid family medical leave right there of ten weeks [to have a child]…I think other ways these places have done it is recognizing you might be out with a sick child and allowing you to do that.” (Beth)	2	8%

Strategy	Definition	Example	N	%
Self-trust	Rely on gut instinct	"The other thing that has gotten me through so many things is trusting my gut. And I trust it completely on hiring situations, and a couple of times I've allowed myself to be persuaded by others and gone against my gut, it's proven I was wrong." (Gina)	1	4%
		REACH OUT TO OTHERS		
Support network	Build and use a personal support network: family, friends, mentors, colleagues, supervisors, professional organizations, board members, household help, etc.	"No one does it on their own. No one does. I think it's really important that you have a group of people that you can talk to, get advice from, believe in, understand and who understand you." (Marcy)	26	100%
Build trust	Build trust and relationships with stakeholders	"The first part of my career as a vice president was really about reestablishing partnerships on campus, so that the faculty trust you when you say, 'We're spending money on this capital project versus this. It's for these reasons.' And they trust you because you've built some political capital and credibility." (Carla)	6	23%
Therapy	Talk to a counselor, psychologist or psychiatrist	"There's still a stigma on therapy. I'm a big believer that there's times you need it if nothing other than to be honest with yourself in a way you can't with anybody else in the world." (Eileen)	4	15%
Role models	Find individuals to emulate	"When I was a dean … I got to watch [a female president] do things and imagine myself doing it. And then the last job I had, the president was female, and so I felt very comfortable being a female president and knowing I didn't have to follow a male model." (Sherry)	3	12%

Strategy	Definition	Example	N	%
Legal support	Get legal support	"I went to a lawyer because I was afraid. [He] helped me draft a letter from my standpoint. ... He said, 'If you don't address this, you're accepting every allegation that they're making. If you do address it, they don't need to respond to you, but you have in writing that you're countering everything.'" (Nina)	2	8%

Adversity is a complex phenomenon in which "there's so much uncertainty, and you don't have that much control," as Darlene described. Given the challenging, uncontrollable nature of adversity, in most cases a single strategy was not sufficient to get through or overcome it. Therefore, participants used a combination of strategies to get around a single occurrence of adversity. For example, after her car accident Wendy used four strategies to recover from her serious injuries. First, Wendy went to physical and mental health *therapy*. Second, she was patient and persevered during the healing process (*persistence*). Third, she attended workshops to learn strategies to keep her emotions under control (*preparation*). Forth, she used positive self-talk, such as "I will get well. I will get well." (*perspective)*. When Nina encountered workplace harassment and unsupportive leadership in her institution, she made use of three strategies. First, Nina sought the support of the human resource director and the former college president (*support network*). Second, she got *legal support*. Third, she looked for and found an *alternative* position at another institution when it was apparent the situation was "not going to get any better."

As mentioned, these strategies are broken into two broad categories: 1) empower self and 2) reach out to others. There are 13 specific strategies which involve empowering oneself to get through an adversity, as displayed in Table 3. These are specific actions which an individual can take on her own. For example, many participants spoke of finding *alternatives* as a way to get through adversity. Looking for alternatives involves two changes to an individual's mindset.

First, the individual must recognize that enduring the adversity is not the only option. Second, the individual must become willing to do something different. Then the individual takes action to move forward using a new option. Beth described this process:

> Some of our greatest adversities come from our own narrow visions of ourselves and our opportunities. And also narrow visions of feeling that someone that's gonna discriminate against me has the power to that. No, you just step around them. Step around them. Find a different place. (Beth)

Some participants, especially those with ongoing health issues, were unable to completely overcome their adversities. These participants used strategies related to empowering self to manage what they could manage. When Phyllis was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, she and her husband used *self care* to stay healthy. As she stated, “We started sleeping more, you know, not sweating the small stuff.” Similarly, after going through a serious car accident, Wendy used *self care* to manage chronic pain and other lingering effects on her body. As she stated, “If my core's strong, I don't have pain, and if I'm out of shape, it's awful, so working out for me is a priority, getting enough rest, things like that.”

Five strategies involve reaching out to others for support and assistance to get through adversity, as displayed in Table 3. Of these, building and using a support network was the most common strategy which participants shared. All (26 of 26 [100%]) participants discussed their reliance on the support of a spouse, partner, family members, friends, internal or external peer colleagues, team members, supervisors, mentors, professional organizations, board members, household help, and/or administrative support staff. As Marcy articulated, “No one does it on their own. No one does. I think it's really important that you have a group of people that you can talk to, get advice from, believe in, understand and who understand you.”

Participants did not rely on just one person to support them. Instead they built their own personal support network made up of many people, as Phyllis described:

> I've always had supportive bosses, both at work, that have helped me, especially with the personal illnesses, been there to say, "What can we do to support you?" The office staff has always been--the folks that work for me and with me are just terrific. And so I think support systems both in the workplace [and] with your families and friends are important to have.

Vivian also articulated this concept and added that the individuals in your support network may be outside of your department. As she stated, “You have to gather around you a community of supportive people, who don't necessarily have to be the people that are in your hallway.” Other participants noted the importance of finding mentors outside of your organization because “it's tough in a leadership position to have people that you can talk to within your institution,” as Evelyn explained.

To summarize, participants discussed many types of strategies to get through adversity, and they used these strategies in combination by selecting those which they thought would work. The types of adversities and strategies used to get through or overcome them form the context through which meanings are developed. The next section describes meanings which participants formed of their experiences with adversity.

Meanings

The meanings of adversity derived from participant interviews are organized by three societal levels: micro (individual), meso (group), and macro (societal), as shown in Figure 17.

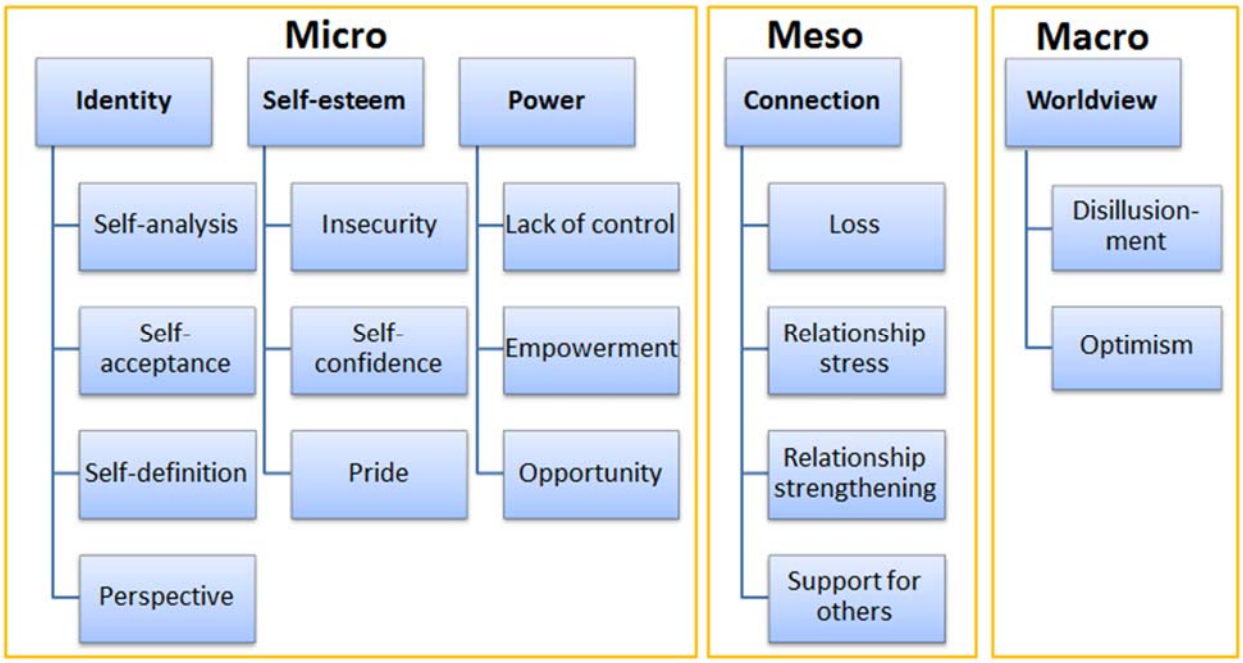

Figure 17. Meanings of Adversity by Level of Society.

There are five categories of meaning for participants in this study: identity, self-esteem, power, connection, and worldview. Within these categories, participants discussed 16 distinct meanings. Participants formed between three and nine meanings each, with an average of six meanings per participant. Each meaning category and the meanings contained within each category are explained in detail in this section.

Identity, self-esteem and power are micro level meaning categories which concern an individual's relationship with herself. Connection is a meso level meaning category which concerns to an individual's relationships with others. The one macro level meaning category is worldview which relates to how an individual views the world or society in general.

Table 4 summarizes meanings by number and percentage of participants.

Table 4

Meanings by Number and Percentage of Participants

	Category	Meaning	Definition	N	%
MICRO	**Identity** what one thinks about self	*Self-analysis*	Giving serious thought to one's character, actions, and motives and being open to changing oneself	13	50%
		Self-acceptance	Accepting that that one cannot control or fix everything in one's life	4	15%
		Self-definition	Defining oneself in spite of adverse people or situations	17	65%
		Perspective	Gaining understanding of what is important in one's life	10	38%
	Self-esteem how one feels about self	*Insecurity*	Feeling self-doubt, shame, inferiority, disappointment and/or loneliness	19	73%
		Self-confidence	Feeling stronger or tougher	14	54%
		Pride	Feeling pride, accomplishment or fulfillment	5	19%
	Power what one can do	*Lack of control*	Lack of power to freely choose, achieve, influence or direct events in one's life	12	46%
		Empowerment	Gaining power or control over aspects of one's life	17	73%
		Opportunity	Gaining new possibilities	7	27%
MESO	**Connection** relationships with others	*Loss*	Losing connections to others	5	19%
		Relationship stress	Strained connections with others	7	26%
		Relationship strengthening	Strengthened connections to others	2	8%
		Support for others	Being able to support others due to one's experiences	15	58%
MACRO	**Worldview** view of society	*Disillusionment*	Experiencing disillusionment about the way the world operates	9	35%
		Optimism	Having an optimistic perspective of the world and why things happen	6	23%

Micro Level: Identity

The first micro level meaning category is identity which is an individual's conception of self and who one is. All participants (26 of 26 [100%]) mentioned some aspect of how their experience related to their identity.

Participants in this study had multiple, varied identities, such as senior leader in higher education, spouse, mother, daughter, friend, teacher, board member, mentor, dancer, and runner, just to name a few. Participants used their multiple identities as a way to buffer or mitigate adversity. This relates to the "refocus" strategy in Table 3. When participants lost one identity, for example through divorce or job loss, they had other identities available to refocus on, as Brenda articulated:

> I'm not the sort of person to become shattered by one thing or to let one thing define me. … I think the answer is you keep multiple identities. You keep multiple things that are important to you, private and public. So that you can keep on keeping on. (Brenda)

An individual's multiple identities meld together into an overall identity, or conception of self. Although participants did not ask for adversity and the experience of going through adversity was very trying, the changes in identity which resulted were generally positive. Participants were able to use their experiences with adversity to analyze themselves (*self-analysis*), accept themselves (*self-acceptance*), define themselves (*self-definition*), and gain *perspective* over what was important in their lives. This section describes these four meanings in detail.

Self-analysis. Self-analysis is one characteristic of identity found in participant interviews. Half of the participants (13 of 26 [50%]) spoke of how adversity led them to give serious thought to their own character, actions, and motives. Through this reflection process,

participants gained knowledge about themselves, and some became open to idea of changing themselves to overcome the adversity.

In reflecting on their experiences with adversity, several participants discovered who they were and what they were made of. For example, through her experience of running construction projects, which is typically a man's job, Carla found that she could do more than she thought she could do:

> I grew up thinking I would never do anything but be a teacher. At my age, most girls went to school for nursing or education. … So I think it's really taught me that I can do what I want to do, and I can do things that I never knew I could do. (Carla)

For Ava, getting through the experience of being abused as a child included learning who she was. As she recalled, "You put your nose down. You take stock of the person that you are. And you rely on the person that you are."

Upon reflection, other participants realized they had inner strength and courage. As a result of working for a disrespectful boss, Kelly discovered how much inner strength she has. As she stated, "It taught me that I've got a lot more inner strength than I thought I had, and I can survive some tough times." Similarly, Wendy discovered that she is a survivor after her experience with a serious car accident:

> I was so thrown initially. I'm like, "Oh my god, I could have died. Oh my god. Oh my god, I could have died. I could have died." I evolved from that into: "I survived. I'm a survivor. I am--I am--I'm--I survived that." (Wendy)

While the self-knowledge gained by some participants was positive, for others, adversity was a more humbling experience. For example, Claudia discussed learning that she was no different than others through her experience with cancer: "Well, it certainly tells me that I can get sick just like everybody else."

For some participants, the self-analysis process did not end with the knowledge gained about self. These participants also became open to changing themselves in dealing with adversity. Frances articulated this concept:

> That obstacle might be there for a reason. Maybe there's something I haven't done. Maybe I'm not ready to go to that next level or what have you. You have to really think about what are people telling you. It's one thing if one person says it. If it comes across in other areas, well, I think you need to be open to changing or growing a little bit more to overcome that barrier. (Frances)

In some cases, participants learned from their experiences and made changes in their approach to their jobs. For example, Isabelle shared how she developed collaboration skills through her experience of encountering disrespect as young black woman working on a special assignment at a military base. As she shared, “That experience helped me personally to--just to realize the importance of being more collaborative and being more willing to allow others to be a part of problem solving.” After her experience with difficult workplace relationships, Jacklyn was learning to not be a “control freak.” As she stated, “I think the self-knowledge that came of that is I am certainly trying to let things go more.”

Participants also used their experiences with personal adversity to make changes in themselves. To get through a difficult period in their marriage, Marcy and her husband participated in both marriage counseling and personal therapy. Marcy noted the importance of admitting her “own frailties.” As she further explained, “You have to be honest with yourself and say, ‘What role do I play?’ [and] ‘What could I have done better?’ and ‘Yeah, I didn't do this well,’ and try and change.”

Participants who became open to changing themselves were aware that they had blind spots. However, not every blind spot related to a failing or a weakness. Sometimes other people could see potential in participants that participants could not see for themselves. For example,

Teresa hesitated to consider a promotion for which she did not feel qualified. It was the encouragement of others which helped Teresa to see that she had the skills necessary for the new position. She applied as part of a national search and was selected. Teresa related how she learned that others may see things that she cannot:

> That's just taught me a little bit more to have confidence in the advice that other people are giving me….It's if somebody's telling me something, I'm more apt to listen to them and consider that what they're seeing is a perspective that I have a gap in being able to see. (Teresa)

By using their experiences with adversity to analyze themselves, participants learned about themselves and were able to incorporate positive changes into their personal and professional identities. The next section discusses the concept of self-acceptance, which participants used when it was not possible to make changes to themselves in the midst of adversity.

Self-acceptance. Self-acceptance is another aspect of identity found in participant interviews. Several participants (4 of 26 [15%]) spoke about how they had learned to accept that that they could not control or fix everything in their lives. For example, Nina was verbally attacked by a male peer and then not supported when she reported the incident to her superiors. Nina discussed her difficulty with accepting that she could not fix the situation. As she stated, "I couldn't fix it, and I had a really hard time with that. So I think getting me to accept that I can't fix everything, and that sometimes the right thing is to leave a situation."

Accepting oneself was crucial to participant well-being when they were unable to implement changes within their institutions, due to factors outside of their control. Diane explained how she has learned to let go out of the outcome after putting forth her best effort:

> Because all you can do at the end of the day is offer your best advice. …I [use] all of my experience to say, "You asked. You hired me. This is my opinion. This is what I think." Now, they're gonna do what they're going to do with that. And that's when you have to walk away and say I've done the best that I can. (Diane)

Whereas these participants learned to accept themselves as they were, other participants took an active role in defining themselves as a result of their experiences, as discussed in the next section.

Self-definition. Self-definition is another aspect of identity found in participant interviews. Over half of the participants (17 of 26 [65%]) spoke about how they did not allow their adversity to define them. These participants defined themselves in spite of adverse people or situations in their lives. Many participants spoke of using their experiences to prove their naysayers wrong. Some participants experienced overt discouragement as high school or college students. For example, Anne, who became a successful college president, did not allow discouraging teachers and advisors to define what she could do. As she explained, "People told me along the way I couldn't do something, and that was very motivational to get it done. … I've always taken that naysaying attitude--telling me I can't do something is a big mistake." Similarly, Vivian did not allow a high school counselor to discourage her from going away to college:

> [The counselor] said, "Well, why do you want to go so far away? And why do you want to go to a college? Why don't you go to a community college?" … And so immediately put these sort of barriers up. … It wasn't just a one-time conversation. It was repeated conversation, [laughs] so that I quickly almost decided that I'm going because you don't think I can go. And so he actually ended up being a negative influence that propelled me to go despite him. (Vivian)

Other participants experienced this naysaying attitude in the workplace. Even though she experienced discrimination and harassment, Lillian also didn't let others define what she could do. Lillian shared how she handles the discriminatory attitude of "She's the girl. She can't do the job." As she stated, "I do a great job. I don't let them stop me. … It just made me mad, so of course, I was going to show them that I could do it." Darlene also did not allow others to define what she could or couldn't do. She described an example in which she stood up to a board member's assumption that she would not continue to work after having more children:

> When I got pregnant with the twins, one of the board members said, “Well, I guess now, you'll finally stay home and take care of the kids, stop working.” … And I was like, “Why would I do that?” That works for some people really well, but not for all people. (Darlene)

Participants made deliberate and proactive choices to define themselves. For example, Ava spoke about how she chose to not allow her adversities to be a part of who she is. As she stated, “I don't dwell on them at all. It's not a part of who I am. I just--I don't choose to think about them.” Brenda also discussed how she chose to separate her identity from her role as president when her institution had to cut personnel. As she explained, “The only way you can do those things, Amy, is to say, ‘This is not me doing this. This is not about me.’ Somebody has to represent the institution.”

Some participants found that their experiences with adversity helped them to define who they wanted to be as a leader as well as who they did not want to be. As Eileen explained:

> I would say that the greatest opportunities for me to grow as a leader have come from the worst negative experiences in my life. And most of the time it doesn't teach me about who I want to be so much as who I don't. (Eileen)

Similarly, Evelyn honed her self-definition as a leader as a result of her experience with an unsupportive supervisor, “Ironically I think it has made me a better leader because I know what I would never do.” Now that we’ve discussed how participants analyzed, accepted and defined themselves as a result of their experiences with adversity, we’ll look at how participants gained perspective through their experiences.

Perspective. Perspective is the last characteristic of identity found in participant interviews. Many participants (10 of 26 [38%]) spoke about gaining an understanding of what is important in their lives through their experiences with adversity. Participants who experienced life and death adversities gained greater clarity in other aspects of their lives. For example, Wendy’s car accident gave her perspective about her marriage. “It's like everything became

clearer in life, and you know, I realized I didn't want to be in the marriage anymore." Phyllis' experience with cancer and multiple sclerosis gave her perspective which she uses in her leadership:

> I mean we could all be in an accident and die tomorrow--that you shouldn't just take each day for granted. And so I think it's made me a better leader and manager because I do have a tendency when things are chaotic and crazy to go, "Time out. Everybody breathe. You know, we're not working--we're not heart surgeons. Somebody's not gonna die tomorrow." (Phyllis)

Similarly, Claudia's experience with cancer helps her to prioritize what she does with her day and gives her perspective on other adversities in her life:

> It also puts everything else in perspective as you can well imagine. … It really helps me prioritize what I do with my day. … Nothing is altogether that important, except your integrity and your love for your family and all that. But most of these adversities are not that big a deal in the long run. (Claudia)

Adversities that were life-altering, but not life-threatening also had the effect of allowing the participant to put "small situations" into perspective. For example, Olivia stood up to a disrespectful, verbally abusive, but influential male colleague, and then was not supported by institutional leadership. After being forced to leave her job, she remained unemployed for two years. Olivia shared the following:

> When I have small situations, I know now that they are not as important. They're little things. I take them into perspective now. … I don't get high blood pressure from it because I experienced something traumatic. (Olivia)

Similarly, dealing with adverse people or situations in the workplace led to new perspectives. Gina worked for an insecure supervisor who continually put her down in public settings. Gina shared how her experience led her to appreciate those who treat others with respect:

> It's given me a wonderful appreciation [laughs] for people with whom you can talk as a respected and on a peer level even though they are the president of the university, or even though they are the head of some huge organization. (Gina)

For Diane, the experience of working in an "über-territorial" environment in higher education has allowed her to keep work in perspective. As she stated, "I think that it's been challenging, but also balancing in a way that it's made me appreciate being disconnected."

To summarize, participants described how their experiences related to their identity, or what they think of themselves. In general they described positive changes to their identity, as they learned to accept themselves, learned to analyze themselves and be open to change, defined themselves, and learned to put things into perspective. Next, we'll turn to how adversity related to participant feelings about themselves.

Micro Level: Self-esteem

The second micro level meaning category is self-esteem, which concerns how an individual feels about himself or herself. Most participants (23 of 26 [88%]) discussed how their adversities affected their feelings about or confidence in themselves. Participants shared three ways in which adversity had affected their self-esteem. Adversity led to feelings of insecurity, self-confidence and pride.

At first glance it may seem paradoxical that adversity would lead to opposite effects on participant self-esteem. While feelings of insecurity lower self-esteem, feelings of self-confidence and pride typically raise self-esteem. For participants in this study, adversity resulted in a mix of positive and negative feelings in each individual. When adversity occurred, negative feelings (*insecurity)* immediately resulted as the participants attempted to deal with the trauma or disruptive event. As Frances explained, "At times when [adversity is] happening to you, it can be an emotional upheaval. It can throw you off kilter, out of kilter. So it's very disturbing and

disruptive. All those very negative words." For many participants, insecurity lingered well after the adversity was over, as these participants felt a need to protect themselves from further harm. As Brenda articulated, "It has made me more private about private things." Similarly, Diane's advice from her experiences is to "make sure that you're protecting yourself."

Insecurity also lingered after the adversity was over for participants who were unable to make sense of their experiences. These participants spent much time questioning why the adversity had happened and had a sense of distress because they could not come up with the answer. As Olivia expressed, "I don't know why this happened. I question what I knew--something I could have done differently. What I may have said differently. I don't know whether I will ever be at peace with it."

Participants experienced positive feelings (*self-confidence and pride)* in two situations. First, participants developed self-confidence during an adversity when they learned how to manage the adversity, even when they lacked hope that the adversity would successfully resolve or end. As Anne expressed, "It wasn't just that one experience. I worked for that person for about 17 years so it was a culmination of things. I think it made me a stronger person." Second, participants developed self-confidence and pride after an adversity when they had successfully overcome it. As Frances said about the adversity she has overcome, "It means a sense of accomplishment. It means a sense of pride." This section will explore the concepts of insecurity, self-confidence and pride in turn.

Insecurity. For a majority of participants, (19 of 26 [73%]) adversity led to insecurity, which included decreased self-esteem and self-confidence. Insecurity is a broad label which encompasses a number of distinct feelings including self-doubt, shame, inferiority, stress, loneliness, disappointment and failure. Participants experienced a loss of self-confidence as a

result of these feelings. For example, Eileen discussed the loss of self-confidence she experienced:

> You just kind of lose that optimism in your ability to make a positive meaningful difference. I think you begin to accept and become more complacent. It isn't the right answer, but it's how you survive. (Eileen)

Many participants spent much time questioning themselves in retrospect about how they could have prevented their adverse situations. In some cases, participants concluded that they were to blame, despite evidence to the contrary, as Marcy articulated:

> I tried very hard to keep thinking of all the things that I did that were good and put blame where it belonged, but that lingering question of "Could I have done better? Should I have done better? Did I shoot myself in the foot sometime?" (Marcy)

Not only did the insecurity which resulted from adversity mean that participants felt bad about themselves in general, it also impacted what they could do with their careers. Some participants questioned whether they should move on to new workplaces and whether they wanted to move on, given that they would have new obstacles to face. These participants expressed a sense of exhaustion from having navigated through so many obstacles to this point in their careers. For example, Lillian articulated her reasons for not moving on:

> It's impacted my mobility. … Should I be going on to the next job? Yeah, I should. I shouldn't still be here. But you know what? I don't want to fight it again. I finally have this organization under control and do I want to do the next one? I'm kind of tired. [Laughs] (Lillian)

Similarly, Brenda reflected on her reasons for not leaving her current institution:

> The absence of mentors is probably the reason I never left this job either. Because it was very hard to sort of know whether it was right or not. … I think obstacles is an interesting question because I've often wondered why I didn't leave here, but I think it's because at a certain point I didn't want any more obstacles. (Brenda)

For some participants insecurity was manifest as a sense of shame. Nina was verbally attacked by a male colleague and then not supported by her institution. As she described, “I just felt--I felt dirty. I felt like I was the instigator in all of this.”

Insecurity was also manifest physically through weight gain, appetite, lack of sleep, stress, and slumping posture. For example, Gina mentioned the physical and emotional stress she endured while working for an insecure, verbally abusive supervisor. As she described, “It affected me personally just in sleep deprivation, appetite, anxiety, all of those things. So I mean it does--those kinds of things affect one's health.” Insecurity was also manifest as an uncontrollable physical reflex. After living through a serious car accident, Wendy described how her body attempts to protect itself through a reflex:

> Even today, like all of a sudden there's screeching tires near me, or a siren all of a sudden turns on right near me. I don't go back to reliving it, but my body reacts like I'm bracing for impact-- … It's like at the cellular level, it's bracing for impact. (Wendy)

Another type of insecurity which participants discussed was loneliness. In Lillian’s case, loneliness resulted from serving on a male-dominated leadership team and being excluded from male-dominated social events such as golf games. As Lillian shared, “You don't get the social interaction out of your job that most males get.” In addition, participants who serve as presidents do not have the benefit of peers within their own institution to reach out to and share experiences with. Claudia articulated her feeling of loneliness and the resulting feeling of insecurity. As she stated, “The presidency is <u>extremely</u> lonely. It is the <u>loneliest</u> place I can imagine. ... Sometimes I feel like, ‘My god, who can I ask about this?’”

Several participants felt an intense need for privacy to help protect themselves. Evelyn discussed how “scary” it can be to serve in a visible leadership position in which “everybody's watching your every move.” In some cases participants with serious health issues chose not to

share their diagnoses with their campus communities. Participants kept their health struggles private to protect themselves from criticism of their leadership or decision-making abilities. As Claudia explained, "I didn't want the campus to know I was sick so they wouldn't think I wasn't making good decisions because of that." Participants did note the importance of sharing struggles with adversity with trusted family and friends, but as Brenda stated, "Other than that, I think a line of privacy where people don't go is important."

Other participants described insecurity that resulted from feelings of inferiority due to their gender, young age, and/or minority race. These participants felt "struck down" and "second-guessed" because of their personal characteristics, rather than being evaluated on their skills or competence. As Isabelle described:

> It's never about who you are. … It was more who you knew and what you were. You know, that you were a woman or that you were a black woman. It's wasn't like who you were in terms of your ability to do a job and that you were competent and all that. That didn't matter. It was but you're a woman, so therefore we're going to second guess everything you do anyway. (Isabelle)

Even participants in this study who were confident in their own skills and abilities experienced a type of insecurity. These individuals were keenly aware that they were likely to be perceived as less than competent in their leadership positions, simply because they were women. These participants felt the need to overprepare to buffer against obstacles they face. Gina explained this idea: "I had to, at all times, realize that I had to be über-prepared because the environment didn't anticipate that I was up to the challenge."

Beth's case provides an interesting example of the concept of being overprepared. When asked, Beth indicated that she had not experienced adversities, barriers or obstacles in her personal or professional life. Instead, she had experienced the opposite, having many encouragers and supporters along the way who helped her to develop as a confident and

successful leader. Even though Beth has not experienced adversity, barriers or obstacles, she still described how she felt the need to overprepare and "be twice as good" in order to succeed as a leader. Many participants in this study dealt with feelings of insecurity as a result of their experiences. However, many participants also experienced the opposite, an increase in self-confidence, as discussed in the next section.

Self-confidence. Another aspect of self-esteem which over half of the participants (14 of 26 [54%]) developed through their experiences with adversity was self-confidence. Many participants discussed feeling "stronger" and "tougher" and gaining "confidence" in their abilities as a result of learning to navigate through adverse experiences. As Kelly articulated, "The toughest times [are often] our biggest learning opportunity, and whether it's searching our own souls, our own strengths, our own abilities for perseverance, the tough stuff makes us stronger."

Participants noted that overcoming barriers or difficult obstacles resulted in an increase in their overall self-esteem. For example, Vivian described how going away to a four year college against the advice of her high school counselor increased her confidence:

> It certainly manifests as a barrier that I broke through…and one that I broke through successfully. And that one I broke through in a way that I felt better for myself--better about myself, more power, you know, more capable. (Vivian)

Not all participants were able to overcome their adversities. In some cases, the best that participants could do was to learn how to handle or deal with their adverse situations. Even when participants could not overcome their adversities, they still experienced an increase in self-confidence as they developed emotional strength and learned how to manage their situations. For example, Evelyn grew up with a mother who was addicted to drugs and alcohol. Her mother continues to struggle with addiction to this day. According to Evelyn this experience "made me

strong.” She further explained how her experience with her mother has given her the ability to handle situations that are not easy or clear:

> My husband always tells me that I operate in the gray, and I do. I do. I am not a black and white person. I will listen and listen and listen and understand in most situations why people make the decisions that they do. Now, whether that's a positive or a negative, I don't know, but that's how I am, and that's why I say I always believe people deserve second chances. Because there are always circumstances around the reasons why people make decisions. (Eveyln)

Increased self-confidence was also the result when participants learned to successfully navigate within difficult working environments. Carla’s success in working on construction projects, typically a man’s job, boosted her confidence and earned her the respect of others. As she shared:

> I think it's made me tough, not always in a good way because I've had to deal with really tough situations where people really don't respect where you're at, so you have to take maybe a harder approach and a harder line sometimes about "no, I'm not accepting it." … I've learned I think more how I can be tough, respected, earn the respect of people, but not come across as like this hard-nosed person. (Carla)

A few participants in this study shared their experiences in dealing with severe budget crises. These participants were faced with decisions to eliminate programs, sports teams and positions to keep their institutions afloat financially. Such decisions have a very human element to them, as some individuals will no longer have programs of study to pursue, sports teams to play on, or jobs to earn their living. For participants in this study, these decisions were more than difficult, they were “painful” as Claudia described. However, after making the most difficult of decisions to enable their institutions to survive, these participants experienced an increase in self-confidence. As Claudia further explained, “It's allowed me to have confidence that when I think a decision is right, trust it. …Having made those decisions, cutting [a sport] and cutting faculty, I feel like I'm real tough.”

Self-confidence was also evident in cases in which participants realized that the individuals who had harmed them were dealing with real problems in their lives. These participants felt strong enough to feel sympathy for individuals who had caused them so much grief. For example, Gina expressed sympathy for her insecure, verbally abusive supervisor:

> That person's biggest punishment is they have to live with themselves. ... It's a weird thing to reassure yourself with but in a way, it was both reassuring to me and in some ways gave me a sympathy for the individual that in the moment I certainly never felt. … We can simply be a piece of that and leave it and go home and have families and other people who love and support us. But this is an individual that probably doesn't have a lot of that. (Gina)

Now that we have discussed insecurity and self-confidence, we'll turn to pride, which is the final aspect of self-esteem expressed by participants in this study.

***Pride*.** Pride is another aspect of self-esteem evident in participant interviews. Several participants (5 of 26 [19%]) discussed feelings of pride, accomplishment, or fulfillment that resulted from their experiences. These individuals all experienced personal pride in accomplishing things they did not know they could. As Ava articulated, "I think there's a sense of pride that I've overcome something that was unexpected for me." Participants who persevered through educational programs and challenging job searches felt a great sense of accomplishment in meeting their goals. For example, Sherry spoke about her feelings of being a successful president after going through six interviews before being offered a position:

> I knew some of my fellow job candidates, and I saw people get hired who I knew did not have the skill set that I had. And it's been <u>wonderful</u> to be a successful president [laughs]. So there. [Laughs] That's my revenge is just I got the right presidency. I'm really good at it. I'm a great match for [my university]. (Sherry)

Beyond a personal sense of accomplishment, some participants also experienced pride for their family and for their larger culture. Frances, who completed a full-time doctoral program while working full time and raising three children, explained this concept:

> When you look at--particularly in the African-American culture--you see more and more doctoral degrees now, but that wasn't always the case. So I think it's important to always recognize that there is that pride for yourself and your family, but there's a larger piece of this for the culture for women. (Frances)

To summarize, participants described how their experiences related to their self-esteem, or their feelings about themselves. Specifically they described a mix of positive and negative feelings including insecurity, self-confidence and pride. Next, we'll discuss how adversity related to what participants could or could not do.

Micro Level: Power

The last micro level meaning category is power, which concerns what an individual can or can't do. Most participants (23 of 26 [88%]) discussed how their adversities affected the amount of power and control they had. In some situations, participants found they lacked control over aspects of their lives, and in other situations, participants were empowered and found new opportunities as a result of their experiences.

Some participants experienced both lack of control and empowerment as a result of the same experience. In these situations, when participants found they could not control one aspect of their lives as a result of adversity, they focused on what they could control and what alternatives or opportunities they had. They asked themselves questions such as: What can I control? What can't I control? What do I want to control? As Wendy explained, "If there's something in my way, and it's not possible to move it, then I'll go on a different direction." This section will explore the concepts of lack of control, empowerment, and opportunity in turn.

Lack of control. Slightly less than half of the participants (12 of 26 [46%]) experienced a lack of control as a result of their adversities, meaning that they had a lack of power to freely choose, achieve, influence or direct events in their lives. This was especially evident for

individuals who went through traumatic adversities such as serious injury or illness, miscarriage, job loss, and loss of spouse or partner. Prior to their experiences, these participants believed they had a good deal of control and power in their lives. However, they became keenly aware of their inability to control their lives as a result of their experiences. As Marcy shared:

> One thing I know is you cannot control your life. And this is kind of a downer, but I used to think, in all honesty, if you are intelligent, if you are honest, and if you are a hard worker, you'd be fine. I don't believe that anymore. (Marcy)

After having had academic and career success, participants who suffered miscarriages and infertility found it especially difficult to handle the lack of control they had over their ability to have children. For example, Sherry shared her story of being unable achieve this major life goal:

> The most significant adversity I faced was when I realized I couldn't have kids. So when I was 32, I became pregnant, but I miscarried, and I miscarried because I had so many tumors in my uterus that I couldn't carry a child. So right after miscarrying, I also had to have a hysterectomy. …That was my first "failure" quote in life. So I had made it through all of my academic preparation. I had had Fulbrights and all these grants. I had lived abroad successfully. And so my professional life was going fine. So I had prepared--I'd bought a house. I prepared everything to start a family. And so it was the first disconnect between setting goals and achieving them, and actually seeing them happening. (Sherry)

Some participants discussed how the onset of adversity meant that they had no other choice but to get through it. Faith was left to raise two teenagers on her own when she lost her husband to cancer. As she explains:

> You don't have any choice. You focus on your children. I got through it because I had things I had to do. I had to think about them. I had to give them support that everything was okay. … You learn self-reliance. You just do. You get through it because have no choice. (Faith)

Several participants spoke about the frustration of being unable to control their working conditions. Claudia described her inability to control her own agenda:

> It's one of the things about being a president is you do not ever set your own agenda. First of all your day--the day I come in with is not the day I get. It's close, but it's changed because of this emergency or that emergency. …When this semester's over, it's been about whatever it needed to be about, but not what I wanted it to be about. (Claudia)

This inability to control working conditions includes lack of freedom to choose to advance or not advance within an organization. For example, Lillian described her experience with lack of opportunities at her institution:

> In other companies where I have worked, … I have been consistently offered jobs within the business unit or within the company. ... I've talked to my [current] boss about career goals, and he's just said, "Well, there's nothing for you here." (Lillian)

In Eileen's case, she was given no other choice but to accept a position as vice president:

> I didn't want it. I refused it, and I was basically told, "You will do it." So it was in acting capacity initially. I didn't want it because you pass a point in your career that is kind of reversible [and] you're no longer safe. Your career is always at risk. (Eileen)

As Eileen noted, serving in the top leadership positions in higher education can be a career risk. Darlene expanded on this idea when she discussed the uncertainty that she experienced when her institution's president moved on. At that point, Darlene was serving as provost and wanted nothing more than to stay at that institution. However, she knew it was unlikely to happen since new presidents frequently bring in their own senior vice presidents. In addition, if she applied for the presidency herself and did not get it, she thought she would be a weaker candidate elsewhere. Darlene recalled the long period of uncertainty she endured:

> How do you deal with a less than ideal situation over many months, when there's so much uncertainty, and you don't have that much control over it? I think that's the real hard part. I mean I guess the most important thing for me in that situation was learning to try and prioritize what was my number one goal. What did I want most that would also be good for my family? And then doing everything I could to make that happen, knowing that half of it was out of my control, at least. How do you come to grips with that? (Darlene)

For a couple participants the inability to control their working conditions led to severe financial losses when they were forced to leave their jobs. These participants were jobless for an extended period of time, as they searched for new jobs, sold their homes and relocated. As Olivia described:

> I couldn't find a job for 15 months so I supported my husband and I for 15 months by borrowing against my credit cards. What else can you do? ... So it affected me tremendously as far as my finances go. I'm recovering from this still. And it was so unnecessary, so unnecessary. (Olivia)

Marcy also discussed the financial loss that her family sustained after she was given no choice but to resign her position:

> It cost me tens of thousands of dollars. … It put a lot of stress just because we ended up having to sell our house at a loss, and we lost a lot. … It forced us into a position to move and change our family finances before we were ready. (Marcy)

Sometimes adversity in the workplace meant being forced make a decision that participants didn't want to make. These participants had two choices: 1) stay in their current position and accept the adverse situation or 2) leave. In these cases, the preferred option, stay and remove the adverse situation, was not available. Nina described this dilemma which occurred after she was verbally attacked by a male colleague and was also unable to gain support to address personnel issues within her department:

> I didn't know how to fix it. I mean I couldn't fix it. I mean if there was no one else on that campus willing to fix it-- … I was at a roadblock, and there was no way it was going to change. … You have to make a decision at that point to make a move or accept. (Nina)

Lack of control was not always a negative concept for participants. In a few cases, participants shared how positive events had occurred through chance or luck. Regarding being offered the presidency of her institution, Darlene stated that "by chance…things sort of worked out." Similarly, Marcy shared that she felt that lucky to have found her husband:

> I think you're really, really lucky if you can find somebody that will support as you grow into adulthood and beyond. I think that's what real love is. It's not romantic. It's hard work, but I think we were both really lucky to be each other's best friends and grow. (Marcy)

Lillian also expressed that she was lucky to work in environments that had measures in place which helped to protect her from sexual harassment. As she stated, "Sometimes it's just flat out luck. Flat out luck that I happened to work for public corporations that had safeguards in place. Had I not, there would have been no help."

Many participants in this study experienced a lack of control or power in their lives as a result of their adversity. Interestingly, many participants also experienced the opposite, empowerment, as discussed in the next section.

Empowerment. Empowerment is another aspect of power evident in participant interviews. More than half of study participants (17 of 26 [73%]) felt empowered as a result of their experiences, meaning that they had gained power or control over aspects of their lives. As Vivian shared, going away to a four-year college against the advice and without the support of her high school counselor gave her a "sense of empowerment." When people stood in the way of participants like Vivian, they kept going. As Vivian further explained, "Your job is to find a way around them or live with what you have to live with until you can." Similarly, Wendy did not allow things to stop her:

> The accident should have killed me and it didn't, so I'm pretty fearless. …Things phase me but nothing can--like if something has to be done, I'll make sure I persevere. I'm a determined person, I'll get it done. … I don't let stuff stop me. (Wendy)

Participants in this study became empowered in several ways. They developed self-reliance, resilience and leadership skills. They became prepared for adversities and obstacles, and they learned to control what they could control. These concepts will be discussed in this section.

Some participants described the self-reliance they gained through surviving or overcoming their adversities. As Faith shared about the loss of her husband at a young age, “It made me self-reliant.” Faith further elaborated on this concept:

> [The loss of my husband] meant having the need to pull oneself together, look ahead, assess one's responsibilities to other people, not just to oneself, and develop a life pattern, a life path that enables you to survive. (Faith)

Other participants described how they developed resilience, which, as Frances articulated, is the ability to “rebound and keep going” when things don’t quite work as expected.

Many participants found they were empowered through the leadership skills they developed as a result of their experiences with professional adversity. Navigating through a particular experience of adversity in the workplace gave participants insight and new skills which they could use to address subsequent challenging issues of a similar nature. As Isabelle expressed, “I've been able to look back on it and use in other situations that are similar to that.”

Some participants became more assertive and vocal and gained the abilities to make tough decisions and to implement change in the workplace. As Wendy stated, “It's really empowered me to just be very professionally direct with people.” For Ava, overcoming the perception that her promotion was a demotion resulted in her ability to make tough decisions and to hold her own with her board:

> Because it pushed me out of my comfort zone, I think I'm better able now to make the tough calls and to make the tough decisions. Part of what I do is work with our board of trustees, and the majority of our board members are CEOs of their own corporations or their own businesses. And I'm not intimidated by that because I had to come into this position making some tough calls and some tough decisions. (Ava)

Similarly, Carla shared how she learned to be vocal and implement change through her experience of working in a man’s world of construction projects:

> Had I not had some of these experiences, particularly professionally I think I would not have been that vocal manager. That vocal person got me to implement changes that have been really positive on our campus. (Carla)

By standing up to a disrespectful supervisor, Kelly also learned to be assertive and vocal. As she shared, “It taught me to not be afraid to speak my truth. Whether that's how someone manages me or to step up and say, ‘Look, I've accomplished all of this’ and to not be afraid to showcase my work.”

Individuals in this study were also empowered when they learned how to be prepared for adversity or barriers. Some participants who were of a minority race discussed how they had learned to expect and even embrace discrimination, as Isabelle described:

> You just sort of know you're gonna be faced with adverse situations. You just know that things-- people are gonna put barriers in front of you, so whether it's gender discrimination-- I think for me, it was a combination of age, gender and race discrimination. … I've just really learned to just--to embrace it and be prepared. (Isabelle)

Participants also used the concept of being prepared to deal with gender-based leadership barriers, such as exclusion from informal networks. For example, Olivia built a network of women to get around the “good old boys’ network.” As she stated, “You need to build a coalition of women, and we have [a women’s association] here. ... You have to identify the women in your professional lives who are willing to help you.”

Participants who experienced a lack of control in one area of their lives were empowered when they discovered what they could control. For example, after Phyllis was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, she started to control what she could. As she stated, “It made me just stop and go, ‘Alright, I can't control what's happened to me, but what can I do?’ So we started sleeping more, not sweating the small stuff.” Although supervisors or mentors can stand in the way of an

individual's advancement, Teresa noted the importance of remembering that people can control their own destiny. As she shared:

> What I share with other people from that experience is that never to believe, never to accept the notion that somebody else controls your destiny. So if you get fired, you get demoted, you don't get the job you want, it may be for a large variety of reasons, but it's never because one person has prevented you from doing that. That you control your own destiny, and don't give that over to anybody else. (Teresa)

Now that we have discussed both lack of control and empowerment, we'll turn to the concept of opportunity.

Opportunity. Opportunity is the last aspect of power evident in participant interviews. Slightly more than one quarter of the participants (7 of 26 [27%]) expressed that their experiences with adversity led to new opportunities in their lives. These participants viewed adversity as a catalyst or circumstance which made it possible to do something new or different.

Opportunity is typically thought of as a positive concept. However, for participants in this study in the context of adversity, opportunity was intertwined with pain and loss. As Sherry stated, "Adversity brings opportunity as well as challenge and pain, if you could get through it." Faith also summarized how adversity and opportunity relate based on her experience, "Adversity and opportunity, I think, become interwoven if you survive." Faith elaborated on how her world both contracted and expanded after losing her husband:

> My world contracted in some ways, when he died. On an emotional level, it contracted enormously. But it expanded professionally and to some extent personally … In many ways, my life was very much enriched because of moving into administration and having the freedom to travel and not feel that I was neglecting either my husband or my children by doing that. (Faith)

Some participants found that professional adversity was a catalyst to professional change and growth and led to new opportunities for more challenging work. For example, Gina spoke

about how she turned serving as the first female vice president at her institution into an opportunity:

> I used [being the first female vice president] to my advantage because I was then frequently called to be the one to substitute for the president if there was a speaking engagement. … I think it all depended on how I handled it. If I shirked back and let, "°You know, well, you know, I'm just--I'm new--I'm the female,°" you know, whatever, I'm sure it would have transpired differently, but I seized it as a wonderful, amazing opportunity to take full advantage of and turned a program around which they could see happening immediately. (Gina)

Similarly, Jacklyn explained how her experience with difficult workplace relationships was a catalyst to change and growth:

> Professionally it has pushed me into an entirely different arena of work, different comfort zone, different set of challenges to puzzle through. So it's just been a huge ratcheting up of the complexity of my position and the difficulty of it certainly. (Jacklyn)

For other participants, breaking through barriers set them on a path that would not have been possible otherwise. As Vivian stated, "It's just amazing that all these sort of coincidental things that happened along the way because I broke through a barrier to go to college in particular [and] to graduate school."

Some participants were able to recast barriers they had experienced as opportunities. When asked if she had experienced any barriers or obstacles in her rise to her current position, Wendy shared the following:

> I don't think of it as barriers because I'm like, "Alright, this person's trying to stop me from being successful because they're jealous or whatever." … Those type of situations kind of empower me, I get energy from them, and I turn it into an opportunity for me somehow. I use all the tools I've gained over my years of work experience and workshops and books I've read too. Alright, I'm not the first person who's dealt with this kind of thing. What's the best way to approach this? So I don't run from it. … I go head on and forward into it. (Wendy)

To summarize, participants described how their experiences related to power, or what they can and can't do. Specifically they described dealing with lack of control in some situations as well as being empowered and finding new opportunities. Next, we'll discuss how adversity related to participant connections to others.

Meso Level: Connection

Connection is a meso level meaning category which concerns how an individual connects to others. A majority of participants (19 of 26 [73%]) described how their experiences impacted how they relate to other people. Aspects of connection to others evident in participant interviews were loss, relationship stress, relationship strengthening, and support for others.

Similar to the themes of self-esteem and power, connection also contains both positive and negative elements. On the negative side, participants experienced lost and strained connections to others. On the positive end, participants experienced stronger connections to others and gained the ability to support others. What type of change in connection to others occurred depended on the particular adversity and the particular relationship. For example, Marcy suffered the *loss* of her leadership team when she was forced to resign and find a new job. As she stated, "I miss my team." Darlene gained the ability to *support others* because of a difficult experience with her own career advancement. As she stated, "I'm more empathetic with my friends and colleagues who are going through work transitions."

For participants in this study, a single adversity led to multiple changes in connections to others. For example, Eileen experienced both *relationship stress* (with her children) and *relationship strengthening* (with her team) as a result of workplace adversity. This section will explore the concepts of loss, relationship stress, relationship strengthening and support for others.

Loss. Several participants (5 of 26 [19%]) described losing connections to others due to various circumstances, such as death, miscarriage, jealousy, or job loss. As Faith shared regarding the death of her husband, “It meant the greatest loss in my life.” Some participants lost connections to people who were not directly involved in the adversity. In Faith’s case, without her husband, she no longer felt comfortable participating in couple’s activities, and therefore lost connections to friends:

> I was an odd person out. And I felt that. And so for a while, I agreed to continue with--play bridge with a friend. But it wasn't the same, and so gradually I just felt the need to find my own space and time on those holidays. (Faith)

Similarly, after being forced to leave her job, Olivia lost her father. As she stated, “During that time, my dad had a stroke over it. My dad died. … He was so upset over me losing that job.”

Some other participants dealt with infertility and miscarriage. While these participants had to deal with loss of a pregnancy, in some cases, they also had to deal with loss of hope for a future pregnancy. This particular type of loss was even more difficult for participants who handled it privately because friends and colleagues were unaware that it had happened. There were no public funerals or memorials for these participants to grieve the loss and for friends and family to lend their support and sympathy. For example, Darlene described the grief she endured in private after suffering a miscarriage:

> It's this time of great sorrow, but you feel like you can't tell people because like you didn't share your greatest joy with them, why are you gonna say, “Well, somehow you're weren't good enough, or you weren't trustworthy enough then, when I got pregnant, now I'm gonna tell you about my miscarriage?” So there were just not very many people to lean on. (Darlene)

Participants also lost connections to friends and colleagues when these individuals became jealous of their success. For example, Isabelle recalled losing a friendship after receiving a promotion:

> There's one person in particular that I was good friends with, and she was not very happy that I was promoted. She thought that she should have been promoted … She ended up quitting and going on to a different position. And I, to this day, have not spoken to her. (Isabelle)

Sometimes connections to others were not lost as a result of adversity, but instead were strained. The next section discusses the concept of relationship stress.

Relationship stress. Relationship stress is another aspect of connection to others that was evident in participant interviews. Slightly more than one quarter of participants (7 of 26 [27%]) described how their adversities had caused connections to others to be strained. Participants experienced strained relationships with individuals who they were closest to, such as their husbands and children, even though these people were not directly involved in the adversity. In these cases, the adversity had demanded so much time and attention that it left participants with little time and energy for members of their families. For example, Brenda explained how three adversities in her life, a murder involving family members, problems with her son, and her institution's financial crisis, all caused a strain on her marriage:

> The killing [involving family members] had I think called a lot out of my husband. The problems with my son [in growing up] I think caused real strain in the marriage… The stress of the job didn't help my marriage any. [Laughs] I mean I finally got so I would lie awake at night, and I go, "Oh my god, there are 200 people who are gonna lose their jobs if I don't sort this out." But he got tired of hearing about [my institution's] problems as you might appreciate. (Brenda)

Other participants had little time for their children as a result of the anxiety they experienced in dealing with workplace adversities. As Eileen shared, "During this period in time I would say again that the people who suffered the greatest were probably my children." Nina also discussed the negative impact on her children. As she stated, "I think my kids suffered in the sense that I wasn't present from them like I could have been otherwise because I had so much going on in my head that I couldn't shut down."

Strained relationships also occurred when participants' partners were unable to support them. Some participants found it difficult to share workplace struggles with their partners when the partners lacked sufficient background to understand and empathize. For example, a few participants had husbands who worked in blue-collar jobs, which is a very different working environment than the professional, white-collar environment of higher education administration. As Eileen stated, "You can't empathize if you have no experience or no context." In Evelyn's case, discussing workplace adversity with her husband caused a strained in her marriage when her husband wanted to interfere:

> He wanted to give [my boss] a piece of his mind. As though he could handle it better than I could. So that was difficult. Unfortunately what I learned from that situation [is] there are things that you can't take home. It depends on your partner, I guess. But often times what we take home from work are the bad stories, the negative things and if it's a person that doesn't like to hear that, then they're gonna tell you to quit your job. They're not gonna tell you how to handle it. (Evelyn)

Adversity led to relationship stress for some participants, but it also led to stronger relationships for others, as discussed next.

Relationship strengthening. Relationship strengthening is another aspect of connection to others evident in participant interviews. A couple participants (2 of 26 [8%]) described how their adversities had caused connections to others to be strengthened. Whereas for some participants talking about workplace adversity with a partner strained the relationship, in Darlene's case such discussions strengthened the relationship. She noted that "talking about issues related to adversity with your spouse or partner does good things for your relationship, in terms of strengthening it." Whether such conversations strengthen or strain a relationship "depends on your partner" as Evelyn stated.

Professional relationships were also strengthened as a result of adversity. Eileen spoke about the cohesiveness her team developed in handling a crisis involving reporting errors which were attributable to her predecessor:

> It definitely brought my team together and made us more cohesive. I think it reinforced the importance of, you know, we are one, and we should-- it's kind of like the football mentality--we succeed or fail together. (Eileen)

In this case, the team's relationship was strengthened as they worked together to overcome the crisis. In addition to strengthening connections to others, adversity also allowed participants to provide support to others, as discussed in the next section.

Support for others. Support for others is the last aspect of connection evident in participant interviews. More than half of participants (15 of 26 [58%]) expressed that going through adversity has allowed them to support others, in ways such as having empathy, providing encouragement, mentoring, promoting inclusiveness in the workplace, and preventing mistreatment of others. For example, Frances articulated that her experiences helped her to "become more supportive to others [and] to encourage others." Olivia shared how she plans to protect other women as a result of her own experience. As she stated, "I will not allow another woman to be subjected to what I was subjected to."

Some participants developed empathy, support and patience for others. For example, Darlene stated that "I'm more empathetic with my friends and colleagues who are going through work transitions." Phyllis discussed how her experience with multiple sclerosis gave her sensitivity to and empathy for those with disabilities. As she shared, "MS [multiple sclerosis] made me more aware and sensitive to another group of folks that have a lot of invisible barriers."

For Wendy, surviving a car accident, going through a divorce and being threatened by a subordinate gave her awareness of what others may be going through. She shared how she approaches her staff with increased sensitivity:

> I just have such a stronger awareness of all the horrific things that people are going through or could go through and are going through, even people in the workplace that I don't even know what they're going through. So I--just from combination of all the things that have happened to me, like on Monday morning, when I see people on my staff, I don't say, “How was your weekend?” because maybe it sucked. So I say, “Good to see you Doug.” Things like that people just can say, “Oh, thanks.” (Wendy)

Going through adversity made it possible for participants to encourage others going through similar struggles. For example, Evelyn, who grew up with a mother who was addicted to drugs and alcohol, shared how her experience helps her to relate to and encourage students at her institution:

> I can to some degree share [my experience] with the students that are here. Many of our students are first in their family to go to college. So they're first generation college students, like I was. … I can relate to the student because I was not sure that I could do it. …They come in here saying they can't do it, and I say, “Boy, do I have a story for you.” (Evelyn)

Going through an experience of adversity allowed participants to sympathize with and support others going through difficult times, even when the type of adversity was not the same. Sherry articulated this concept:

> I kind of had to go through my own adversity to be able to sympathize with other people's adversity. … It's one of the nicest roles of a president is to actually be there for somebody at a time when they're going through something difficult. It makes a huge difference, and you feel like you're building a culture that contributes to people's lives by not ignoring it yourself and by diving in and being a part of it. (Sherry)

Participants were also able to use their experiences to mentor others, thus providing others with encouragement to take on new opportunities and guidance to avoid mistakes. As

Claudia stated, “I take mentorship very seriously. I feel like it's my responsibility.” Similarly, Teresa added, “I see it as my obligation to turn around and do what I can to help [other people] transition through advice, through opportunities, through clear and forthright feedback.” Lillian related how her experiences with discrimination and sexual harassment have enabled her to guide other women and students within her institution. As she stated, “I think that's the making sense maybe part is that you in turn need to do this for other people, so your experience is translating into here's how I can help you avoid that.”

Participants were also able to support others by modeling the successful balance of work and family to young women and young men. Rachel noted that this balance was especially beneficial for her son to see. As she stated, “I thought it was almost more important for my son to see it, than for my daughter. I think it was very important for young men and boys to see women doing so many different things in their lives.”

Not only did experiencing adversity allow participants to support others individually, it also allowed them to support others on a collective basis through institutional policy or culture change. For example, Evelyn explained that her own experience with salary inequalities led her to push for better salary and benefit policies for employees in her institution. As she stated, “A lot of the benefits wouldn't have been implemented if there wasn't someone--either a woman or somebody that had family concerns that needed to be addressed.” Phyllis related how her experience of discrimination as a young woman led her to promote inclusion in the workplace:

> It really made me want to be a model for other young women and to find ways through HR, through the professional [associations and] through that role in the institution, to make it as easy for dual-career families to exist and to really appreciate the value that different folks bring to the organization. (Phyllis)

To summarize, participants described how adversity resulted in positive and negative changes in their relationships with others. On the negative side, connections to others were lost or strained. On the positive side, participants experienced strengthened relationships with others and developed sensitivity for and the ability to support others. The next section overviews how adversity related to participant views of the world.

Macro Level: Worldview

Worldview is a macro level meaning category which concerns beliefs about the world and how society operates. Half of study participants (13 of 26 [50%]) discussed how their adversities related to their views of the world. For some participants, experiences with adversity led to a sense of disillusionment with the way that the world operates. For others, adversity led to optimistic perspectives of the world and why things happen. In this section, I'll first explain the concepts of disillusionment and optimism. Then I'll discuss what accounted for changes in worldview and how worldview, self-esteem and power relate.

Disillusionment. Some participants (9 of 26 [35%]) experienced a sense of disillusionment related to why things happen. Participants expressed a sense of disillusionment when their experiences did not match a more idealized pre-existing worldview. As a result of their adversities, several participants came to believe that things don't happen for a reason. As Wendy explained, "I don't think there's a god that says, 'Okay, she's gonna be an accident today,' or 'Her marriage is not gonna work out.' Things just happen." Ava shared a similar belief when asked how she made sense of the abuse she experienced as a child. As she stated, "I don't think you make sense of that. That was a bad thing to happen, but bad things happen to people."

Growing up, some participants believed that good would always prevail and that everyone is nice. These participants experienced a sense of disillusionment when good didn't

happen in their lives and when they were mistreated by others. Eileen shared her experience of disillusionment:

> I would say my perspective changed, and sadly you begin to realize that good doesn't always prevail. … I definitely have a different perspective, less optimism, less of that--like I said the good guy wins in the movies [Laughs]. It's--that's just--that is life. That's tough. It's disillusioning I guess to grow up. (Eileen)

Olivia also experienced disillusionment when she realized that not everyone is nice:

> My perception has always been, as I was growing up, that everybody in the world was nice, and then you find out, not everyone is. Not everyone has your best interests in mind, and you're not everybody's baby girl. (Olivia)

In addition, participants discussed how they learned that other people are not guided by the same principles that they themselves follow. For example, Nina said that her experience "made me realize that not everyone is going to follow the standards or the expectations."

Other participants experienced a loss of naivety when they experienced discrimination first-hand and were prevented from doing things they wanted to do. As Kelly expressed, "Some of these things happened to me, and I thought, 'Oh, it's not as easy as I thought it was gonna be.'"

The disillusionment which some participants experienced related to the idea that problems exist in the world. These participants translated their realization that other people do indeed have problems and need support into an obligation to provide assistance and encouragement to others. Supporting others as an outcome of adversity falls under the meso level meaning of connection, as explained in section "Support for Others." As Lillian explained, "People need to be watched out for. Not everyone is tough and can handle things on their own." Sherry also came to understand that problems happen to everybody:

> I figured problems came in small sizes, and maybe people were making more of them than they should, and you have to kind of be knocked on your butt by something before you understand it can happen. That it happens to everybody. (Sherry)

While some participants became disillusioned about the way the world works as a result of their experiences, others held onto or gained optimistic views of the world, as described in the next section.

Optimism. After going through adversity, several participants (6 of 26 [23%]) retained or gained optimistic views of the world and why things happen. In some cases, participants held firm to their beliefs or faith and viewed their experiences with adversity through the lens of their pre-existing beliefs. Instead of focusing on the negative outcomes of adversity, this sense of optimism allowed participants to focus on the benefits that adversity had brought into their lives. As Phyllis stated:

> I have a firm belief things happen for a reason. I've got a very deep faith, and that plays out in different roles in my work life. And so I think it has helped me develop sensitivity to people that I wouldn't have necessarily had. (Phyllis)

In other cases, participants used their optimistic beliefs to recast their adversity more positively. For example, Jacklyn discussed her belief that “every experience teaches you something.” As she further elaborated, “I just think that obstacles either help you grow or help you make a decision about moving on to something else.” Similarly, other participants noted that hard times can be beneficial. As Teresa shared, “Sometimes the worst of times can actually turn out to be the most beneficial of times.”

Participants gained optimism when an unexpected positive result occurred. One participant developed an optimism about what other people could do. Evelyn grew up with a mother who addicted to drugs and alcohol. Since her mother was not able to change significantly enough to overcome her addictions, Evelyn held a belief that adults don’t change. However,

through her experience in working with a difficult boss, Evelyn learned that it was possible for an adult to change. As she stated:

> He's a 60-some year old man, and I would say over the last 15 years, I have seen him change significantly. And I didn't know that could happen. I mean when somebody's 40 or 45, you kind of think, “Well, they are who they are.” (Evelyn)

While for some participants adversity caused a sense of disillusionment because the outcomes did not match what they had learned when growing up, other participants experienced a confirmation of beliefs they had been taught. For example, in Marcy’s case, the person who had caused her harm eventually was removed from his position. As she shared, “Your mother always tells you that people that do bad things will get their [reward] but you never think you'll see it in your life. But we did.”

Changes in worldview. As a result of their experiences with adversity, some participants changed their worldviews while others retained their pre-existing worldviews. Two scenarios accounted for this process. First, some participants applied the outcome of their own experiences with adversity to their pre-existing worldviews. When beliefs matched outcomes, these participants took their experiences as a confirmation of their pre-existing beliefs. As Wendy stated, “Things just happen. … It's not what I had hoped for or ever thought would happen to me, but it did.” In cases when the outcome of their experiences did not match pre-existing worldviews, some participants modified their beliefs. As Eileen said, “My perspective changed.” Participants with an idealized worldview, such as Eileen and Olivia, became disillusioned, while participants who held more pessimistic beliefs, such as Evelyn, developed optimistic beliefs.

The second scenario involved participants who had a strong faith and an optimistic worldview. When these participants experienced adversity, they chose to view it through the lens of their faith. So for example, when Phyllis experienced discrimination and serious health issues,

she applied her belief that all things happen for a reason and focused on the benefits of her adversities. These participants retained their pre-existing optimistic worldviews.

Worldview, self-esteem and power. For some participants, worldview was connected to the micro-level meaning categories of self-esteem and power. Some participants who became disillusioned as a result of their experiences were left with a sense of *insecurity* and *lack of control*. Eileen summarized this concept: "You just kind of lose that optimism in your ability to make a positive meaningful difference. I think you begin to accept and become more complacent. It isn't the right answer but it's how you survive." Other participants who became disillusioned experienced a mix of insecurity and self-confidence as well as lack of control and empowerment. For example, as a result of her experiences with adversity, Wendy became more fearless, self-confident, and empowered by developing skills and controlling what she could control in her life. However, Wendy also had a strong sense of insecurity and lack of control. As she stated, "[The] car accident could have killed me. My son could have killed me. This guy at work could have killed me. I'm like, 'Jesus, life is not easy.'"

Participants who retained optimistic worldviews experienced an increase in self-esteem (*self-confidence*) and felt *empowered* as a result of their adversities. As Kelly described, "The more difficult times you're able to go through, the more you're able to look back and learn from those experiences. … I'm able to think back, 'Okay, I got through this and this and this and this, I can get through this one next.'"

Experiences of African-American Participants

Although the goal of this study was not to analyze adversity as it relates to race or culture, one's race and culture may impact how an individual makes meaning of adversity.

Therefore, this section will summarize unique perspectives which arose from my discussions with three participants who identified themselves as black or African-American.

Experiences and meanings for African-American participants were similar to meanings for Caucasian participants with three notable exceptions. First, not only did African-American participants experience gender discrimination, they also experienced discrimination and discouragement based on their race. In fact, these participants experienced discrimination on so many occasions throughout their lives that they learned expect and embrace it. As Isabelle shared, “I've just learned to not be surprised by it, and I almost sort of embrace it and expect it to happen.” African-American participants learned to use the strategy of depersonalizing discrimination so that it would “have a less personal impact on my ego,” as Vivian explained.

Second, due to their experiences of navigating through and overcoming adversity, African-American participants gained “a sense of empowerment,” as Vivian also shared. Frances described how she was empowered as a result of her experience with adversity: “It helps you to be much stronger. It helps you to maybe seek out more opportunities and be open to risk and taking on more than what you feel is comfortable.”

Last, African-American participants developed self-reliance as a result of their experiences with discrimination. Caucasian participants also learned self-reliance as a result of adversity, as discussed in the “Empowerment” meaning earlier in this chapter. Both Caucasian and African-American participants were empowered through the self-reliance they developed. However, for African-American participants, self-reliance was also a form of insecurity as they learned to rely on self to avoid showing weakness to others. This self-protection motivation did not exist in the stories of the Caucasian participants. As Isabelle shared about her experience, “I've tended to be very careful about sharing or voicing my concerns with people for fear that

they're gonna think that I'm just, you know, being overly sensitive." These participants also felt uncomfortable reaching out to others for assistance, as Isabelle further described: "I've just never felt comfortable going to a supervisor for assistance … unless I'm not able to handle it."

Summary

This chapter described the types of adversity which participants experienced, the strategies they used to get through their experiences, and the meanings which participants constructed from their experiences. There were 16 distinct meanings related to participant identity, self-esteem, power, connections to others and worldview. Meanings related to participant identity were generally positive, while meanings related to self-esteem, power and connections to others were mixed. In addition, adversity led to disillusioned worldviews for some participants and optimistic worldviews for others. The common thread for participants in this study was that adversity can lead to growth and opportunity but such benefits are intertwined with pain and loss. In the next chapter, I discuss how findings relate to existing literature on meaning-making and gender-based leadership barriers and then provide my own thoughts on notable aspects of this study.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to discover how women leaders in higher education make meaning of adversity. This chapter will explore answers to this question, specifically:

1. What meanings did participants construct from their experiences with adversity?
2. What process did participants use to make meaning of their experiences with adversity?
3. What were the outcomes of the meaning-making process?
4. How does participant meaning-making in this study relate to prior studies on meaning-making and adversity?
5. How do findings relate to gender-based leadership barriers?
6. How did participants navigate adversity, barriers, and obstacles to achieve their leadership positions?
7. How do participant experiences and meaning-making relate to feminist standpoint theory?

This chapter will explore answers to questions one through six in turn in the section entitled “Making Meaning of Adversity.” I will then explain the connection between feminist standpoint theory and the findings of this study in the section entitled “Feminist Standpoint Theory.” I then discuss notable aspects of this research in the section entitled “Discussion.” This chapter concludes with study limitations, suggestions for future research and recommendations for women on succeeding in leadership.

Making Meaning of Adversity

Through the course of the interviews, I discovered that the meanings which my participants had constructed about their personal experiences with adversity impacted their identities, self-esteem, power, connections to others and worldviews. This section will first summarize the meanings participants had constructed. Then I will address the meaning-making process participants used, the outcome of this process, and how participants navigated through adversity. Finally I will explore the relationship of findings to prior studies and to gender-based leadership barriers.

Participant Meanings of Adversity

What meanings did participants construct from their experiences with adversity? This question was explored and discussed in detail in Chapter 4. This section will provide a brief summary. Participants constructed meanings related to their connections to all three levels of society: micro (self), meso (others), and macro (world). The micro level meanings related to what participants thought of themselves *(identity),* how they felt about themselves *(self-esteem),* and what they could do *(power).* The meso level meanings concerned how participants related to others *(connection),* while the macro level meanings related to how they viewed the world *(worldview).* These meanings will be reviewed in turn.

Micro Level: Identity. Participants developed generally positive meanings related to identity. Through their experiences with adversity, participants formed or defined aspects of their identities (*self-definition).* They also learned about themselves and became open to change (*self-analysis).* In cases when it was not possible to overcome an adversity by changing themselves, participants learned to accept themselves (*self-acceptance).* Finally, adversity helped participants

to clarify what was important in their lives and to put smaller problems and less adverse situations into *perspective*.

Micro Level: Self-esteem. Participants developed opposite meanings related to their self-esteem. Participants experienced both lowered self-esteem in the form of *insecurity* and increased self-esteem including *self-confidence* and *pride*. Adversity resulted in a mix of positive and negative feelings in each participant. When adversity occurred, feelings of insecurity immediately resulted as the participants attempted to deal with the trauma or disruptive event. Many participants continued to feel insecure and self-protective well after the adversity was over, especially those who were unable to make sense of their experiences.

Participants experienced an increase in self-esteem during an adversity when they learned how to manage the adversity, even when they lacked hope that the adversity would successfully resolve or end. Participants also developed *self-confidence* and *pride* after an adversity when they had successfully overcome it.

Micro Level: Power. Participants also experienced opposite meanings related to power. Some participants found that they lacked power and control in their lives (*lack of control*) while others experienced *empowerment* and *opportunity*. Some participants experienced both lack of control and empowerment as a result of the same experience. In these situations, when participants found they could not control one aspect of their lives, they focused on what they could control, what their alternatives were, and what new opportunities they had.

Meso Level: Connection. Adversity resulted in mixed effects on connections to other people. On the negative side, participants lost connections to others *(loss)* and experienced strained relationships *(relationship stress).* On the positive end, participants experienced stronger connections to others *(strengthened relationships)* and gained the ability to support others

(support for others). What type of change in connection to others occurred depended on the particular adversity and the particular relationship. For some participants, a single adversity led to positive changes in connections in some relationships and negative changes in others.

Macro Level: Worldview. Participants formed disparate meanings related to worldview. Some participants described a sense of *disillusionment* when their experiences did not match a more idealized pre-existing worldview. Others retained or gained a sense of *optimism* of the world and why things happen. In some cases, participants used pre-existing optimistic beliefs to recast their adversity more positively, which helped them to focus on the benefits of their experiences. In other cases, participants gained optimistic viewpoints when unexpected positive results occurred.

Changes in worldview were connected to the micro-level meanings of self-esteem and power. There were participants who became disillusioned as a result of their experiences and were also left with a sense of insecurity and lack of control. Other participants who became disillusioned experienced a mix of insecurity and self-confidence as well as lack of control and empowerment. Participants who retained their optimistic worldview experienced increased self-esteem and empowerment. Now that we have reviewed the question of what meanings participants constructed, we'll discuss the process participants used to make meaning of adversity.

Meaning-Making Process

What process did participants use to make meaning of their experiences with adversity? Every individual makes their own sense of the world by constructing meanings in their mind of their unique experiences (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002). As discussed in Chapter 2, meaning-making includes the concepts of symbolic interactionism, social constructivism and

sensemaking. Study findings relate to all three concepts. Symbolic interaction and social constructivism are useful in terms of understanding meaning-making in general, while sensemaking explains the process participants used to make meaning of their experiences.

Symbolic interactionism. Study findings related to the concept of symbolic interactionism. According to Blumer (1969), individuals act towards people, things and situations based on the meanings they have for them, and not on the basis of the meanings that other people ascribe to the same people, things or situations. An example of this concept from this study deals with how individuals responded to the questions about leadership barriers or obstacles they have experienced in the past or present. Most participants discussed various obstacles they have run into, such as discrimination, perception issues, advancement difficulties, salary inequalities, etc. However, a few participants did not view the challenges they have faced as barriers at all. For example, Wendy has run into advancement difficulties, but she doesn't view them as barriers. As Wendy stated, "I wouldn't say those were barriers, but they were--I turned them into opportunities." Similarly, Faith doesn't view challenges in her life as barriers. As Faith reflected, "My life has been a path. And you go in this direction, and then maybe adversity comes, and you turn back for a while. But a path you can get off and on, and it goes in different directions." Although these participants did reflect on difficult situations they have faced, they viewed their difficulties as challenges or opportunities instead of barriers. This affected the way that they chose to respond to difficult situations. They did not allow the situations to stop them. Instead, they chose to learn from the situations and/or work around them to continue moving forward in their lives.

Social constructivism. Study findings also relate to the theory of social constructivism which asserts that individuals make their own sense of the world by constructing meanings in

their minds of their unique experiences (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002). Individuals make multiple subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell, 2009).

Participants in this study developed multiple, varied, and subjective meanings for their adversities. Sixteen distinct meanings were found in participant interviews. Participants formed between three and nine meanings each, with an average of six meanings per individual. In many cases, participants developed multiple meanings for the same experience of adversity. For example, Faith viewed the loss of her husband as the greatest loss in her life as well as an opportunity to advance professionally to positions of state-wide and regional influence. Sherry also had multiple meanings for her experience with infertility. After experiencing lack of control in directing her life when she was unable to have children of her own, Sherry chose to support others by serving in university leadership. Through her various roles in university administration, Sherry has positively impacted thousands of young people.

What is important is that each person's "way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other" (Crotty, 1998, p.58). The purpose of this study was to understand the meanings of adversity from the perspective of participants. As Patton (2002) indicated, from the social constructivist paradigm, individual perceptions are not compared to each other, but are valued as equally real and meaningful. The sixteen meanings of adversity in this study are all valid, and participants used them to construct their own realities.

Sensemaking. Louis'(1980) conceptual framework for making sense of surprises allows us to examine the process participants used to make meaning of adversity. As Louis (1980) explained, surprises are events that are discrepant from anticipations or predictions. Surprises can be positive and/or negative. Although not every surprise is an adversity and not every adversity is a surprise, this model has relevance because there are generally elements of surprise contained

within experiences of adversity. For example, the difficulties, distresses and misfortunes of adversity may be unexpected or the extent of the challenge in getting through the adversity may be unanticipated. In this study, many participants described the "surprising" nature of their adversities. In some cases, what participants found surprising was the fact that adversity doesn't just happen to other people, but can happen to them too. For example, participants who dealt with serious health issues never expected, anticipated or thought that they would get so sick. Even when the particular adversity wasn't a surprise, the difficulty in navigating the adversity was often unexpected. For example, participants who had to deal with significant resource shortages on their campuses didn't fully anticipate the emotional toll of their decision making. One participant described eliminating positions as "the most painful thing I've ever done."

Sensemaking of adversity. Given this connection between surprise and adversity, we can use the model which Louis (1980) developed for the sensemaking of surprise to examine the process which participants used to attempt to make meaning of adversity. Figure 18 presents a model for sensemaking and adversity which is based on Louis' (1980) model.

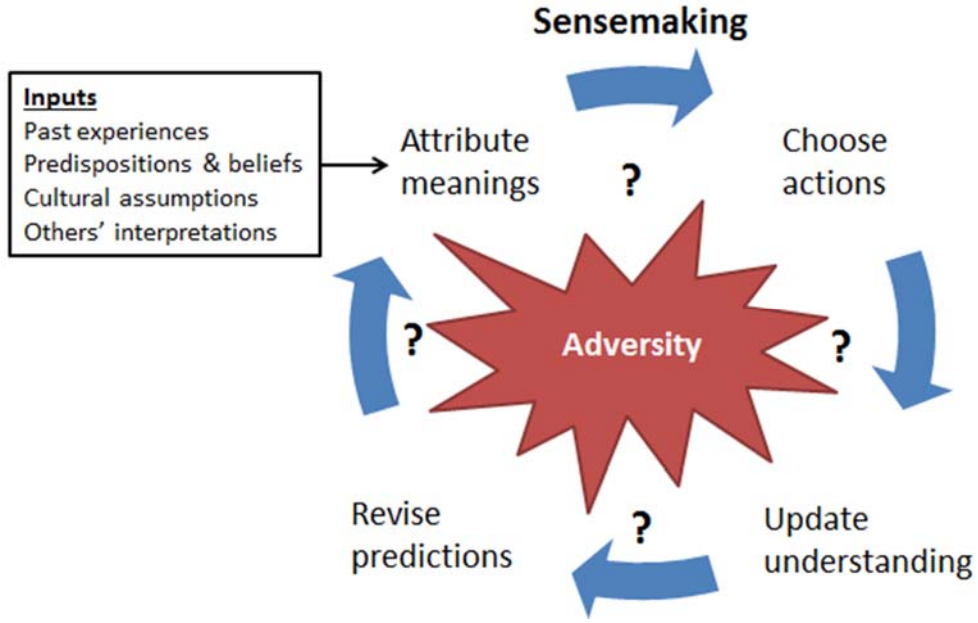

Figure 18. Sensemaking of Adversity Cycle.

Similar to Louis' (1980) model, the model for sensemaking of adversity represents the cycle of general stages in understanding one's experience with adversity. It is not a literal process by which all individuals respond to or understand their experience. Louis (1980) described sensemaking as a "recurring cycle comprised as a sequence of events occurring over time" (p. 241). In this model, the adversity experience appears in the center as the focus of the sensemaking process. The sensemaking cycle may occur while the adversity is ongoing and may continue after it has ended. Participants in this study seemed to stay in the sensemaking cycle until they came to a sense of closure about their experience by settling on a meaning or concluding that no meaning exists. However, at times, even after finding closure, some participants returned to the sensemaking process when they gained new insights or learned new information about their experience. For example, some participants returned to the sensemaking process in preparing for their interview for this study. These participants described gaining new insights in the course of choosing experiences to share and thinking about answers to interview questions in advance of the interview. In addition, a couple participants expressed that they had experienced new insights during the course of the discussing their experiences in the interview itself.

Participants in this study relied on Louis' (1980) four inputs to attribute meanings to their experiences with adversity: past experiences with similar situations, personal predispositions and beliefs, cultural assumptions and interpretive schemes, and information and interpretations from others. First, participants who dealt with repeated adverse events of a similar nature, such as discrimination, were able to use *past experiences* as an input to subsequent experiences with a similar adversity. Participants were also able to make use of past experiences more generally. Knowing that they had navigated through adverse situations in the past gave them the belief that

they could navigate through subsequent experiences with adversity, even subsequent experiences of a different nature. Second, many participants used existing *belief* systems as an input, such a belief that "things happen for a reason" or that "life happens." Third, participants used *cultural assumptions* specific to the context of their adversity. One example of a cultural assumption used as an input to meaning-making occurred with participants who dealt with serious health issues. These participants assumed that others would question their leadership abilities if they knew of the illness. This assumption led to participant decisions to keep their health situations private. Last, participants used *information and interpretation from others* as an input to sensemaking. For example, participants discussed sharing their stories with friends, family members, mentors, colleagues and others who provided interpretations. Participants found this input to be especially valuable when others had experienced a similar adversity in the past or were currently experiencing the same adversity.

Using the four inputs, individuals may attribute possible meanings to their experiences, choose actions or responses, update understandings of the experience and people involved, and revise predictions, anticipations and assumptions about the experience and future events of a similar nature. Revised predictions, anticipations and assumptions can be thought of as changes to the individual's cognitive script (Louis, 1980).

The cases in this study in which participants were unable to make sense of their adversity are particularly illuminative of this sensemaking process. The reason these cases are useful is because they provide detailed examples of the sensemaking cycle. In this study, Isabelle's experience with sabotage provides one such example. I will describe the steps which Isabelle went through as she attempted to make meaning or sense of her adversity.

Isabelle's experience. After the initial "shock" of being verbally attacked by a male co-worker in front of other members of senior leadership at her institution, Isabelle began the sensemaking process. First, she *attributed meaning* to the event by considering it to be a possible misconception. As she stated, "Maybe he didn't mean to use those words." Next, Isabelle *chose the action* of confronting her co-worker. During their conversation, the co-worker indicated that he did not like Isabelle's management style. Based on this conversation, Isabelle *updated her understanding* of the situation as one in which they would agree to disagree since they did not work with the same constituents. At this point, Isabelle *revised her predictions* believing that the she had been able to "nip it." Next, her co-worker continued his public attacks. At this point, Isabelle *attributed a new meaning* by labeling it as a "personal attack." Using the new meaning, Isabelle *chose the action* of speaking to human resources about the situation. Human resources helped Isabelle to further *update her understanding*, by suggesting that it may have been a personal attack resulting from the co-worker's dislike or lack of respect for Isabelle. This led Isabelle to *revise her predictions* about the future, believing that the co-worker would continue to demonstrate his dislike and lack of respect. Next, the co-worker became "complimentary," telling Isabelle that he "really respected" and "valued" her. At this point, Isabelle *attributed a new meaning* which was that the co-worker was "equivocating." Her *understanding* of the situation now was one of confusion, which resulted in an inability *to make a new prediction* about the co-worker's future behavior. A few months later, the co-worker left the organization, thus ending the adversity.

However, Isabelle remained in the sensemaking process even after her experience with sabotage was over. At this point, Isabelle no longer needed to *choose a specific action* or response to deal with the situation since the co-worker was gone, but she did choose to continue

to attempt to make sense of the situation. She continued to *attribute possible meanings*, such as "he wanted my job," or he "maybe just wants to understand this job," in order to try to *update her understanding* of what had caused the attack and why. Isabelle found it difficult to not try to "read into" the situation in order to come up with the answer.

Isabelle remains in the sensemaking process for this particular experience. As she stated, "I've still to this day have not figured the what, why with that." Since Isabelle is unable to *update her understanding* with a conclusive meaning for her experience, she also found it difficult to *revise predictions* and assumptions about future similar experiences. Isabelle's conclusion to our conversation about this experience was: "It was hard for me to really figure out what triggered that sort of attack from him. But yeah. I don't know."

Summary. As we've seen from Isabelle's example, sensemaking of adversity is a recurring cycle compromised of four general stages in understanding one's experience. These stages occur over a period of time. Similar to Isabelle's case, not all stages may be used through every trip through the cycle. For example, at times, participants bypassed the step of choosing an action as they attempted to think through their situation by attributing possible meanings, updating understandings, and revising predictions. In other cases, participants seemed to get stuck in the update understandings stage due to the confusing nature of adversity.

Participants stopped the sensemaking cycle upon settling on one or more meanings for their experience or concluding that no meaning exists. At times, even after coming to a conclusion, participants restarted the sensemaking process when they gained new insights or learned new information about their experiences. Now that we have seen how this study relates to sensemaking process, we will discuss the outcomes of this process.

Meaning-Making Outcomes

What were the outcomes of the meaning-making process? In this study not all individuals were able to make sense of their experiences. Participants fell into four categories, related to finding a conclusive meaning for their adversities:

1) Made sense or meaning
2) Concluded that no meaning exists
3) Have not made sense or meaning
4) Have not experienced adversity

Made sense or meaning. More than half of the participants (16 of 26 [62%]) in this study were able to make sense of or find a meaning for their experiences. These participants found they had developed self-confidence or were empowered as a result of their experiences. Many of the participants reinvented themselves and found new opportunities or paths in life. In some cases participants related their adversities to their pre-existing optimistic worldviews such as “things happen for a reason” or “hard times can be the most beneficial.”

Not all meanings were highly positive. For example, some participants made sense of their adversities with the realization that bad stuff exists in the world and that problems happen to everyone, including them. For other participants, non-positive meanings included being forced to make decisions that they did not want to make, such as leaving their jobs.

Concluded that no meaning exists. Two participants (2 of 26 [8%]) concluded that there is no meaning for or making sense of their experiences with adversity. As Ava stated, “You don't make sense of them. I don't think you make sense of that. That was a bad thing to happen, but bad things happen to people.” Although these participants experienced a sense of disillusionment about the way the world works, they have moved on from their experiences and have thrived

with a sense of empowerment and fearlessness. As Wendy shared, “I'm pretty fearless. … Things phase me but nothing can--like if something has to be done, I'll make sure I persevere. I'm a determined person, I'll get it done.”

Have not made sense or meaning. Almost a quarter of participants (6 of 26 [23%]) were unable to find meaning for or make sense of their experiences, even though they have tried to do so. In fact, many of these participants were not sure how to answer the question, “What did your experience mean to you?” They were very cognizant of the harm or loss which they had suffered and in general, they felt a sense of powerlessness over their situations. As Olivia explained, “I don't know whether I will ever be at peace with it.”

Many participants in this study dealt with a sense of insecurity and lack of control as a result of their experiences. However, participants who have not found a meaning for their experiences seemed to have a stronger sense of insecurity as well as the belief that they are unable to control their lives. As Marcy stated, “One thing I know is you cannot control your life. … I used to think, in all honesty, if you are intelligent, if you are honest, and if you are a hard worker, you'd be fine. I don't believe that anymore.”

Have not experienced adversity. One participant (1 of 26 [4%]) has not experienced adversity in life or professional barriers as she rose to her current position. This participant, Beth, discussed at length the challenges she has had in balancing work and family. However, Beth did not view these challenges as adversity in the sense of something “hurting” her. Beth spoke about the reasons for not experiencing barriers in her leadership. For example, Beth had many people in her life who encouraged her with “Yes, you can do it” instead of “No, you can't do it.”

Although Beth did not define her work-family challenges as adversity, the meanings she formed of her experience are included in the findings. I chose to include them because her

experience was similar to that of other participants who did define balancing work and family as a significant adversity in their lives.

As a result of her experiences, Beth was empowered, and she defined herself. On occasions when Beth ran into adverse people, she didn't allow them to affect her psyche or what she can do. In fact, as Beth explains, she barely even notices these individuals. "I've often joked with people here or--sometimes like two days later, I'll say, 'Did he really say that to me? Oh well, his loss, pfft, you know.'"

Self-esteem and power. In this study, making sense or meaning of adversity was related to self-esteem and power. All participants who made sense of or found a meaning for their adverse experience (16 of 16 [100%]) and all participants who had concluded that no meaning exists (2 of 2 [100%]) developed self-confidence, a sense of empowerment, and/or new opportunities. In other words, they found their self-esteem and/or power had increased.

All participants who were unable to find a meaning for or make sense of their experience (6 of 6 [100%]) developed a sense of insecurity and/or lack of control over their lives. In addition, none of these participants indicated that they had found new opportunities as a result of their experiences. In other words, these participants felt their self-esteem and power had decreased. This supports Armour's (2010) notion that the ability to make sense facilitates long-term adaptation by reducing fears of the recurrence of the experienced adversity. Those participants who settled on a meaning for or made sense of their adversity or concluded that there was no meaning were able to move forward in their lives with increased self-esteem, empowerment and new opportunities. Those participants who have not found a meaning for or made sense of their experiences dealt with insecurity and a sense of powerlessness.

The relationship between meaning-making and self-esteem and power for participants in this study is shown in Figure 19.

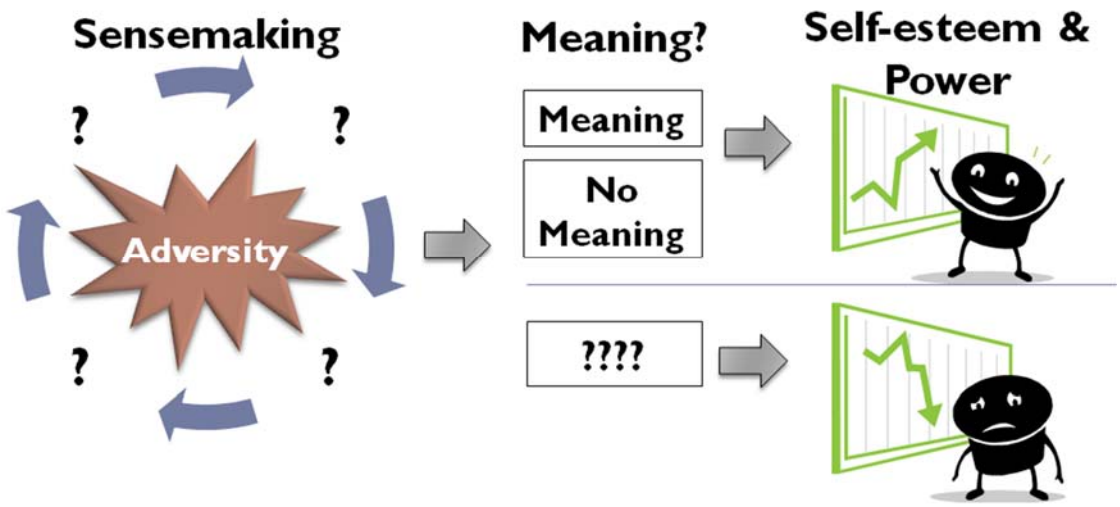

Figure 19. Meaning-making, Self-esteem and Power.

Participants used sensemaking to attempt to find a meaning for their experiences both during and after the adversity. When sensemaking led to a *meaning* or a conclusion that there is *no meaning*, self-esteem and power increased. When participants were unable to make sense of their adversity, self-esteem and power decreased. Now that we've discussed the outcomes of the meaning-making process including the effect on participant self-esteem and power, the next section will describe how participant meaning-making in this study relates to prior studies.

Relationship to Prior Studies

How does participant meaning-making in this study relate to prior studies of meaning-making and adversity? This study both supports findings of prior studies and provides additional insight into how individuals make meaning of adversity. Johnston (2003) found that some individuals viewed their adversity experiences as permanent, inescapable losses, whereas others found hidden opportunities, new directions, liberation and deeper meaning in life. Individuals in this study also experienced loss, new opportunities, empowerment (similar to the concept of

liberation) and optimism (similar to the concept of finding a deeper meaning in life). One difference is that in this study, there were instances in which the same participant viewed their adversity both as a permanent loss and a new opportunity. For example, Faith and Claudia constructed multiple divergent meanings for single instances of adversity. Faith viewed her adversity as *loss* and *opportunity* while Sherry found that she had *lack of control* and the ability to support others *(support for others*) as a result of her experience.

Similar to this study, McMillen's (1999) meta-analysis found felt that individuals both benefitted from and were also harmed by adversity experiences. In McMillen's (1999) study, several processes seem to account for the reports of benefit: purposeful changes in life structure, changes in views of others and the world, receipt of support, and finding benefits from adversity. Although my study did not seek to address what processes accounted for beneficial aspects of adversity, participants who made sense of or found a meaning for their adversity and participants who concluded that no meaning exists experienced increased self-esteem and empowerment. However, those who had searched for a meaning in adversity and did not find one experienced lowered self-esteem and a sense of powerlessness. Therefore, to add to McMillen's (1999) findings, it may be that searching for a meaning and coming to a resolution can also account for benefit, even if the resolution is that no meaning exists.

Seery, et al. (2010) found that while exposure to adversity typically predicts negative effects on mental health and well-being, adverse experiences may also foster subsequent resilience with advantages to health and well-being. My study supports the findings of Seery, et al. (2010). In my study, participants experienced negative effects such as *insecurity* and *lack of control,* and they also experienced increased self-esteem (*self-confidence* and *pride*), increased power (*empowerment* and *opportunity*), as well as positive changes to their identities through

self-acceptance, *self-knowledge*, *self-definition* and gaining *perspective* over what was important in their lives.

Kerfoot (2003) noted that "adversity builds leaders if they have the capacity to reframe the event into a learning experience" (p. 233). In general, participants in this study found that their experiences helped them to become better leaders. Some participants used examples of poor leadership to learn what not to do as a leader. In other cases, participants noted that they could look back on their experiences with adversity and apply what they had learned in dealing with similar challenges in the future. Adversity also enabled participants to put less challenging problems and issues into perspective. In addition, participants mentioned that their experiences gave them empathy for individuals battling similar problems.

Beaty's (2001) study of six successful female secondary principals found that their greatest adversities were internal struggles dealing with resistance to established cultural norms. The principals found it easier to deal with adversities derived from external sources, such as issues related to ethnicity, gender and politics. Similarly, in this study, participants tended to find it easier to deal with adversity which they could depersonalize, such as resource shortages and discrimination. For example, Vivian shared, "I don't personalize [the discrimination]." In addition, participants found it more difficult to make sense of adversities which were harder to depersonalize, such as unsupportive leadership, workplace harassment and relationship conflict. As Brenda stated, "You're prone to say maybe it's about me."

Beaty (2001) concluded that individuals who have experienced adversity may make meaning by choosing to deny their experiences or by being defined or redefined by them, bringing about an awareness that was not previously known. Similarly, in this study, all participants developed meanings related to their identity. Many participants defined or redefined

themselves as a result of their experiences with adversity. Some participants gained knowledge about themselves, while others reflected on ways in which they needed to change in order to get through the adversity. In addition, adversity helped participants to gain perspective over what was really important in their lives. Now that we've discussed who findings from this study relate to prior studies on meaning-making and adversity, we'll look at how findings relate to gender based leadership barriers.

Relationship to Gender-Based Leadership Barriers

How do findings relate to gender-based leadership barriers? As presented in Chapter 2, gender-based leadership barriers are barriers and adversities that women leaders may face as they strive to succeed and advance professionally. These barriers operate at the macro (society), meso (groups) and micro (individual) levels of society. Macro level barriers include cultural constraints on women's own choices (Haveman & Beresford, 2012; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007), leadership perceptions (Lord, et al., 1986; Lucas & Baxter, 2012; Schein, 2001), and gender stereotyping (Hofstede, 2009; Pittinsky, et al., 2007; Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Meso level barriers include tokenism (Klenke, 1997), exclusion from informal networks (Klenke, 1997), lack of mentoring (Catalyst, 2004; Noe, 1988), the disappearing of relational practice (Fletcher, 1998, 2001), salary inequalities (Compton & Palmer, 2009), and discrimination (Klenke, 1997). Micro level barriers include communication style (Chliwniak, 1997; Tannen, 1994), work-family conflict (Klenke, 1997; Williams, 2001) and psychological glass ceiling (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007).

In this study, gender-based leadership barriers were used as sensitizing concepts. There were no interview questions which asked participants to specifically discuss gender-based leadership barriers. However, through the course of answering the open-ended questions about

significant adversity and leadership barriers and obstacles, most participants (23 of 26 [88%]) discussed adversities, barriers and obstacles which were related to gender. There were examples of all of the gender-based barriers contained within participant interviews. Table 5 outlines gender-based leadership barriers and examples from participant interviews.

Table 5

Gender-Based Leadership Barriers with Examples from Participant Interviews

Barrier	Definition	Example
Cultural Constraints on Women's Own Choices	Women's educational and career choices being constrained by culture	"I grew up thinking I would never do anything but be a teacher. At my age, most girls went to school for nursing or education." (Carla)
Leadership Perceptions	Association of the image of leadership with masculinity	"Frequently still when somebody is scheduled to meet [me] someplace, and [my staff will] say, 'Come in. I'd like you to meet the president of [this university]. This is President Smith.' And they frequently will look to whoever the oldest male is in the room. … In our society, we still don't view…presidents as women or even vice presidents as women. And that must have an effect on--an unintended effect…on those of us who are women, or those of us who are hiring vice presidents and presidents." (Darlene)
Gender Stereotypes	Relatively fixed and oversimplified generalizations about women	"When I got pregnant,…one of the board members said, 'Well, I guess now, you'll finally stay home and take care of the kids, stop working.'"(Darlene)
Tokenism	Being in the minority (< 15%) gender or race of a proportionally skewed workgroup	"Being the only, and first and only, female at a senior level sitting in cabinet brought with it challenges, inherent challenges as to having your voice heard, being for sure seen as--I'm there because I'm one of you, not because if somebody needs something I'll run and get it." (Gina)
Exclusion from Informal Networks	Exclusion from unofficial social events	"There are social gatherings, non-university-related, that I'm not invited to. Yeah, you just deal with the exclusion." (Lillian)

Lack of mentoring	Lack of a significant mentoring relationship	"I didn't have mentors. … I would have been very well served by having a mentor or boss [who could say], 'give it a little bit of thought to how you just handled that.'" (Brenda)
Disappearing of relational behavior	Lack of acknowledgement of and support for relational activities in organizations	"[My male colleague] didn't like my management style because he thought that I was not sort of forceful and demanding enough. And again, I sort of talked about my style more so being one of collaboration and really trying to come from a position of understanding a situation before I make a decision." (Isabelle)
Salary inequalities	Being underpaid	"I have never made [the salary] the male people ahead of me made and what the male people after me make." (Claudia)
Discrimination	Subtle or overt discrimination or discouragement due to gender	"I think the most significant thing … would be early on in my career when I realized that all things equal women had to work a lot harder than men to really get the same chances for promotion." (Phyllis)
Communication Style	Constraints on communication style used to express leadership	"[A male colleague] and I had to deal with a personnel issue that was not very pleasant--I had to let someone go, and he said, 'I hope I never see you like that again' So he's always joked with me, like, 'You can be kind of tough.'" (Frances)
Work-family conflict	Challenges balancing professional responsibilities with personal or family responsibilities	"It can be quite a balancing act to raise your children while you're pursuing a career, and I think that is something that often impacts on a professional's ability to advance." (Frances)
Psychological glass ceiling	Unwillingness to appear assertive; Undervaluation of one's own abilities	"[The president] called me in, and said, 'I want you to be provost.'... And I said, 'Susan, you're bananas, that's stupid. …There's other people that you should choose because I'm not big enough to do this.'" (Marcy)

In addition, participants discussed dealing with two other types of adversities or barriers perceived to be associated to gender: 1) discrimination related to age, race and body size and 2) workplace harassment.

Discrimination. Discrimination is a meso level gender-based leadership barrier that was discussed in Chapter 2. In this study, some participants noted that the discrimination they experienced was a result of more than just their gender. These participants felt discrimination was based on gender combined with young age, minority race, and/or small body size.

Ageism and sexism. Most studies dealing with ageism in the workplace focus on the experiences of older individuals (Barnett, 2005; North & Fiske, 2012). Ageism against the young is under-researched (North & Fiske, 2012). Duncan and Loretto (2004) conducted a study in the United Kingdom which explored negative treatment due to young age for both men and women. The study found that women were more likely than men to experience negative attitudes from older colleagues, to be viewed as too young for promotion, and to receive less favorable treatment because of their youthful appearance (Duncan & Loretto, 2004).

In my study, several participants noted that their young age or youthful appearance combined with their gender led to discrimination in promotions and a general lack of respect in the workplace. For example, after Phyllis served as interim director for her department, a male supervisor told her that she was not hired into the permanent position because she was "too young and a female." Eileen also experienced sexism combined with ageism when she was first promoted into the position of vice president. Eileen shared how she was told to hire an older man into a subordinate role:

> I had board members tell me directly that I should be seeking an older man to complement me. … So you can't get much more biased than in there. It was just a nightmare for me because you know what that meant was, "We want what you aren't." (Eileen)

Racism and sexism. Just as age and gender combine to form a barrier for women, race and gender may also form a double jeopardy which hinders career advancement for minority women (Combs, 2003; Key et al., 2012). In a study of 371 female leaders serving in various sectors, Key, et al. (2012) found that women of color perceive more obstacles to and receive less assistance with career advancement than do white women. The experiences of the three African-American participants in this study bear this out. Two participants found that they were discouraged in pursuing college and career goals when they were students. One participant experienced discrimination as a finalist for three college presidencies. After being passed over for white male candidates each time, this participant decided to apply for and was hired into another provost position.

Isabelle noted the triple effect of race, gender and young age when she encountered disrespect working on a special assignment at a military base. As she stated, "I think for me it was a combination of age, gender and race discrimination." Similar to the findings of Key, et al. (2012), women of color in this study also perceived obstacles in career advancement.

Body size discrimination and sexism. Body size and gender may form another barrier for women. A literature search yielded no studies specific to body size discrimination for women in leadership positions. Studies are available which analyze height and career success for both men and women. For example, Judge and Cable (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of prior studies and found that tall individuals have advantages in several aspects of their careers and organizational lives. Physical height in both men and women was significantly related to measures of social esteem (how others regard an individual) and leader emergence (election, nomination, or ranking of individuals in leadership positions). Height was found to be positively related to income, when controlling for sex, age and weight (Judge & Cable, 2004).

Two participants in this study speculated that their small size may have led to discrimination in promotional opportunities along with other workplace barriers. Kelly finished second in several job searches for leadership positions. When she and her husband dialogued about why she was passed over, her husband commented, “Maybe it’s your size too because you look like you could be pushed around.” Similarly, Teresa said, “I think that I've met some adversity because of being a small woman, because of my height.”

Workplace Harassment. Workplace harassment is a meso level gender-based leadership barrier which was not uncovered in the literature review prior to this study. In general, harassment is repeated or persistent treatment that pressures, torments, wears down or frustrates a person, as well as all repeated behaviors that ultimately provoke, frighten, intimidate or bring discomfort to the recipient (Berdahl, 2007; Brodsky, 1976; Ehrenreich, 1999; Einarsen, 1999). The primary motive underlying harassment is a desire to protect one’s social status when it seems threatened (Berdahl, 2007). According to Berdahl (2007), harassers are likely to target the source of the threat, and men are more motivated than women to protect their sex-based status when it is threatened. Therefore women who threaten men’s status are likely to be targeted (Berdahl, 2007).

Ehrenreich (1999) noted that workplace harassment of women is often motivated by hostility to women’s presence in the workplace, which may arise from male resistance to female competitors in male-dominated jobs. Even when workplace harassment of women is not directly related to discrimination, it may still have an adverse impact on the advancement of women in the workplace (Ehrenreich, 1999).

Workplace harassment can be sexual or nonsexual in nature. Sexual harassment is generally defined as persistent unwelcome sexual remarks, looks, or advances, especially from a

senior colleague in the workplace (Colman, 2012b). General workplace harassment is abusive treatment that is nonsexual in nature which degrades, frightens, pressures, intimidates, torments or threatens the person to whom it is directed (Ehrenreich, 1999).

Lopez, Hodson, and Roscigno (2009) noted that both general workplace harassment and sexual harassment are elements of social exclusion and closure. Closure is mocking, barriers and threats used to exclude certain groups, force them out of the workplace, or keep them in their place (Lopez, et al., 2009).

In a study of 110 organizational ethnographies, Lopez, et al. (2009) found that general workplace harassment was more common in workplaces where there is job insecurity. However, job insecurity was not a predictor of sexual harassment. High female work group composition was found to increase the likelihood of sexual harassment, but not general workplace harassment (Lopez, et al., 2009). Lopez, et al. (2009) concluded that both forms of harassment serve to protect masculine identities and men's privileged access to jobs and that when job security is an issue, harassment can be much more mean-spirited and threatening.

Many authors have concluded that workplace harassment is detrimental to the well-being of the victim (Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008; Hoobler, Rospenda, Lemmon, & Rosa, 2010; Raver & Nishii, 2010). Researchers have also found that workplace harassment may induce the victim to voluntarily leave their job (Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008; Deery, Walsh, & Guest, 2011; Laband & Lentz, 1998; Lopez, et al., 2009; Raver & Nishii, 2010).

Several participants (5 of 26 [19%]) in this study discussed being subjected to workplace harassment, both sexual and nonsexual in nature. One participant, Lillian, experienced sexual harassment from an older male colleague. For the other participants, the harassment was nonsexual in nature. In all five cases, the harasser was male.

The experiences of these participants support the notion that harassment is motivated by a threat to male status. For example, Nina voluntarily left her position after she was verbally attacked by a male colleague and not supported by her male supervisor. Nina speculated that the harassment and lack of support she experienced resulted from a threat to male status. As she stated, “I've had all kinds of people say [my male colleagues and supervisor] were threatened because I was capable.”

Isabelle dealt with a male colleague’s attempt to sabotage her. Isabelle speculated that her colleague’s motivation was competitive in nature:

> It was quite possible that he was either interested in my position or felt that [my] position was … getting preferential treatment by the president and by others. And so he was trying to find a way to knock me and probably my entire department down. (Isabelle)

Marcy was verbally abused by a male supervisor and then was forced to resign her position. Marcy believed that this harassment occurred because she refused to “follow him blindly.” She stated:

> This man was verbally abusive to me…because I wouldn't kowtow to him. …He would call and my stomach would turn, because I knew he would call to--you know, it was like he was trying to beat me into submission kind of thing. (Marcy)

Three of the four participants who experienced general workplace harassment did leave their jobs. These participants all dealt with a lack of leadership support in addition to workplace harassment. After being harassed, two participants spent months advocating to their institutional leadership for support. Both of these individuals ended up voluntarily leaving their place of employment. This is similar to finding of previous studies that workplace harassment may induce the victim to voluntarily leave their job (Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008; Deery, et al., 2011; Laband & Lentz, 1998; Lopez, et al., 2009; Raver & Nishii, 2010). However, the difference in this study is that it was not the workplace harassment on its own which caused these individuals

to leave. Instead, it was the lack of leadership support subsequent to workplace harassment which motivated these participants to voluntarily seek employment elsewhere.

Gender-Based Leadership Barriers Revisited. Now that we have discussed gender-based leadership barriers in relationship to this study, we can add study findings to the original gender-based leadership barriers graphic (Figure 12 from Chapter 2). Discrimination was included in the previous version; however, workplace harassment was not. Workplace harassment is a meso level barrier as it occurs within organizations. Figure 20 displays gender-based leadership barriers including workplace harassment by level of society.

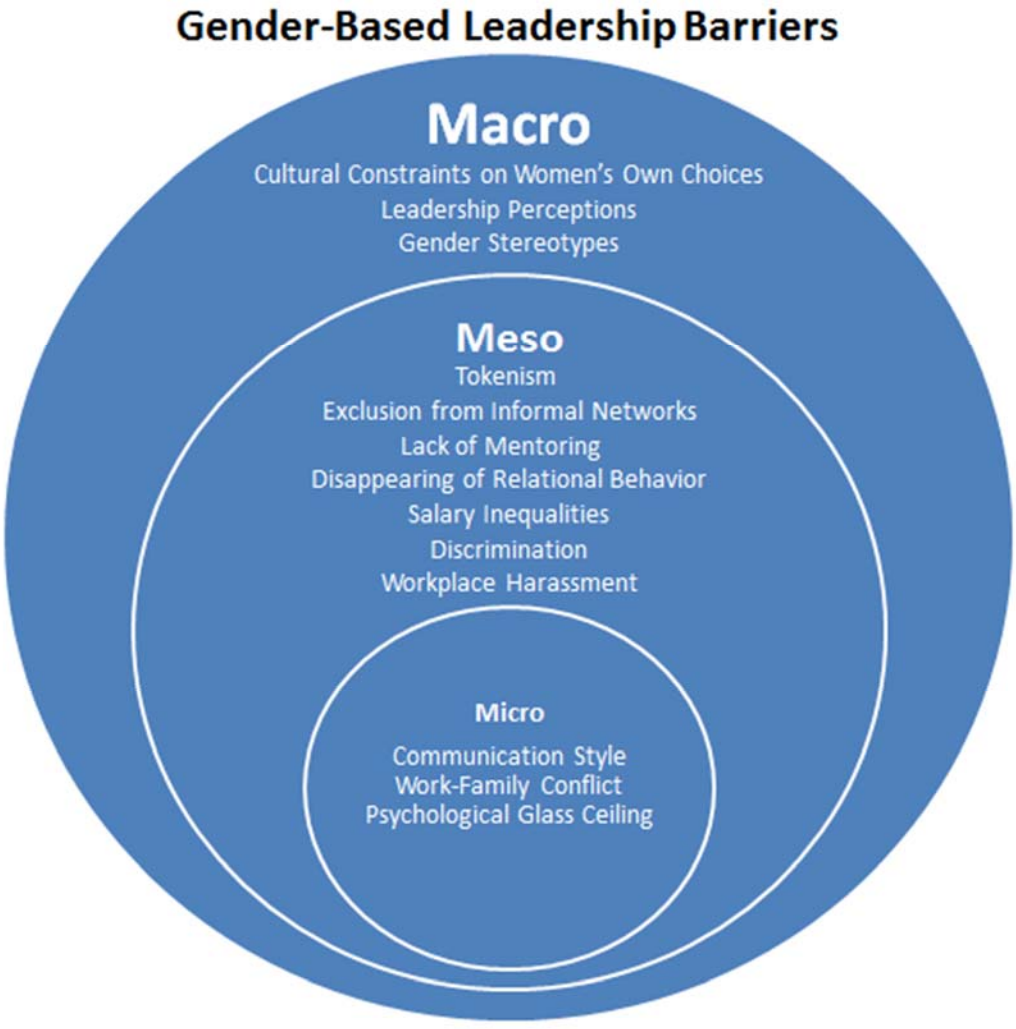

Figure 20. Gender-Based Leadership Barriers by Level of Society – Updated.

Navigating Adversity

How did participants navigate adversity, barriers, and obstacles to achieve their leadership positions? Even though the power and self-esteem of many participants were negatively impacted, participants in this study have made it through adversity, barriers and obstacles and have achieved influential leadership roles in institutions of higher education. How did they do this? The answer to this question lies in the concepts of reframing, resilience and self-efficacy, which will be discussed in turn in this section.

Reframing. Reframing, also known as cognitive restructuring, is the process used to change a negative perception into a positive or neutral one, making it less stressful (Seaward, 2009). As mentioned previously, Kerfoot (2003) discussed how reframing adversity can help to build leaders. As Seaward (2009) stated, stress often causes individuals to lose sight of the whole picture. The goal of reframing is to widen one's perspective to allow room for a change in perception. The reframing process involves assuming responsibility, facing the reality of the situation, and taking steps to resolve the issue causing stress (Seaward, 2009). Reframing can be considered an active, purposeful form of sensemaking in which an individual makes retrospective sense of his or her experiences by deliberately changing negatives perceptions into neutral or positive ones. This occurs in the "update understanding" stage of the sensemaking cycle (Figure 18).

Some participants in this study chose to reframe their negative perceptions of their experiences into positive or neutral perceptions. Some types of adversity were more easily reframed than others. For example, participants who experienced work-family conflict were able to retrospectively broaden their perspective to focus on the positive benefits, such as pride in their accomplishments, the ability to be a positive role model for both young women and young

men, and the ability to use their experiences to mentor and support others. Participants were also able to reframe more traumatic types of adversity, such as loss of spouse, infertility, and health issues, by focusing on the new opportunities they had. However, in these cases, participants were also keenly aware of the losses they had experienced.

Some participants reframed adversity as a more neutral perception by depersonalizing the experience. For example, participants reframed their personal experiences with discrimination. They focused on the thought of "this is not about me" in order to not personalize it and to protect their egos. These participants also learned to expect and, in some cases, embrace discrimination and to look for alternate pathways to move forward.

In other instances, adversity was very challenging for participants to reframe, even when they actively attempted to do so. Unsupportive leadership is a type of adversity which participants struggled to reframe. Many of these participants felt they had no other alternative but to find another job, and they seemed to have a hard time in developing positive or neutral perceptions of what had happened to them, even when they actively attempted to do so. This type of adversity was very difficult to depersonalize, and in some cases, the negative repercussions were very serious, such as financial losses which affected not only themselves, but also their families.

Faith's example can be used to understand how the reframing process works. Faith lost her husband at a relatively young age. When this happened, Faith *assumed responsibility* for the situation. She became the head of the household and was solely responsible for raising two young children. She *faced the reality* of the situation and became self-reliant. She pulled herself together, looked ahead, assessed her responsibilities to herself and other people, and developed a life path which enabled her to survive. Finally, Faith chose steps to *resolve the issues* causing

stress by refocusing her attention. For example, she focused on her children and gave them support to know that their lives would be okay. When her children went off to college, Faith then focused her time on her profession, taking her first permanent position in higher education administration. Although Faith stated that she felt that she had "no choice" but to get through it, she retrospectively reframed the loss of her husband as an experience that led her to opportunities she would not have had otherwise. By reframing the extreme loss in her life, Faith became a trailblazer who served as the first female provost and president in her state system.

Resilience. In addition to reframing their experiences, participants in this study also developed or strengthened their resilience in navigating through experiences with adversity. In general terms, resilience equates to using energy productively to move ahead when faced with adversity (Patterson, 2001). It is "the human capacity to deal with, overcome, learn from and even be transformed" by adversity (Grotberg, 2003, p. 1). Resilience is a long-term construct. It doesn't fluctuate daily, and its capacity is built or destroyed one day at a time (Patterson, 2001). Christman and McClellan (2008) note that resilience is also transformative. Beyond enduring adversity, an individual changes his or her personality to better persevere through future encounters with hardship (Christman & McClellan, 2008; Grotberg, 2003). This means that resilience functions as a dispositional characteristic, in that it is trait that is formed and developed over time and does not constantly vary.

To better explain what resilience is and how it works, Wagnild and Young (Wagnild, 2010; Wagnild & Young, 1993) documented five characteristics of resilience. These are meaningfulness, perseverance, equanimity, self-reliance and existential aloneness. Each of these characteristics can be applied to this study.

Meaningfulness. Meaningfulness is the recognition that there is something for which to live which includes a sense of what one's purpose is. Our purpose helps to pull us forward in life when we encounter difficulties. Typically our purpose finds us, however it is necessary to become aware of what that purpose is (Wagnild, 2010; Wagnild & Young, 1993).

A powerful meaning from this study which relates to meaningfulness is *support for others*. Many participants expressed that a purpose in their lives was to help and support others. Some participants found they could support and enable the growth of young people by serving in higher education administration. Others discussed using their experiences with adversity to directly support and encourage individuals experiencing similar types of hardships.

Perseverance. Perseverance is the ability to remain involved in reconstructing one's life in the midst of adversity or discouragement. It includes setting realistic goals and attaining them, overcoming roadblocks in the process (Wagnild, 2010; Wagnild & Young, 1993).

Perseverance is connected to the strategies of *persistence* and *alternatives* discussed in Chapter 4. To get through adversity, participants chose to keep moving and remain patient. They set goals, such as finding a new job or learning a new skill, and attained them. When circumstances or people stood in their way, they sought out alternatives to work around or leave adverse situations. Even when the process to get through adversity took years, they did not stop until they were successful.

Equanimity. Equanimity is a perception of life and experiences that is balanced and flexible. Individuals who possess equanimity understand that life is not all good or all bad, and they are open to many possibilities. These individuals are optimistic in the midst of doubtful situations, and they look out for new opportunities (Wagnild, 2010; Wagnild & Young, 1993).

Equanimity is related to the meanings of *perspective* and *opportunity*. Participants in this study understood that life was not all good or all bad and were able to use their experiences to put smaller problems into perspective. They had an appreciation for the good side of life, such as appreciating kindness in others and appreciating spending time disconnected from work. Participants also took advantage of new opportunities, such as new jobs, and some participants were even able to recast barriers in their lives as opportunities.

Self-reliance. Self-reliance is the ability to recognize and rely on personal capabilities as well as draw on past experiences to guide actions. Through the knowledge learned from success and failures, self-reliant individuals refine, adapt and strengthen their skills throughout life (Wagnild, 2010; Wagnild & Young, 1993).

Participants in this study became self-reliant through their struggles with adversity. Some participants, such as Faith who lost her husband, had no choice but to become self-reliant in order to survive. Several participants discussed drawing on past experiences with navigating adversity when dealing with subsequent similar challenges or problems. In many cases, adversity negatively affected participant self-esteem and self-confidence, which caused participants to doubt themselves and their gut instinct. In some cases, participants retrospectively realized that their gut instinct had been reliable and could be trusted. Therefore, an outcome of adversity for these participants was a stronger reliance on their gut instinct.

Existential aloneness. Existential aloneness is the realization that each person is unique and that while some experiences can be shared, others must be faced alone. In fact, much of what we face in life must be faced alone. Existential aloneness includes getting to know ourselves well, understanding our own strengths and weaknesses, and recognizing our own worth.

Existential aloneness gives a person a sense of uniqueness and freedom, without a pressure to conform (Wagnild, 2010; Wagnild & Young, 1993).

The meanings of *self-analysis* and *self-acceptance* relate to the concept of existential aloneness. Participants in this study used their experiences with adversity to give serious thought to their character, actions and motives. They learned who they were and what they were made of. They came to understand their strengths and weaknesses and to accept themselves, even when they could not change or fix the situation.

Self-efficacy. In addition to reframing their experiences and developing resilience, participants also increased perceived self-efficacy as a result of navigating adversity. Self-efficacy is the ability to achieve desired results or outcomes (Colman, 2012a). Individuals perceive their level of self-efficacy related to particular courses of action (Bandura, Adams, & Beyer, 1977). The strength of one's belief in his or her own ability or competence determines whether the individual will attempt the course of action (Bandura, et al., 1977). Perceived self-efficacy influences both choice of activities and how long an individual will persist in the face of obstacles after an activity is initiated (Bandura, et al., 1977)

Four factors affect perceived self-efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological factors (Bandura, 1997; Bandura, et al., 1977). First, personal accomplishment is the most influential source of efficacy information because it is based on one's personal mastery of the activity in question. Success raises self-efficacy while failure lowers it. Second, vicarious experience also influences self-efficacy. Seeing others succeed in an activity or course of action can help an individual to believe that through improved performance and persistence, he or she can also succeed. However, this is a less dependable source of information about one's capabilities than is previous experiences of personal mastery.

Third, verbal persuasion is a widely used method to influence behavior. Individuals believe that they can master an activity or cope successfully through persuasive suggestions of others. However, mastery expectations are also easily extinguished through personal disconfirming experience. Last, physiological factors influence efficacy expectations. When individuals perceive they have high levels of anxiety, they are likely to consider themselves as less capable. Conversely, when individuals perceive low levels of anxiety, they are likely to consider themselves as more able (Bandura, et al., 1977).

Participants in this study built self-efficacy in the course of navigating adversity. They learned to believe in themselves to achieve their goals. This was true for participants who had made meaning of their experiences as well as those who had not. How did this occur? The learning took place through the four factors which affect self-efficacy: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological factors. First, participants increased perceived self-efficacy through their own performance accomplishments. This was especially true for participants who looked for and found new jobs to escape adverse working environments. These participants came to believe in themselves as they interviewed for and were offered new positions. Second, vicarious experience also increased participant self-efficacy. Many participants had male and female mentors and role models who they watched and learned from. For example, some participants watched women in leadership positions, such as previous supervisors and female presidents in higher education, to learn how they could be effective as a leader, using a non-male model. Third, participants increased their self-efficacy through the verbal persuasion of others. Verbal persuasion was especially useful when participant self-esteem was at a low point due to the adversities they had faced. Several participants discussed how others in their lives had told them “you can do it” which led

participants to attempt particular courses of action, such as applying for or accepting a new position. Last, physiological factors caused participants to alter their perceived self-efficacy. Many participants discussed negative physiological factors which they endured during adversity, such as emotional stress and lack of sleep and appetite. These negative factors caused participants to question their self-efficacy. However, some participants chose to learn how to manage physiological factors which helped them decrease the perception of stress and better manage the crisis or adverse experience. For example, taking a deep breath was noted as a way to calm nerves. In addition, one participant learned mind-body techniques which allowed her to deal with stressful events by lowering her heart rate and slowing her breathing down. These participants increased their perceived self-efficacy by controlling physiological factors.

As we have seen, in the course of dealing with adversity, participants chose to reframe their experiences, and they developed resilience and increased self-efficacy. Reframing, resilience, and self-efficacy enabled participants to successfully navigate adversity, barriers and obstacles even when their power and self-esteem was negatively impacted.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

How do participant experiences and meaning-making relate to feminist standpoint theory? This section will explain why feminist standpoint theory is central to the accounts of the participants of this study.

Study Background

This study was an exploratory study using a general meaning-making framework in which 26 women leaders in higher education were asked open-ended, non-leading questions about adversity, barriers and obstacles they had faced in the past and present. The goal was to not impose any particular point of view or predetermined constraints or assumptions on the interview

questions or the interview data. This allowed for an emergent research design with an openness to whatever constructs and answers emerged from the data, which Patton (2002) recommends.

In Chapter 2 of this study, I conducted a literature review of barriers and obstacles which this particular group of people (women leaders) were likely to face. This became the section entitled "Gender-Based Leadership Barriers." As mentioned previously, gender-based leadership barriers were used as sensitizing concepts during the analysis of participant interview data. These sensitizing concepts helped me to find barriers and obstacles that were contained in interview text but not identified as such by the participants themselves. For example, work-family conflict and lack of mentoring are two examples of gender-based leadership barriers that some participants described but did not expressly label as "barriers."

Feminist Standpoint Lens

Now that themes have been generated from the data, and I found that women did indeed experience leadership barriers related to their gender, an appropriate next step is to consider applicable lenses through which my data and findings can be viewed. Although the goal of this study was not to analyze findings from all possible points of view, one particularly relevant view is feminist standpoint theory. Dorothy Smith is a pioneer of feminist standpoint theory (Calhoun, Gerteis, Moody, Pfaff, & Virk, 2007). Smith developed this theory by considering how the social world would look from a woman's perspective. Smith believes that "objective" knowledge has been based on a male social world. She argues that it is not enough to study women, but the researcher must recognize his or her own place in the world and include the distinct standpoint of women into research (Calhoun, et al., 2007).To do this, I have stated my own positionality in Chapter 3, and I allowed findings to emerge from the women's voices themselves, which were

contained in the interview recordings and transcripts, without predetermined constraints, categories, or assumptions.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Smith (1987) asserts that women have been largely excluded from society's ruling apparatus, which include varieties of administration, management, and professional organizations. Institutional processes organize, coordinate, regulate, guide, and control contemporary societies. In other words, these processes perform the work of ruling in society. Smith (1987) believes that at best women have played a subordinate role in relation to this ruling apparatus. They have supported the work of men who have been the actors in the institutional processes of ruling. For example, secretaries have translated thought and design into forms suitable for communication. Wives have provided bodily and emotional supports for men. Mothers have complemented the educational work of the school (Smith, 1987). According to Smith (1987), individual women have been admitted to the ruling apparatus but only in special cases and never as a representative of her sex. To be clear, Smith (1987) was not talking about bias against women or negative stereotypes of women. Her point is that the silence, absence, and nonpresence of women in the ruling apparatus results in the lack of their full participation in the making of our culture (Smith, 1987).

As an example of how women's participation is limited, Smith (1987) identified devices that have been used in professional conversations to restrict women's influence in the development of topics. These devices control the entry of women's ideas into discourse. For example, a suggestion contributed by a woman may be ignored at its point of origin, but recognized later when it is reintroduced by a man. One participant in my study described having had this exact type of experience in meetings, which she characterized as a type of unintentional *discrimination*, which is a gender-based leadership barrier.

Patricia Hill Collins embraces Smith's general approach for standpoint theory but adds that black women have a specific standpoint or experience, which is different than that of white women (Calhoun, et al., 2007). From Collin's (1986) point of view, systems of domination occur through the self-definition of an objectified "other." The "other" is anyone who is or acts different than the assumed norm of white male behavior. In this model, white males define themselves as subjects and classify individuals of color and women in terms of established white male norms (Collins, 1986). For example, whereas white males may find it acceptable to generalize findings from studies of white males to other groups, black women may find this practice to not represent their experience. Similarly, when white feminists generalize findings about "women," black feminists may ask "Which women do you mean?" (Collins, 1986, p. S27).

This study supports two key concepts found in Collins' (1990) work. First, Collins (1990) noted that black women struggle for equality due to both their gender and their race. In this study, African-American participants experienced both gender and race discrimination. Second, Collins (1990) makes the point that black women's independence and self-reliance developed from their vulnerability to assaults in the workplace, on the street, and at home. This concept is also supported by this study as African-American participants developed self-reliance as a form of self-protection.

Relationship to Gender-Based Leadership Barriers

Smith (1987) and Collins (1990) both assert that the structure of our society was formed by men and for men. This premise can help us understand why gender-based leadership barriers came to be and why they are still prevalent today. Historically women were not included in society's ruling apparatus. Though strides have been made to increase representation of women

in leadership positions, they continue to hold a minority of top leadership positions across all sectors (The White House Project, 2009).

In general, gender-based leadership barriers are an outcome of women's historical nonpresence in society's ruling apparatus. These barriers are inherent to the way in which work was formed. According to Smith (1987), the organization of managerial and professional work depends upon the alienation of the individual worker from his or her bodily existence. The structure of careers assumes that individuals focus on their professional work and not on routine aspects of their bodily maintenance. It is taken for granted that aspects of bodily maintenance are provided for in such a way that does not interfere with the work itself (Smith, 1987). For anyone to participate fully in the conceptual mode of work, they must be liberated from having to focus on their bodily concerns. Traditionally, the work of liberating men in this fashion has been the work of women. Women provided the supports that men needed in order to focus on their professional work. Women have kept the home, had children and cared for them, cared for men when they are sick, and in general provided for the logistics of men's bodily existence (Smith, 1987).

The supportive nature of women's work extends into the workplace. In professional and managerial workplaces, women have historically handled tasks which give concrete form to conceptual activities, such as clerical work which gives material form to the thoughts of the boss. In health settings, the necessary routine care of patients is handled by nurses, social workers, or receptionists, which are historically women's professions, so that the doctor may attend to only those aspects which are in his or her professional focus (Smith, 1987). Certainly such an arrangement is efficient and makes best use of the skills of the specialist. However, this historical division of labor has led to men's prevalence in the positions related to ruling and decision-

making and women's prevalence in positions which support men to fulfill their professional responsibilities.

There were 13 gender-based leadership barriers identified in the literature and in this study, which crossed all three levels of society, macro, meso and micro. These barriers are connected to Smith (1987) and Collins' (1986, 1990) assertion that the structure of society and its ruling apparatus was formed by men and for men. For example, the macro barrier of cultural constraints on women's own choices is the result of the traditional division of labor of men in leadership positions and women in support roles. One study participant noted that she studied education in college because she thought she "would never do anything but be a teacher." At that time, most girls went to school for nursing or education. As a young person, this participant never conceived of the idea that she could be a leader in higher education or any other field. Another macro level barrier, leadership perceptions, is also connected to the idea that traditionally society's ruling apparatus has been male-dominated. Participants in this study felt the effects of serving in positions in which men are traditionally expected to serve. One participant spoke about being mistaken as a secretary, and some participants dealt with comments from others which implied their role should be in the home.

The meso level barriers of discrimination and workplace harassment are related to perceived competition or threats to traditional male status. Some participants in this study dealt with blatant discrimination and harassment. Although they could not speak with certainty about the motivation behind the discrimination and harassment they experienced, they speculated that it was related to a threat to male status. African-American study participants validated Collins' (1990) notion of the struggle for equality in terms of both gender and race. African-American

participants experienced both overt and subtle discrimination and learned self-reliance as a way to overcome these obstacles.

The micro level barrier of work-family conflict is connected to D. E. Smith's (1987) idea of a bifurcation of consciousness in which women are expected to navigate two worlds, the domestic world and the public world. In this study, many participants spoke about the conflicts of participating in both worlds. These participants were expected to fulfill traditional domestic responsibilities while handling high-profile careers with long working hours. Some women in this study had male partners who stayed home. However, even in cases in which the male partner stayed home with the children, some domestic responsibilities, such as grocery shopping, taking sick children to the doctors, and cleaning, were still expected from and handled by the participants.

Overcoming Gender-Based Leadership Barriers

Because a gender-based power structure has been built into the ordinary functioning of society, many individuals (men and women) may be unaware that inequalities exist. However, for the most part, women in this study were aware of the existence of gender-based leadership barriers and that, all things being equal, women have to work much harder than men to get the same chances for advancement. Given that participants in this study had achieved senior leadership positions in higher education, how did they overcome gender-based leadership barriers? When participants in this study ran into gender-based leadership barriers, they first entered the sensemaking process. During this process participants questioned their identities, dealt with negative effects on their self-esteem and power, handled positive and negative changes in their connections to others, and considered the implications on their worldviews. Self-esteem and power rose for those participants who came out of the sensemaking process with a particular

meaning for their experience or a conclusion that no meaning exists. Regardless of the outcome of the sensemaking process and regardless of the impact on self-esteem and power, participants did not let the barriers stop them. Choosing to persevere, participants in this study rose to the occasion and achieved their leadership positions by reframing their experiences, by developing resilience and by increasing their self-efficacy.

Discussion

After reviewing study findings and analyzing how this study relates to meaning-making, gender-based leadership barriers, and feminist standpoint theory, I now provide my own thoughts of the notable aspects of this research, negative cases and progressive subjectivity. There are six major themes related to notable aspects of this research which are summarized below.

Themes

Out of adversity comes opportunity or growth if you survive it. In other words, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. This appeared to be especially evident for individuals who suffered some of the harshest forms of adversity, such as child abuse, death of spouse, life-threatening accident, infertility, and severe institutional financial crises requiring layoffs. These participants chose to redefine or recast themselves after their experiences and found new identities and meanings for their lives. As a result, they were empowered and discovered new opportunities in life.

Perspective matters. How we view a situation often defines what we do with it. Several participants in this study discussed not seeing barriers in their personal or professional lives. This was the case even though they experienced difficult situations. They chose to not view difficulties as barriers. In some cases, participants did not expend effort to even acknowledge the troublesome situations. In other cases, participants chose to reframe their negative experiences

by focusing on positive aspects. In general, when encountering difficulties, these participants chose to keep moving. Specifically, they considered how to work with or around difficult situations and how to turn them into opportunities.

Privacy in adversity is important. Many participants work in very public positions, especially those who serve as presidents. The presidents especially felt that privacy was necessary, but not always available, when dealing with adversity. For some, privacy meant sharing struggles with only a few, trusted friends so that their ability to lead would not be questioned. For others, finding time to be alone and reflect was important. These presidents found it especially challenging to find time for themselves. Their calendars were booked, not only during the work day, but also for evening and weekend events. Having children at home meant a lack of time for oneself at home, and being a public figure meant being unable to run errands without being recognized and stopped. When adversity was public knowledge, such as the possible elimination of programs, then participants also had to deal with being offered opinions no matter where they were, both inside and outside of the workplace.

Finding a meaning for adversity or concluding that none exists relates to self-esteem and empowerment. Participants who had settled on a reason for their experience or concluded that there was no reason experienced an increase in self-esteem and empowerment. It seemed that coming to a sense of closure about the adversity enabled participants to move past the adversity. Often the meanings were positive, such as new opportunities, self-confidence, or the ability to support others. However, not all meanings were highly positive. In some cases, participants made sense of their adversity with the realization that bad stuff exists in the world and that problems happen to everyone, including them. In other cases, meanings included being forced to make decisions that they did not want to make, such as leaving their jobs. As

mentioned previously, simply concluding that no reason exists also resulted in increased self-esteem and empowerment.

Conversely, those who were not able to make sense of their adversities experienced a decrease in self-esteem and empowerment. It seems that this lack of closure resulted in a sense of insecurity or lack of ability to control their lives. Many of these participants were still working through and processing their experiences with adversity, even though some of the experiences had occurred years in the past.

In this study, meanings involving identity, connection and worldview did not appear to depend on the participant's ability to make sense of or find a meaning for their experiences. For example, participants who made sense of their experiences and participants who did not make sense of their experiences defined themselves in spite of adverse people or situations and used their experiences to support others. In addition, participants in both groups came to hold both disillusioned and optimistic worldviews.

Gender-based leadership barriers are pervasive. In this study participants were asked to discuss their experiences with adversity, barriers and obstacles in general. There were no questions which specifically asked them to speak about gender-based leadership barriers. However, the vast majority of participants (23 of 26 [88%]) shared experiences with barriers or adversities that were related to their gender. As discussed, these gender-based leadership barriers are an outcome of women's historical exclusion from the ruling apparatus of society.

The age range for participants in this study was 39 to 79. All ages ran into some obstacles in their leadership that were based on gender. The three individuals who have not experienced gender-based leadership barriers were of various ages from 50 to 79. Therefore, in this study, the prevalence of gender-based barriers did not seem to be connected to age.

In addition, an examination of the data in this study led to two additional concepts about gender-based leadership barriers. First, some participants suffered workplace harassment which was related to gender. Although motivations behind harassment may be difficult to prove, these women believed their male harassers may have either felt threatened or else wanted their submission. Second, participants in this study did not just experience gender-based discrimination. They also experienced career advancement issues and lack of respect due to gender discrimination combined with ageism, racism and/or body size discrimination.

Participants in this study are survivors. The women in this study did something relatively few women have done. They overcame adversity, navigated through obstacles and broke through barriers to attain senior leadership positions in higher education. Although some participants aspired to further climb the career ladder but found that they had hit the "ceiling," all participants have survived and most have even thrived in spite of the adversity they have faced. For that they should be applauded, commended and celebrated as examples to those of us who aspire to do what they have done. Even though some participants may feel as though they have hit a ceiling, they may yet break through it just as they have broken through other seemingly insurmountable situations in their lives.

The question remains how did women in this study succeed even when adversity had negatively impacted their self-esteem and power? To answer this, let's return to the cases of Marcy and Olivia. Marcy and Olivia were both forced out of their positions. They both had to relocate which severely negatively impacted their family finances. Although they were attempting to reframe their adversities, both had not (yet) made meaning of their experiences, and their self-esteem and power were negatively impacted. However, after almost two long years of searching, both Marcy and Olivia successfully found new senior leadership positions in higher

education. What made them successful? Put simply, they were *resilient*, and they increased their *self-efficacy*. They chose to believe in themselves to achieve their goals.

Demonstrating their resilience and self-efficacy, Marcy and Olivia chose three strategies to empower themselves and to reach out to others. First, they recognized that even though they were victims, they would have to find their own *alternatives* to build new lives for themselves in a new location. Second, they were *persistent,* and they did not give up. They applied and interviewed for numerous jobs across the country. For example, Olivia applied for 132 jobs. From the 132 applications, she had 32 telephone interviews and 12 face to face interviews. At the end, she had two job offers. This means that she had 130 rejections! Rejection after rejection, Olivia chose to keep going, rebuilding her faith in herself along the way, until she achieved her goal. Third, both Olivia and Marcy used their *support networks.* Marcy allowed her husband to provide support and encouragement which helped to keep her moving forward. She also maintained connections with and reached out to colleagues from other institutions. Marcy's supporters were individuals who understood and believed in her and who offered both a listening ear and advice. Even when Marcy did not believe in herself, she chose to reach out to others who provided the encouragement she needed to keep going.

Participants in this study survived adversity and some even thrived due to their resilience and self-efficacy. Some participants successfully reframed their experiences, but even those who had not reframed their experiences or made meaning of them demonstrated their resilience and self-efficacy by choosing multiple strategies to empower themselves and reach out to others.

Negative Cases

The negative cases in this study were those individuals who reported that they had not experienced adversity in their life or that they had not experienced barriers or obstacles as they

rose to their current leadership positions. One individual, Beth, had experienced neither adversity nor professional barriers. As mentioned previously, I included Beth's interview in findings because she discussed significant challenges related to work-family conflict, which were similar to those of other participants who did define work-family conflict as a significant adversity in their lives.

Four participants reported that they had not experienced professional barriers as they rose to their current positions. However, these participants did note that they had run into challenging professional situations. Instead of defining challenging situations as barriers, these participants chose to define them as situations to work through, as situations to get around, or as learning opportunities. These negative cases support the premise of social constructivism, which is that each individual constructs multiple subjective meanings in their mind of situations in their lives. This study confirms that people may view the same type of difficult experience very differently. Some may see it as an adversity or barrier, while others may not see it as an adversity or barrier at all.

Progressive Subjectivity

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I used progressive subjectivity to ensure quality of my findings. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), progressive subjectivity is the process in which the researcher monitors his or her own developing construction to ensure that the construction of the researcher is not given privilege over that of any other individual. In other words, did I as the researcher find what I expected to find? There were some ways in which I did find what I expected, and there were several notable differences. I developed five expectations for findings prior to beginning data collection. Each expectation is outlined below with a description of how the expectation was similar to or different from what I actually found.

First, I had expected that my participants would have encountered significant barriers in their professional careers. Many participants did speak about professional barriers, however as noted previously, not all participants felt that they had encountered barriers which held them back. Interestingly, the oldest participant, now retired from a university presidency, was one of the individuals who had not encountered any barriers. The youngest participants, those in their thirties and forties, had all encountered some form of gender-based professional barriers or obstacles.

Second, I had expected that my participants would have experienced some type of adversity in their personal lives and that the types of adversities would vary significantly. Most but not all participants spoke about adversity in their personal lives. The types of personal adversity did vary and included death of spouse, infertility, family challenges, relationship conflict, health issues, abuse and work-family conflict.

Third, I had expected that each participant would have a compelling story to tell about her personal or professional experiences with adversity. This proved to be true. All participants told me compelling stories about their experiences, including one individual who did not label the challenges that she has experienced as adversity. In fact most participants related multiple stories about their experiences with adversity. The stories my participants told were powerful stories of enduring, navigating through, or overcoming unexpected challenges and roadblocks in their lives.

Fourth, I had expected that for those participants who are currently enduring an adversity, the adversity would be confusing and distracting and would cause them to question their ability to navigate through or rise above it. Many adversities which participants were currently enduring related to health issues. I found that in these cases, although the illness had caused some

insecurity and a sense of being unable to control one's life, these participants chose to maintain positive attitudes about either living with or overcoming their illnesses. These participants also had gained perspective about what was important in their lives, which they used to help them prioritize their time and to put smaller problems into perspective.

Finally, I had expected that for those participants whose adversity experience was well behind them, the adversity would have caused some type of loss but overall would have made them stronger and more resilient. There were many participants who did become stronger and more resilient as a result of their adversities. This was the case for those participants who had made sense or meaning of their adversities or who had concluded that no meaning exists. However, there were participants whose adversity had occurred years in the past, but who had still not made sense or meaning of it. These participants felt a stronger sense of insecurity and lack of control in their lives. In other words, time was not necessarily a factor in determining if study participants became stronger or more resilient. What seemed to matter was that they had made sense of their experience or concluded that there was no meaning for it.

Limitations of the Study

There are eight primary limitations to this study. First, participants selected for this study had already achieved career success to attain their senior leadership positions in higher education. Some participants encountered barriers which prevented them from climbing further steps on the career ladder, such as one provost who attempted to become a president but ultimately accepted a second provost position. However, this study did not include individuals in middle management or faculty positions. Individuals who have aspired to senior leadership positions but were stopped by barriers or hardships may have a different perspective on adversity, barriers and obstacles than women who have successfully achieved these positions.

Second, this study was conceived from a meaning-making framework. Open-ended, non-leading interview questions were drawn from this framework, and the data was analyzed to determine what meanings participants drew from their experiences with adversity. This framework provided answers to the question of how women leaders in higher education made meaning of adversity, but it was limited in its ability to explain why the women had made the specific meanings they had made. Conceiving the study from an alternative framework, such as feminist theory or organizational theory including power structures could provide additional explanatory power for meanings of adversity for women in higher education leadership.

Third, participants were selected from the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States which includes the states of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Washington D.C and West Virginia. In addition, several participants shared experiences that occurred while living or working in other regions of the United States. It is possible that regional differences in United States culture may shape attitudes towards women in general and women in leadership. Furthermore, no participants lived or worked outside of the United States. It is also likely that national differences in culture may shape attitudes towards women in general and women in leadership. Cultural differences could affect the type and severity of adversity, barriers and obstacles which women in leadership experience.

Fourth, this study included Caucasian women as well as African-American women. I made the choice to keep the primary focus of this study on gender, but to summarize findings specific to African-American participants in Chapter 4. I found there were some differences in how African-American participants made meaning of adversity. It is also possible that women of other races or ethnicities may have different experiences and perspectives of adversity as a result of cultural differences. For example, Hispanic and Asian women come from cultures which

likely have somewhat different views on appropriate roles for women inside and outside of the workplace.

Fifth, participants in this study served at institutions which had predominately white student populations. Women may have different experiences depending whether they are in a majority or minority race or ethnicity within their institutions. For example, an African-American woman may have a different experience working in a predominately white institution versus working in an historical black institution.

Sixth, in response to the questions related to spouse or partner support, all participants identified that they were currently or previously in heterosexual relationships. Individuals in same-sex relationships may have different experiences and perspectives of adversity.

Seventh, this study was limited to women currently working in higher education. Women leaders in sectors other than higher education, such as business, law, military, politics, film and TV, not-for-profit and K-12 education may have different experiences and perspectives of adversity.

Last, participants were chosen from those who responded to a mailed invitation to participate. These participants were willing to discuss their experiences with adversity. Women in senior leadership positions in higher education may be well-known regionally or nationally, especially those serving as presidents or chancellors. It is possible that some women who did not respond to the invitation may have felt uncomfortable in sharing their experiences or may have preferred to keep their experiences private. These women may have a different experience or perspective on adversity than women who participated.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future qualitative research pursuing the same research questions should be conducted using a design that would address limitations stated above. The population to study should include all regions of the United States. Women of other races and ethnicities, such as Hispanic, Asian, and Native American should be included and data should be analyzed by race and culture, as it is possible that race and culture affect how individuals make meaning of adversity. Women serving in historical black institutions and institutions with more diverse student populations should be included. Non-heterosexual women should also be included. In addition, further efforts to reach out to individuals who do not respond to mailed invitations to participate should be made. For example, follow-up phone calls can be made to all participants who do not respond to a mailed invitation. The phone call could serve to make personal contact with potential participants, to encourage their participation, and to provide reassurance that confidentiality will be maintained.

Future qualitative research could reconceive this study from an alternate framework, such as feminist theory or organizational theory including power structures. Using an alternative framework would allow the researcher to develop interview questions and probes that are specific to that framework. An alternative framework could better address the question of why senior women leaders in higher education made the specific meanings that they made.

Future studies could be conducted using a population of male leaders in higher education to compare their experiences with adversity and their ways of making meaning with women leaders. Studies could also be conducted using a sample of women in faculty and middle management positions in higher education to see how their experiences compare with those in

senior leadership positions. In addition, this study could be conducted of women leaders in sectors outside of higher education, such as business, law, military, and not-for-profit.

Future studies could also be conducted using a population of women leaders outside of the United States, including both developed and developing countries. The experiences and meanings of adversity for women leaders in developing countries could be compared to women in developed countries to determine both similarities and differences.

An anonymous survey-based quantitative study could be conducted using the findings from this study to see if the meanings found in this study generalize across a larger population of female leaders in higher education. Use of an open-ended question on the survey would allow participants to add any meanings or concepts not found within survey questions. An anonymous survey may be one way to include participants who are uncomfortable in sharing their story with a research interviewer.

Additional study of gender-based leadership barriers could be conducted. For example, a survey-based quantitative study could examine the prevalence of gender-based leadership barriers across a large sample of women leaders and include results by demographic factors, such as age, race, ethnicity, region, and sector.

Recommendations

From this study it is clear that there are many barriers and obstacles to women's leadership success and advancement, including many that are gender-related and others that are not. I will focus my concluding thoughts on five specific recommendations for women who aspire to leadership positions.

1. *Excel in your current job or academic program.* Several women in this study reported the need to overprepare to succeed and advance as leaders. While it may not seem fair

that women to have to be über-prepared, these participants found it absolutely critical to their success. Do your current job to the best of your ability. Anticipate and prepare for obstacles. Speak up and voice your concerns, opinions and ideas. Excellence in work or academics will serve as a foundation for your ability to succeed and advance as a leader.

2. *Find mentors*. Don't wait for a mentor to find you. Seek out individuals (male and female) in your professional circles who are successful or who you admire. If you have a professional relationship with the individual, reach out and ask for advice or support. Cultivate the relationship. A successful mentoring relationship may develop informally in the midst of mutually-beneficial professional relationship. If it is not possible to have a personal relationship with the individual, look to that person as a role model to study and learn from.
3. *Build support networks*. Build your own personal network of supporters including family, friends, colleagues, supervisors, professional organizations, board members and household help. Building your own network of like-minded colleagues both inside and outside of your organization may help combat the effects of exclusion from the "good-old boys' club." Reach out to your partner, friends and family when you need encouragement or assistance. Don't feel that you have to go it alone. Ask for help when you need it.
4. *Seek out family-friendly places of employment.* For those that have the opportunity to seek out a new position, look for workplaces which support combining family and career. Even younger women who may not yet have children or aging parents to care for should consider organizations with family-friendly policies in their job search

process. Look for organizations with family leave policies that grant both men and women paid time off for care of children, spouses and elders. If you do not currently have the opportunity to seek out a new position, advocate to your current institutional leadership to develop family-friendly policies which would enable both men and women to reduce the stress caused by work-family conflict.

5. *Empower yourself.* Finally, participants in this study were successful primarily because of personal choices. They chose to not let barriers stop them. They chose to plow through. They chose to look for alternatives. They chose to persevere even when the future was unknown and when their options seemed limited. Of course, others aided these women along the way, but it was primarily their own choices which made them successful. When you hit a wall, don't let it stop you. Consider your alternatives. Choose a new path or direction. Most importantly, make the choice to persist and to keep going.

Conclusion

As we have seen, participants in this study experienced wide-ranging types of adversity, including gender-based leadership barriers. Adversity had a generally positive effect on participant identity and disparate effects on self-esteem, power, connections to others and worldviews. To make sense of their adversities, participants spent time in a sensemaking cycle. Inputs to this cycle were past experiences, predispositions and beliefs, cultural assumptions and others' interpretations. The cycle consisted of stages in which participants attributed meanings, chose actions, updated understandings, and revised predictions and assumptions about the future.

When they were able to find closure for their experiences by making sense or meaning of them or by concluding that there is no meaning, they tended to experience a rise in self-esteem

and empowerment. However, there was a negative impact on their self-esteem and power as long as they were unable to make sense or meaning of their experiences.

Despite the adversity they have faced, participants in this study have survived and most have even thrived. To navigate adversity, these women chose to reframe obstacles and barriers and empower themselves, developing their resilience and self-efficacy along the way. For this, I applaud and commend them as inspirations to those of us who aspire to leadership positions in higher education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Invitation to Participate in Study

Dear «Name»

Greetings! My name is Amy Diehl and I am a PhD Candidate in the Administration and Leadership Studies program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. My dissertation research is to study how women leaders of higher education make meaning of adversity. I am inviting you to participate in this research study as you are a woman serving in a senior leadership role in higher education as the «Title» of «Institution».

The following information is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Participation in this study will involve an individual interview approximately 60 minutes in length. Questions will relate to your experiences with personal and/or professional adversity occurring in the past or present. Information from your interview will be used to help understand adversities and barriers faced by women in higher education leadership. It is hoped that insights gleaned from this research can prove helpful to women aspiring to leadership in higher education or in any other field.

Let me assure you of a couple things:

1) Your interview will be private and confidential**.** You will be assigned a pseudonym which will be attached to your interview data and used in final report findings.
2) Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without consequence. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying me or the Faculty Sponsor, Dr. Susan Boser. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence.

I'll be in touch with you via email or phone within the next few weeks to discuss this research project with you further. For more information or to participate in this project, please contact me, Amy Diehl, Project Director at a.b.diehl@iup.edu or 717-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

Project Director:
Ms. Amy B. Diehl, PhD candidate
Administration & Leadership Studies Program
Dixon University Center, Richards Hall
2986 N. Second St.
Harrisburg, PA 17110
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This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (phone: 724-357-7730).

Appendix B – Follow-Up Email

Hello «Name»,

My name is Amy Diehl, and I am a PhD Candidate at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. For my dissertation, I am studying how women leaders of higher education make meaning of adversity. Recently I mailed you a letter inviting you to participate in my study.

Would you be willing to participate? All that is required is one 60-minute interview at a location of your choosing. Your participation will be a valuable addition to my research!

The attached letter contains pertinent details about my study. If you choose to participate, I will provide you with a copy of the final report when it is complete.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about this project. To participate in this study or to get answers to any questions you may have, please contact me at a.b.diehl@iup.edu or 717-XXX-XXXX.

Thank you and have great day!

Amy

Ms. Amy B. Diehl, PhD candidate
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Appendix C – Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Working title: **"Making Meaning of Adversity: Experiences of Women Leaders in Higher Education"**

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep in my possession.

Name *(please print):* _____

Signature:_____**Date**: _____

Email or Phone where you can be reached to schedule an interview:_____

Best days and times to reach you: _____

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, and have answered any questions that have been raised.

Date: _____ Investigator's signature:_____

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (phone: 724-357-7730).

Appendix D – Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Demographics

Age

Race/Ethnicity

Marital Status

Children (Number, Ages)

Education (Degrees/Fields of Study)

Years in Higher Education Administration

Current Position

Years in Current Position

Professional Path to Current Position

Adversity

What does the term 'adversity' mean to you?

Tell me about a time when you've experienced the most significant adversity in your life, either personal or professional.

How did you get (or how are you getting) through this experience?

What effect does/did this experience have on your personal life?

What effect does/did this experience have on your professional life?

How, if at all, has this experience changed you?

How, if at all, has this experience related to or impacted your leadership?

Overall, what does this experience mean to you?

You've told me about a (professional/personal) adversity, what do you think was the most significant (personal/professional) adversity that you've faced?

What did that experience mean to you?

Leadership Barriers

Have you experienced barriers or obstacles in the past as you rose to your current position? If so:

What were they?

How did you handle these?

What do these experiences mean to you?

Are you presently dealing with any barriers or obstacles in your leadership? If so:

What are they?

How do you handle these?

What do these experiences mean to you?

Future

What are your future career goals?

Do you anticipate any obstacles in the pursuit of your goals? If so, what obstacles do you anticipate? If not, why not?

Supports, Connections, Benefits

Was there anything along the way that buffered or mitigated the adversity, barriers or obstacles you experienced or are currently experiencing?

Were/are there any supports or connections which have helped you succeed as a leader?

Do you feel that privilege has aided your leadership success? If so, how? If not, why not?

Spouse/Partner Support

Do you presently have or have you ever had a spouse or a partner? If yes:

How supportive is/was your spouse/partner of your career?

How does/did your spouse demonstrate that support?

Are there any ways in which your spouse is/was not supportive?

Has career opportunity for you ever required a move? If so,

How did you navigate the decision with your spouse/partner?

Other

Is there anything that I didn't think to ask, which you think would be helpful to add for the purpose of this study?

Are there any women in higher education senior leadership positions who you think would be a good participant for this study?

Would you be interested in reviewing and providing feedback to a copy of this interview transcript and/or my preliminary research findings?

Appendix E – Researcher Expectations

For the process of progressive subjectivity, I recorded my expectations for findings prior to beginning any participant interviews and continued to record my expectations and developing construction as my research progressed.

6/21/2012 – Prior to beginning data collection

As a result of my analysis, I expect to find that:

- my participants have encountered significant barriers within their professional careers.
- my participants have experienced some type of adversity in their personal lives and that the types of adversities vary significantly (health issues, relationship issues, emotional issues, family issues, etc.).
- each participant has a compelling story to tell about her personal or professional experiences with adversity.
- for those participants who are currently enduring an adversity, the adversity is confusing and distracting and causes them to question their ability to navigate through or rise above it.
- for those participants who adversity experience is well behind them, the adversity caused some type of loss but overall made them stronger and more resilient.

9/12/2012 – After completing 17 interviews

- Not everybody has had what they would consider significant adversity. Those that don't feel that they have been really helped along the way by mentors and others who have encouraged them (and not discouraged them.)
- Even those that haven't had "adversity" reported having dealt with challenges.

- Almost everyone has discussed some type of adversity or challenges that, in their mind, definitely or possibly, relate to their gender.
- Many women discussed how they felt the need to be "over-prepared" in order to succeed. This is even true for individuals who did not have significant adversity in their lives.
- Most, but not all, individuals have said that privilege played no role in their success. Then yesterday a participant noted that her race (Caucasian) was a type of privilege that she's had. Although the others did not mention their race as leading to privilege, could it be that many types of privilege are not conscious to individuals.
- As I've been transcribing, I've been, of course, soaking in the information, but, at this point, deliberately not attempting to think through my own framework for what adversity "means." I want to let the framework be drawn from the content analysis process.

9/29/2012 – Preliminary themes developed from a sample of 10 interviews

1. Feeling a sense of accomplishment
2. Losing optimism
3. Having to deal with negative consequences
4. Being devalued
5. Being lost
6. Being pushed
7. Enabling others to receive benefits
8. Blaming self
9. Becoming a better leader
10. Carrying the experience
11. Discovering self
12. Doubting self
13. Experiencing disappointment
14. Failing
15. Finding
16. Getting new opportunities
17. Having to overprepare
18. Just surviving
19. Learning

20. Moving on
21. Not being in control
22. Protecting self
23. Receiving benefits
24. Reinforcing core beliefs and values
25. Relying on others
26. Strengthening of self
27. Suffering a loss
28. Supporting others
29. Appreciating

10/26/2012 – Themes and subthemes developed after 25 interviews

Harm **-** Physical injury, material damage, ill effect or danger

- Adverse physical effects
- Life reconstruction
- Emotional trauma
- Guilt
- Loss
- Social isolation
- Damage
- Ambivalence

Vulnerability – susceptibility to physical or emotional attack or harm

- Self-protection
- Over-preparation
- Self-doubt
- Reliance on others
- Lack of support
- Lack of time for oneself
- Risk

Identity Construction **–** the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is

- Self-concept
- Self-acceptance
- Validation
- Worth
- Shame
- Self-definition

- Role model
- Societal symbol
- Humility

Advantage - the opportunity to gain something; benefit or profit

- Opportunity
- Benefit

Lack of Control – lack of power to influence or direct people's behavior or the course of events

- Uncertainty
- Fortuity
- Failure
- Forced decisions
- Powerlessness

Empowerment - become stronger and more confident, esp. in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights

- Self-confidence
- Resilience
- Control
- Self-reliance
- Support
- Education

Internalization - make (attitudes or behavior) part of one's nature by learning or unconscious assimilation

- Disillusionment
- Perspective
- Loyalty to values
- Faith
- Appreciation

Growth - The process of developing or maturing physically, mentally, or spiritually; the process of increasing in amount, value, or importance:

- Personal development

- Professional development
- Leadership development
- Empathy
- Sympathy
- Support for others

Other/Negative Cases:

- *No meaning* – Concluding that there is no meaning or making sense of it
- *Inability to make meaning* – Trying to figure out why but not being able to come up with a reason
- *No adversity* – not experiencing what they would define as adversity or barriers