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Different for Girls? The Experiences and Perceptions of Women Presidents Leading Transformational Change in Higher Education

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of and give voice to women presidents facilitating transformational change in higher education institutions. Feminist theory was the foundation and underpinning lens to view women presidents' experiences. A phenomenological, qualitative study was conducted utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data collection to capture the experiences and perceptions of women presidents. A demographic survey, field notes, and document analysis were also used to triangulate the data. There were three themes that emerged from the data analysis: (a) leadership is not one dimensional, (b) cultivate a culture for transformational change, and (c) lead intentionally through gendered-based challenges. Results of this study provide women presidents and executive leaders with resources to assist with leading transformational change as well as career advancement. This study found that women presidents incorporated a multidimensional leadership role when leading transformational change in their colleges and universities. Learning about the leadership behaviors that support the success of transformational change and the unique challenges women presidents face will benefit both current female presidents and women who aspire to be future presidents or executive leaders in higher education.

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Different for Girls? The Experiences and Perceptions of Women Presidents Leading
Transformational Change in Higher Education

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

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Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

St. John Fisher College

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Dedication

I began this research to find strategies to help successfully transform the culture of my organization and make it a better place for students to live and learn. I also wanted to ensure that other female leaders in higher education had research-based strategies and resources to help transform their organizational culture in positive ways. What I didn't realize then was how this experience would impact my own underlying assumptions, values, and leadership behaviors and how I have individually transformed as a result. I sincerely appreciate the seven women presidents who agreed to be interviewed for this study, each of you contributed in a very significant way.

I would also like to acknowledge my dissertation committee, Dr. Shannon Cleverley-Thompson and Dr. James Hurny. You both had confidence in me at times when I was having trouble finding confidence in myself. Thank you for your time, energy, feedback, knowledge, experience, and wisdom. All of these were invaluable to me and contributed to my development as a researcher. Thank you for believing in the research I wanted to conduct and for pushing me to do it well.

I want to thank my husband for the unwavering support and encouragement he has given me throughout my entire educational journey. Mike, you have been what has kept me focused on finishing what I start since our early days in Fredonia. Your belief in me and advice to stay in the moment was what motivated me at times when I thought I had nothing left. I am forever grateful to you. This dissertation is dedicated to you and to

our four amazing children Nicholas, Jillian, Kennedy, and Nathan. You all are truly what I am most proud of in my life, the VB 6-pack.

Biographical Sketch

Jacquelyn VanBrunt is currently the Dean of Admissions at Elmira College and has worked in higher education for over 20 years. Mrs. VanBrunt attended the State University of New York at Fredonia from 1987 to 1991 and graduated with a Bachelor of Art degree in Psychology. In 1999, she graduated from Alfred University with a Master of Science degree in Education Counseling. Jackie came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2017 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. She pursued her research in the experiences and perceptions of women presidents leading transformational change in higher education under the direction of Dr. Shannon Cleverley-Thompson and Dr. James Hurny. Jacquelyn VanBrunt received the Ed.D. degree in Executive Leadership in 2019.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of and give voice to women presidents facilitating transformational change in higher education institutions. Feminist theory was the foundation and underpinning lens to view women presidents' experiences. A phenomenological, qualitative study was conducted utilizing semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data collection to capture the experiences and perceptions of women presidents. A demographic survey, field notes, and document analysis were also used to triangulate the data. There were three themes that emerged from the data analysis: (a) leadership is not one dimensional, (b) cultivate a culture for transformational change, and (c) lead intentionally through gendered-based challenges. Results of this study provide women presidents and executive leaders with resources to assist with leading transformational change as well as career advancement. This study found that women presidents incorporated a multidimensional leadership role when leading transformational change in their colleges and universities. Learning about the leadership behaviors that support the success of transformational change and the unique challenges women presidents face will benefit both current female presidents and women who aspire to be future presidents or executive leaders in higher education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Change has occurred throughout the history of higher education, and it continues to affect higher education organizations today. Research has shown that internal forces, such as policies, can be as powerful as external forces, such as federal funding, in driving changes within higher education (Lorenzo, 1998; Schein, 2017; Tierney, 2008). Public colleges and universities are heavily reliant upon external funding sources, and they need to respond to an external environment that is constantly changing to stay competitive and survive (Burke, 2018; Kezar, 2014). Private, nonprofit universities, which rely on student tuition, endowments, and public funding, need to stay viable as well (Seltzer, 2017).

State laws, federal regulations, and legislative performance funding, based on student completion rather than enrollment rates, are all examples of external forces that can drive significant change initiatives within higher education institutions (Kezar, 2014; Kronk, 2018). Externally imposed change disrupts organizational infrastructure and impacts day-to-day operations of an institution (Littlepage, Clark, Wilson, & Stout, 2017; McKinney & Morris, 2010). A change in admissions policies, enrollment or retention processes, or a change in presidency are examples of internally imposed changes within higher education institutions (Barnett, 2011; Baston, 2018; Gearin, 2017). Significant change initiatives, whether internally or externally imposed, can impact organizational structure or mission and can be transformational to an institution (Burke, 2018; Gearin, 2013; Harris & Hartley, 2011; Kezar, 2013; Littlepage et al., 2017; Plowman, Solansky, Beck, Baker, & Kulkarni, 2007).

In 2016, college presidents recognized financial management and fundraising followed by managing senior-level staff as areas that occupy most of their time (American Council on Education [ACE], 2016). Additionally, presidents identified a lack of financial resources as the number-one challenge in leading their institutions with faculty resistance to change as the second-highest rated challenge presidents face (ACE, 2016). Littlepage et al. (2017) posited that college presidents who anticipate and prepare for change respond with more innovative methods than those who refuse to accept or resist change.

McKinney and Morris (2010) identified college presidents as the *change agents* necessary to guide and sustain a change process forward to transform an institution. Hamilton (2016) acknowledged the changing role of the college president as one who needs to consistently align different internal and external stakeholders to work collaboratively toward achieving organizational change. Researchers have recommended that today's college presidents will need to manage resistance to and navigate obstacles around change initiatives to successfully implement change that is transformational to an institution (ACE, 2016; Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; McKinney & Morris, 2010).

Transformational Change

Transformational change is a type of change that has been well documented and the topic of study in the literature for many years. Transformational change encompasses changes to the beliefs, values, and underlying basic assumptions that provide stability, guidance, and meaning for group members' behavior (Schein, 2017). Schein (2017) developed a framework that used a dynamic, multilevel approach to studying the shared learning and behavioral assumptions toward externally and internally imposed changes

that impact organizational culture. As shown in Table 1.1, Schein (2017) described the levels of structure in this theoretical framework with artifacts (things an observer can see, hear, and feel), espoused values and beliefs (less concrete), and underlying basic assumptions (providing stability and meaning). Gaining an understanding of the structural levels within organizations will assist leaders in facilitating transformational change (Burke, 2018; Schein, 2017).

Table 1.1

Schein's Three Levels of Culture

Level	Example/Illustration	Understanding
Artifacts	Visible structures, processes, and observable behaviors	Difficult to decipher, need to ask insider questions to make meaning or understanding
Espoused Beliefs and Values	Ideology, goals, shared values and ideals, and reason	Understanding of a piece of the culture, the organizational philosophy
Basic Underlying Assumptions	Intrinsic learning of repeated beliefs and values that guide group members' behavior	Deeper understanding of the underlying reasons that drive the observed behaviors

Note. Adapted from *Organizational culture and leadership* by E. H. Schein, 2017. 5th ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

In organizations, there are almost as many types of change as there are reasons for the change. “Not all changes are the same, although most research and advice for change agents treats all change initiatives the same” (Kezar, 2014, p. 45). Given that most institutions rely heavily on policy and governance to make decisions, it can take a considerable amount of time and energy to implement transformation (Kezar, 2014; Norris, Brodnick, Lefrere, Gilmour, & Baer, 2013) In business, transformational change

has been referred to as total quality management, reengineering, and right sizing (Kotter, 1995).

Regardless of the term being used to describe fundamental changes in business procedures, the organization's chief executive officer needs to be the *change champion* for transformation. A change champion is essential in leading an organization through a transformational process that requires a series of steps for change, which can take a significantly long time (Kotter, 1995). Furthermore, leaders using a participatory, rather than directive leadership approach, create buy-in for transformational change (Arnold & Laughlin, 2013). Participatory leadership involves a democratic and collaborative style for decision making, creating vision, and motivation for change (Arnold & Laughlin, 2013; Kotter, 1995).

In higher education institutions, transformational change has been described as comprehensive, widespread, and collaborative change that engages employees on, and from, many levels (Burke, 2018; Kezar, 2014; Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Coordinated enrollment redesign efforts, such as changes to new student onboarding processes that engages multiple departments and improves student outcomes is transformational because of the change in processes and behaviors (Baston, 2018). Burke (2018) described transformational change as being revolutionary to the total system, rather than being merely revolutionary to parts of an organization. This type of transformation requires the attention of many campus departments and divisions of an institution, as well as the use of different tools and approaches for implementation than for the change that occurs within silos (Burke, 2018). The consolidation of two public higher education institutions for economic reasons is an example of an externally imposed transformational change

that impacts an entire organization (Ribando & Evans, 2015). In contrast, superficial changes, such as a change in personnel or a course requirement that does not impact methods or approaches, is not considered a transformational change in higher education institutions. Transformational change requires leaders to implement the changes in structures, processes, and attitudes in and on the structural levels of organizational culture (Gambino, 2017; Schein, 2017).

Kezar and Eckel (2002) defined transformational change in the field of higher education as altering culture by intentionally changing underlying assumptions, behaviors, and processes. This transformation to culture is considered to be pervasive, not shallow, and it takes time. Kezar (2014) referred to transformational change as being *second-order change* because of the multilevel or multidimensional impact it has on group behavior; whereas, first-order change involves minor improvements or adjustments. First-order change, such as employing new technology, is easier to implement and happens more often in higher education than second-order change (Kezar, 2014). Second-order change involves changes to underlying values and assumptions that impact the culture of a department or an organization (Kezar, 2014). Associate degree-granting colleges moving to award baccalaureate degrees is an example of second-order change that requires pervasive, collaborative efforts, and is transformational because of the cohesive outcomes and impact on culture (McKinney & Morris, 2010). Moreover, second-order change is less common than first-order change in higher education (Kezar, 2014).

A major implication of leading transformational change in higher education institutions is the impact this type of change has on organizational culture (Barnett, 2011;

Bystydzienski, Thomas, Howe, & Desai, 2017; Springer, Clark, Strohfus, & Belcheir, 2012). Springer et al. (2012) researched transformational change that impacted the culture of a college's nursing school. This longitudinal study measured the cultural impact of faculty integration from three distinct programs into one cohesive program, the design and launch of an additional graduate program, and the design and implementation of a new shared-governance structure. These internally imposed, second-order transformational changes impacted the culture of the nursing school and created conflict and resistance to the changes (Springer et al., 2012). Although these changes took place in one school, and they were not university-wide changes, the change, itself, was transformational because it impacted the culture of the nursing school through change in employee beliefs, values, and behaviors.

Burke (2018) delineated between the content and process of transformational change in organizations. The content of change involves what overall direction and clear-vision leaders provide and what story is communicated as to where the organization is headed (Burke, 2018). Content determines what employee behaviors need to be addressed, and content involves changing behaviors, and leaders being self-aware, self-reflective, and emotionally intelligent (Burke, 2018). The process of leading change includes how the change is planned, implemented, and accepted (Burke, 2018). Determining the content (what) and the process (how) of transformational change strategies requires competent leadership (Burke, 2018). Furthermore, successful transformational change involves leaders who assess organizational culture, plan and prepare for change, and create readiness for change (Armenakis et al., 2011; Burke, 2018; Springer et al., 2012).

Factors Influencing Transformational Change

Factors that influence transformational change in higher education have been identified in the literature. Campus leaders facilitating transformational change need to overcome conflict and resistance to the change (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Gearin, 2017; Springer et al., 2012).). It is also necessary to prepare for and create organizational readiness for change (Armenakis, Brown, & Mehta, 2011; Bystydzienski, et al., 2017; Springer, et al., 2012). Furthermore, it is important to understand the leadership characteristics and behavior needed for transformational change to be successful (Armenakis, et al., 2011; Burke, 2018; Bystydzienski, et al., 2017; Deprez, Van Den Broeck, Cools, & Bouckenoooghe, 2012; Springer, et al., 2012).

Leading transformational change can be a long and difficult process because of the impact this type of change has on people's values, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior (Bystydzienski, et al., 2017; Kezar, 2013, 2014; Schein, 2017; Springer, et al., 2012). Change that challenges people's beliefs and attitudes can create dissonance and interference with the change (Burke, 2018). Transformational change tests values, behaviors, and impacts culture, so it is necessary for a leader who is facilitating this type of change to lead through conflict and resistance (Saltmarsh, Janke, & Clayton, 2015).

Senior leaders navigating through employees' resistance to change, involves strategic management of different visions and perspectives (Barnett, 2011; Deprez et al., 2012; Harris & Hartley, 2011) and dealing with negative implications and fear of change (Gearin, 2017). Additionally, leaders facilitating transformational change need to have a broad understanding of employees' personal values and perception of a leadership style in relation to their resistance to change (Oreg & Berson, 2011). These factors that

influence the success of transformational change can be challenging and are of concern for leadership across the disciplines of business and education (Barnett, 2011; Deprez, et al., 2012; Gearin, 2017; Harris & Hartley, 2011; Kotter, 1995; Oreg & Berson, 2011) .

Resistance to transformational change has been studied in both primary and secondary schools. Gearin (2017) and Harris and Hartley (2011) expressed that leaders attempting to implement transformational change need to be prepared for, and work diligently to address, conflict and resistance. Baston (2018) and Kezar (2014) uncovered that resistance and conflict are an employee's response to transformational change that requires learning new skills or delivering services or products in different ways.

Additionally, employees may resist change as a result of a leaders' management style or as a reaction to how changes have been implemented (Barnett, 2011; Oreg & Berson, 2011). Leaders who prepare an organization by providing data driven in depth planning and educational opportunities for employees reduce resistance to transformational change (Bystydzienski, et al., 2017; Cejda & Leist, 2013; Kezar, 2013; Springer et al., 2012).

Successfully Leading Transformational Change

Several factors have been identified in the literature as being associated with successfully leading and facilitating transformational change. These factors include assessment of culture, preparation for change, and specific leadership characteristics necessary for transformational change (Armenakis, et al., 2011; Barnett, 2011; Bystydzienski, et al., 2017; Cejda & Leist, 2013; Gearin, 2017; Kezar, 2013; Littlepage et al., 2017; McKinney & Morris, 2010; Springer, et al., 2012). Successful transformational leaders create planned change with a clear goal, purpose, and vision in mind (Burke, 2018; Schein, 2017). Schein (2017) described this concept as the *change target* that is

necessary for cultures, climates, and shared meanings to change within organizations. Moreover, Burke (2018) and Kezar (2014) concluded that campus leaders need to create motivation for change initiatives on many different levels throughout their organizations and allow people to create new meaning and significance around the transformational change. According to Armenakis et al. (2011), one way leaders can prepare and create readiness for change is by assessing their organizational culture prior to implementation.

Littlepage et al. (2017) noted that campus leaders create motivation for transformational change by preparing an organization and creating readiness prior to implementation. Myran, Baker III, Simone, and Zeiss (2003) posited that an assessment of a culture allows leaders to understand how members of their organizations behave and carry out their responsibilities as well as allowing them to detect any underlying assumptions that might guide actions and influence processes. Myran et al. (2017) also found that assessing and understanding organizational culture creates readiness and preparation for transformational change that allows for a collective buy-in for change to occur.

Creating institutional buy-in and motivation for change is necessary for college presidents facilitating transformational change (Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; McKinney & Morris, 2010; Myran, et al., 2003). College presidents who communicate a shared vision, lead with motivation, encourage collaborative behavior, and create buy-in through shared values and beliefs among the members of an organization, can successfully implement transformational change (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; McKinney & Morris, 2010). Furthermore, successful transformational change includes the organizational membership being involved in the creation of policies and

procedures with a shared vision (Springer et al., 2012). Finally, a clear understanding of organizational values and beliefs, through cultural assessment, prior to implementing transformational change, creates motivation or readiness for, and minimizes the organizational resistance to, transformational change (Armenakis et al., 2011; Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Springer et al., 2012).

Successful facilitation of transformational change in higher education calls for a college president who is a *change agent* and committed to working through challenges (Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; McFarlin, Crittenden, & Ebbers, 1999; McKinney & Morris, 2010). Navigating through employees' resistance to change involves strategic management of different visions and perspectives as well as dealing with negative implications and fear of change (Barnett, 2011; Deprez et al., 2012; Gearin, 2017; Harris & Hartley, 2011). Implementing transformational change is a long, challenge-filled process that requires firm dedication and visionary leadership on behalf of the college president (Brown & Marcum, 2016; Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; McFarlin et al., 1999). Lorenzo (1998) posited that it is crucial for higher education leaders to understand the influence that culture has on change efforts, and change initiatives are not sustainable if they are implemented without a deep understanding of an organization's values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations.

Gender may be a factor for females who have the responsibility to facilitate transformational change in higher education institutions. Deprez et al. (2012) found that women were more positive about change, meaning that the female employees in their study were more accepting of, and less resistant to, the transformational change than the males. Differences in gender leadership characteristics may factor into how women

facilitate transformational change compared to men; for example, Arnold and Loughlin (2013) found that some men in military settings lead in a more participatory way than females in a military setting. Yet, outside of the military, the cultural expectations are that women lead in more collaborative and relational ways; whereas men in leadership roles are expected to be agentic and heroic (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard, & Newman, 2017). According to Northouse (2019), gendered behavioral roles are culturally pervasive, highly resistant to change, and they are still being assigned to both men and women leaders today. For example, characteristics, such as taking charge, confidence, independence, and decisiveness, are seen as masculine, while taking care, sensitivity, warmth, and nurturing are viewed as feminine characteristics (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Vinkinburg, van Engen, Eagly, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2011). Furthermore, women leaders face barriers as a result of the incongruities that exist between the female gender role and the leadership role (Ayman, Korabik, & Morris, 2009; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Northouse, 2019).

Transformational change, which is deep and pervasive within institutions, requires a sensitive appreciation of the overall culture of an organization (Myran, et al., 2003; Burke, 2018; & Schein, 2017). Successfully leading and facilitating this type of change requires an unwavering dedication and persistence by the change agent (Brown & Marcum, 2016; Gearin, 2017; McFarlin et al., 1999; McKinney & Morris, 2010). Additionally, historical conditions, stereotypes, and gendered organizational cultures can make such change a significant challenge for female leaders in today's higher educational systems (Davidson, 2018; Enke, 2014; Savigny, 2014; Tedrow & Rhoades, 1999; Wheat & Hill, 2016).

These challenges, and the necessary leadership characteristics required to lead transformational change, however, have predominately been researched with White male presidents. At the time of this study, there was a lack of research on how women presidents lead transformational change in colleges and universities, and there was a lack of research on regarding the unique skills women need to overcome when faced with the challenges associated with this type of change (Bierema, 2001; Gearin, 2017; Littlepage et al., 2017; Townsend & Twombly, 2007).

Problem Statement

According to Roberts (2010), “The problem statement is the discrepancy between what we already know and what we want to know” (p. 125). This difference in knowledge is especially true when it comes to women in leadership positions in higher education. The current literature on women in leadership positions in higher education reflects their underrepresentation, leadership styles/characteristics, and the challenges they face (Enke, 2014; Parsons & Priola, 2013; Redmond et al., 2017; Savigny, 2014; Wheat & Hill, 2016). Women in higher education institutions are up against a male-centered organizational culture and stereotypes that favor male approaches to leadership (Davidson, 2018; Enke, 2014, Redmond et al., 2017; Savigny, 2014, Wheat & Hill, 2016). Male-centered cultures favor male approaches to leadership and elevate male privilege while sidelining women and excluding them from power within organizational structures (Davidson, 2018; Gill & Jones, 2013; Parsons & Priola, 2013).

Much of the research conducted in higher education institutions related to transformational change does not fully reflect women’s perceptions and experiences because the population consisted of mainly White male presidents (Bierema, 2001;

Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; Littlepage et al., 2017; Townsend & Twombly, 2007).

Many female leaders in higher education face multiple challenges and resistance due to a culture created, maintained, and controlled by men (Bierema, 2001; Gill & Jones, 2013; Redmond et al., 2017; Savigny, 2014). Gill and Jones (2013) and Parsons and Priola (2013) shared that male-controlled systems and gender inequalities found within higher education institutions pose challenges for women. The often male-controlled systems and inequalities can make it difficult for some women to advance into senior leadership positions (Gill & Jones, 2013; Parsons & Priola, 2013; Redmond et al., 2017; Savigny, 2014).

One of the challenges females face in higher education is the lack of representation in senior leadership positions. Across the United States, women are underrepresented in senior leadership positions in higher education institutions. According to the ACE, in 2016, three out of 10 of the nation's college presidents were women. Although this is a 4% increase since 2011, it is still significantly lower than the number of men in senior leadership roles. Further data from the ACE (2016) indicates women are most likely to lead community colleges, at 38%, and only 7% of doctorate-granting institutions are led by women. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015), 56% of students in baccalaureate-degree-granting institutions in 2015 were women. Furthermore, females have surpassed males in enrolling in, and graduating from, colleges in the United States since 1988 (NCES, 2015). Even though women earn the majority of college degrees and are enrolling in colleges at a greater rate than males, there has been little improvement in the equal representation of females in senior leadership positions in higher education (ACE, 2016). According to the ACE

(2016), the 30% of females serving as college presidents across the nation were more likely to lead public, rather than private, institutions. Across the nation, women are still underrepresented in college president positions as well as in the research regarding leading transformational change in higher education (ACE, 2016; Cejda & Leist, 2013; Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; Kezar, 2013; McKinney & Morris, 2010; Parsons & Priola, 2013).

Transformational change requires college presidents to be persistent and keep people focused on the journey toward the desired future (Burke, 2018; Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; McKinney & Morris, 2010). Being prepared to be a change agent has been identified as a primary skill that is necessary for successful college presidents (McFarlin et al., 1999; McKinney & Morris, 2010). Preparation as a change agent by itself, however, is not enough of an advantage for women in senior leadership positions because many colleges and universities are male-centered (Davidson, 2018; Tedrow & Rhoades, 1999).

According to Sullivan (2009), organizational culture impacts a leader's ability to successfully move an organization forward, and it should not be underestimated. Jones and Taylor (2012) found that perceptions are embedded in institutional culture that create behavioral expectations and gendered organizations for females. The females in the Jones and Taylor (2012) study constructed leadership identities as a response to cultural expectations and perceptions of gender roles. While enrollment of women in degree-granting institutions has increased over the years, women are still underrepresented in senior leadership positions in higher education institutions (ACE, 2016; NCES 2015); as well, the experiences of women leading transformational change are underrepresented in

the literature. According to Myran, et al., (2003) various leadership competencies are necessary for higher education leaders who plan to facilitate transformational change. Exploring the leadership role of women presidents facilitating transformational change can add a female voice that is missing in the higher education literature and inform other women leaders involved in transformational change initiatives at their colleges or universities.

Theoretical Rationale

Feminist theory was the foundation and underpinning lens with which to view women's experiences in this study. Using feminist theory as a theoretical framework assisted in gaining an understanding of the leadership role of women presidents who are facilitating transformational change in higher education. Feminist research is action oriented and seeks to empower women and transform patriarchal organizations (Iverson & Seher, 2016).

According to Hooks (2000), feminism is not about being anti-male, it is a movement to help people understand that males and females have been socialized to accept sexism, which is a societal problem. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2018), sexism is defined as "behavior, environments, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex." Braidotti (1993) proposed that feminist knowledge should no longer be thought of as universal and that discourse is always at the individual experience. This rethinking of feminism in 1993 included belief in the knowledge that comes from the conflict between the cultural image of women and their lived experiences.

In 1998, Townsend and Twombly suggested that second-order change was necessary in higher education, but that it would not occur within institutions without preparation and creating readiness for such change. The transformational change Townsend and Twombly (1998) were referring to was improving the social, political, and economic conditions for women in higher education institutions that had traditionally been led by men. This paradigm shift from patriarchal thinking that feminists, at that time, were envisioning was described as moving from first-order changes that leave the organizational core intact, toward more second-order changes that were considered multilevel, qualitative, and radical shifts in philosophy, policies, beliefs, values, and structure (Townsend & Twombly, 1998).

Virginia Schein (2001) globally confirmed the underlying masculine assumptions about leadership, as well as her previous research from the 1970s in an international study. The think manager, think male theory was confirmed when it was determined that, regardless of what a culture considers male or female leadership characteristics, the success of a manager is determined by sex type, rather than leadership characteristics (Schein, 2001). In other words, there is such strength embedded in the sex type of leadership that it does not matter whether a woman utilizes masculine or feminine leadership characteristics; if she is not a male in embodiment, she is not viewed as a successful leader (Schein, 2001). Edgar Schein (2017) theorized that most of us consist of the sources of the early layers of cultural socialization that were taught to us when we were young. This would seem to support the think manager, think male theory, initially developed nearly 30 years ago, which was confirmed in Virginia Schein's (2001)

international study, and it continues to be a focus of research on women leaders in higher education today.

The re-envisioning of the characteristics necessary for successfully leading organizations and the movement from heroic to post-heroic models of leadership traits was considered a paradigm shift by liberal and neoliberal feminists (Fletcher, 2004; Madsen, 2017). Heroic leaders behave in ways that are considered hierarchal, individualistic, and that emphasize power over and competition within organizations (Fletcher, 2004). A post-heroic leadership style is considered more relational, multidirectional, and emphasizes shared and distributed power rather than a directive leadership style (Fletcher, 2004). At one time, post-heroic leadership models were viewed as *feminine* and possibly gave females an advantage in leadership roles; however, Fletcher (2004) argued that underlying beliefs and assumptions about leadership are *masculine* and deeply rooted in the images associated with traditional heroic leaders.

Madsen (2017) identified a need for research on females in leadership roles because women still experience discrimination and gender biases within organizations. The post-modern feminists of today challenge the status quo of gendered organizational culture to move toward a more diverse and inclusive understanding of women and the leadership behaviors necessary to dismantle the power structures they experience (Iverson & Seher, 2016; Madsen, 2017). Madsen's (2017) call was for research to provide a female voice in the literature and inform young women about drawing on a variety of their diverse identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion) to become successful leaders because of the lack of gender equality and the cultural, economic, and political hurdles women face (Madsen, 2017).

Longino (2010) reminded researchers to attend to what we choose not to know; in other words, focus on what has been left out of the research. Traditionally, organizations have been dominated by men; therefore, research on leading transformational change in higher education is based on data from White males (Davidson, 2018; Gill & Jones, 2013; Parsons & Priola, 2013; Savigny, 2014). Applying feminist theory as a lens for this study provided an opportunity for women presidents to share their experiences about facilitating transformational, second-order change in what has been described as a White male-dominated culture (Bierema, 2001; Gill & Jones, 2013; Savigny, 2014; Townsend & Twombly, 2007; Wheat & Hill, 2016).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the leadership role of women facilitating transformational change while serving as presidents in higher education. This study investigated the leadership experiences and perceptions of women presidents involved in transformational change in higher education institutions in the United States. An intended outcome was to learn more about the challenges women presidents experience while leading transformational change and the leadership behaviors that may support or hinder the success of facilitating transformational change in higher education institutions.

Research Question

The research question that guided this study was:

What are the leadership experiences of women presidents facilitating transformational change in their institution of higher education?

Potential Significance of the Study

This study explored women presidents' experiences facilitating transformational change in higher education institutions using feminist theory. One of the goals of this study was to understand the role female college presidents had in facilitating transformational change. A second goal of this study was to learn about the challenges women experience when leading transformational change and what leadership characteristics helped them overcome those challenges. According to Schein (2001), research that establishes the phenomena of the barriers to women's advancement in leadership positions should not be overlooked, and views that hinder women are embedded in all cultures. Therefore, qualitative research that gives a voice to women's discourse can provide tools for organizational and structural change that reframes old assumptions and points out ways to eliminate sexism (Schein, 2001; Townsend & Twombly, 1998). Furthermore, leadership preparation, practice, certification, and assessment of transformational change in higher education institutions have been developed based on a White male viewpoint (Marshall & Young, 2013); therefore, this study anticipates adding a more diverse understanding of overcoming the unique barriers and resistance women college presidents may face when facilitating transformational change (Marshall & Young, 2013).

Chapter Summary

The topic of transformational change is well documented in the literature, and it has been researched across the disciplines of business and education. Leading transformational change involves understanding and assessing organizational culture as well as creating readiness for change (Armenakis et al., 2011; Burke, 2018; Kezar, 2014;

Springer et al., 2012). Creating readiness for transformational change will produce more innovative, rather than resistant, responses from employees experiencing this type of change (Littlepage et al., 2017).

Researchers have suggested that college presidents involved with leading transformational change will need to continually move the change forward and navigate through both internal and external organizational challenges (Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; McKinney & Morris, 2010). Additionally, women face many challenges in their leadership roles in higher education. One challenge females experience is their underrepresentation in college president positions with the majority of college presidents across the nation being male (ACE, 2016; NCES, 2015). Although women have exceeded men in earning more college degrees over the past two decades, they are more likely to experience less leadership opportunities than men (NCES, 2015). Furthermore, women experience more challenges than males because of the gendered organizational culture that exists in higher education (Davidson, 2018; Gill & Jones, 2013; Savigny, 2014) and leadership stereotypes that are male centered (Bierema, 2001; Schein, 2001).

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature related to transformational change in higher education, women leaders, and gendered organizational culture. Chapter 3 explains in detail the research design methodology including the research context, research participants, instruments used in data collection, and procedures for data analysis for this study. Chapter 4 presents a description of the background of the research participants and restates the research question in this study with the corresponding evidence from the research findings, and Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation with a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

Transformational change encompasses changes to the beliefs, values, and underlying basic assumptions that provide stability, guidance, and meaning for group members' behavior (Schein, 2018). Kezar (2014) described the transformational, or second-order change, process as being so significant that it alters underlying values, organizational structures, and impacts culture. Additionally, transformational change requires leaders to be persistent and keep people focused on the journey toward the desired future (Burke, 2018). McFarlin et al. (1999) identified that being prepared to be a change agent is a primary skill necessary for successful college presidents. Because many colleges and universities are male-centered, being prepared as a change agent, by itself, is not enough of an advantage for women in senior leadership positions (Davidson, 2018; Tedrow & Rhoades, 1999). Male-controlled systems and gender inequalities found within higher education institutions pose challenges for many women and make it difficult for them to advance into senior leadership positions (Gill & Jones, 2013; Parsons & Priola, 2013). Across the nation, women are underrepresented in college presidential positions. This underrepresented disparity is also true regarding research on women leading transformational change in higher education.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature related to transformational change in higher education, women leaders, and gendered organizational culture. The chapter identifies the gaps in the literature as a result of the reviews, and the chapter summary

discusses how the research explored the experiences and perceptions of women presidents leading or supporting transformational change in 2- and 4-year higher education institutions.

Transformational Change

Transformational change has been studied in both 2- and 4-year colleges as well as in doctoral-granting universities. Additionally, transformational change has been studied both within and outside of the United States. While some research has been focused on the organization undergoing the transformational change (Barnett, 2011; Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Cejda & Leist, 2013; Kezar, 2013; Springer et al., 2012), other research has focused on the administrators or change agents who lead transformational change (Arnold & Loughlin, 2013; Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; Littlepage et al., 2017; McKinney & Morris, 2010). Regardless of the research context, all of the studies in the literature review include implications and discussion for leading transformational change. The central themes that emerged from the literature on transformational change are organizational culture and the leadership behaviors that are necessary to implement this type of deep and pervasive change.

Transformational change and organizational culture. A central theme in the literature on transformational change is the impact this type of second-order change has on organizational culture. Springer et al., (2012) conducted a longitudinal study to describe a transformational change in the culture and climate of a school of nursing. Springer et al. sought to understand how a culture might change from dissatisfaction and mistrust to high employee satisfaction and trust within a 4-year study. Springer et al. defined culture as the organizational values and beliefs that are often invisible and a

reflection of employee attitudes. Climate was described as how employees act or the interpersonal relationships within their organization that are often visible. Springer et al. (2012) noted that climate and culture may be interchangeable for some; however, the authors viewed climate and culture as closely related, but held that they were two distinct concepts. Furthermore, Springer et al. (2012) postulated that transformational change is necessary to change organizational culture; however, changes to climate are more short term and incremental.

Springer et al. (2012) developed a Culture/Climate Assessment Scale (CCAS) that contained both open-ended and closed-choice items that provided quantitative and qualitative data for the mixed-methods study. The CCAS was administered to all faculty, staff, and administrators of the school of nursing, and it was given at 2-year intervals from 2005 through 2009. The CCAS consisted of questions regarding general work satisfaction, communication, support, teamwork, level of stress, conflict, morale, and the amount of change perceived by employees (Springer et al., 2012).

After the first administration of the CCAS in 2005, the first six stages of Kotter's (1996) 8-step process for leading transformational change (Appendix A) were implemented within the school (Springer et al., 2012). In 2007, the CCAS was administered for a second time with a 93.8% response rate and Springer et al. reported progress had been made in every area that was assessed and concluded the school had displayed a significant amount of growth in trust and satisfaction in 2 years. Springer et al., (2012) reported administering the assessment again in 2009, after Kotter's (1996) final two stages for transformational change were implemented with the members of the school. Springer et al. (2012) reported a 72.2% response rate with 39 out of 54 members

surveyed and results indicated that progress on all items of assessment had either maintained or increased in comparison with the 2007 results.

The findings of the Springer et al. (2012) research were that clear communication, collaborative decision making, and establishing a shared vision were essential to transforming the culture of the school of nursing. A further finding noted by Springer et al (2012) was the success of utilizing Kotter's (1996) award-winning 8-step process for leading change, which the authors noted impacted the culture. More specifically, Kotter's eighth stage: anchoring new approaches to organizational norms and values. Springer et al. (2012) also found that broad-based, transformational change requires strong, effective leaders who challenge existing policies and procedures and promote innovation. This study further examined the leadership approach and behaviors of women presidents leading transformational change that influences higher education culture.

Kezar (2013) recognized that very few studies had been conducted on deep or transformational change in higher education, and she intended to fill a gap with her research focused on mobilizing change from a bottom-up approach. Kezar posited that bottom-up sensemaking is vital in understanding how change processes become deep and transformational rather than superficial. According to Kezar (2013), "sensemaking is about creating an understanding of the change while sense giving is concerned with influencing the outcomes, communicating thoughts about change to others, and gaining support" (p. 763). Specifically, Kezar (2013) wanted to understand the importance of sensemaking in the later stages of transformational change—after implementation.

Kezar (2013) purposefully selected the participants for the qualitative case study from 28 higher education institutions across the United States who met the criteria for

institutionalizing transformational change successfully. The criteria included the following: change in culture (i.e., change in underlying assumptions, values, or beliefs); deep change that affected the entire institution; and change that was intentional or took place over a substantial amount of time (Kezar). The researcher conducted a case study and collected multiple forms of data through observation, interviews, document analysis, and surveys over a course of 3 years from 250 faculty members and department chairs across diverse institutions (small/large, public/private, religious/secular).

Kezar (2013) found that, overall, the colleges that engaged in bottom-up sense giving and sensemaking across the institution made the most progress with implementing and sustaining transformational change. The findings included the concept that early efforts of sensemaking and sense giving were shallow, needed constant support, and for change to be transformational, efforts needed to be rooted within the various levels in and across the institution. Therefore, bottom-up approaches need administrators to reinforce the change initiatives with resource support, collaborative leadership, and restructuring to impact organizational culture and maintain transformational change (Kezar). The results of Kezar's research also included three key elements for institutionalizing transformational change: depth of process, breadth across departments and campus, and connecting strategies with barriers. Although Kezar's (2013) study centered on bottom-up sensemaking being vital to implementing transformational change, some of her findings provided support for collaborative leadership behaviors that can be necessary for leading transformational change. This study further examined the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and values in higher education culture and the leadership behaviors

of women presidents leading transformational change and determine if experiences are similar among women.

Added research on transformational change and culture was conducted by Gearin (2017). The purpose of Gearin's study was to investigate the resistance to change that externally recruited, first-time presidents experienced when taking on the role of the transformational change agent (Gearin, 2017). The researcher sought to understand what common leadership characteristics helped make sense of the expectations and what assisted with managing resistance and navigating obstacles in the participants' higher education institutions. Gearin (2017) posited that the transformational change these presidents were leading was their own integration into the campus culture.

Gearin's (2017) qualitative, phenomenological study used open-ended questions to interview 11 first-time campus presidents from 4-year institutions with populations of up to 15,000 students. The participants included five women and six men in their first 4 years of presidency. None of the participants came from outside of higher education (i.e., business or industry). Gearin's study results indicate that despite the differences in their managerial career paths, the presidents utilized similar listening and learning approaches immediately after beginning their presidencies. The presidents who maintained open communication and a transparent approach with their campuses experienced little resistance to their assimilation into the campus culture (Gearin, 2017). Conversely, the presidents who led with certainty and coercive power met more resistance from their communities than the other presidents in the study.

Four major themes emerged from Gearin's (2017) research, including disequilibrium from unexpected events that caused awareness and motivation of the need

for change, resistance due to uncertainty or fear of change, change or moving from the current to the desired state, and change readiness, which is necessary for mobilization of change. The findings of the Gearin (2017) study suggest that college presidents face challenges and resistance to change efforts and that many presidents are overwhelmed in the beginning of their tenure.

Gearin (2017) identified several limitations of the study, one being a lack of consideration of prior experiences of the new presidents. Although both male and female presidents were interviewed, leader gender and approach to change was not identified by Gearin. Therefore, it is unknown whether the female presidents in Gearin's study reported meeting more or less resistance than the males, or if their approaches to leadership and change were different than the male presidents. This study further examined the challenges and resistance women presidents have experienced when leading transformational change in higher education institutions.

Further research on transformational change and the impact it has on higher education culture came from Bystydzienski et al. (2017). The purpose of Bystydzienski et al.'s study was to determine how deans and department chairs use leadership positions to enable transformational change that impacts the culture in their colleges and universities. Bystydzienski et al. sought to understand the gender inequality that exists for women in the culture of higher education, and the researchers conducted a 6-year research project at a large university in the United States with the goal of developing systemic approaches for recruitment, retention, and advancement of women in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) careers. Bystydzienski et al. (2017) noted that having university policy encouraging diversity was not enough for transformational change to

occur; changes in attitudes, practices, and underlying assumptions were needed to produce a culture change.

Bystydzienski et al. (2017) used a grounded research approach to gather data with a combination of inventory, questionnaires, evaluations, and interviews in the mixed-methods, longitudinal case study. Baseline data of 21 participating administrators' attitudes and behaviors were assessed using the 38-item Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (1990). Following 3 years of diversity and inclusion workshops, which were designed to identify and shift cultural assumptions about women, the same leadership questionnaire was administered to the administrators a second time. Further data were gathered from the administrators with a short questionnaire and evaluation following each of 10 workshops (Bystydzienski et al.). Over the course of 3 years, the authors collected data from 194 evaluations, with a large majority of respondents reporting being satisfied or very satisfied (97.9%); found the workshop content important or very important (96.9%); and, over time, the respondents saw an increase in changes aimed at transforming the cultures of their departments (Bystydzienski et al., 2017). Finally, a culture survey was administered three times between 2008 and 2014 with data responses from over 1,300 faculty members.

The findings of the Bystydzienski et al. (2017) study suggest that administrators who are trained to encourage and value the practice of inclusivity for decision and policy making create buy-in for, and bring about, transformational change that impacts university culture. Moreover, leading transformational culture change involves an understanding of certain values and beliefs to create motivation or readiness for change (Bystydzienski et al.). The leaders in the Bystydzienski et al. (2017) study were able to

reduce resistance to, and gain a commitment for, change from employees when those leaders were armed with the skills necessary for implementation that were derived from the workshops provided by the researchers. This study explored the experiences and perceptions of women presidents leading transformational change efforts that have impacted the culture of higher education institutions.

Transformational change is a type of change that impacts organizational culture (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Gearin, 2017; Kezar, 2013; Springer, et al., 2012). An assessment of attitudes, behaviors, values, and beliefs prior to implementing transformational change can create motivation and readiness as well as reduce resistance to change (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Springer, et al., 2012). Leaders who manage resistance and navigate obstacles about change do so through clear communication, transparency, and inclusivity in decision making (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Gearin, 2017; Springer, et al., 2012). Bottom-up sense-making, collaborative leadership, and creating a shared vision within a culture can assist leaders in implementing transformational change (Kezar, 2013; Springer, et al., 2012).

Leading transformational change. A second central theme in the literature on transformational change is the need for change leaders to prepare and plan for this type of multilayered organizational change. Cejda and Leist's (2013) qualitative study explored the common factors of successful change initiatives that were transformational in community colleges. The context of Cejda and Leist's study was twofold: identify shared features/themes of award-winning community college programs, and identify whether the transformational change programs were developed by serving an internal or external need. Cejda and Leist conducted a content analysis by examining the narratives of 65

award-winning programs entered into the National Council of Instructional Administrators (NCIA) by 58 community colleges. The narratives included a full description of the work processes, the resources involved, and any problems or attributes associated with the change initiative program (Cejda & Leist, 2013). Narrative data were independently coded for themes in three phases by both researchers and independent assistants for validity purposes.

Cejda and Leist (2013) found that almost two-thirds of the award-winning programs were initiated by an external stakeholder need (i.e., potential students, community agencies). The remaining winning programs were driven by improving policies that served internal stakeholders (i.e., current students, faculty, staff), and the researchers found that regardless of whether the change was driven by an internal or external need, the most common characteristics related to the award-winning program narratives was data-driven, in-depth planning and preparation for the change. Cejda and Leist (2013) concluded that several steps are necessary to intentionally plan and prepare for transformational change, and the community colleges that recognized the need to collect, analyze, and utilize data for implementation and continuous assessment were among those award-winning transformational change programs.

Cejda and Leist (2013) also identified three leadership themes from the research on the award-winning transformational change programs. The first theme involved fiscal and human resources. Leaders who directed fiscal and human resources toward the change program helped create organizational buy-in and participation in the change. The second theme was preparation for change. Senior leaders who made internal structural changes and created cross-departmental teams were better able to prepare their

organizations for change initiatives. Finally, a common leadership theme that emerged from Cejda and Leist's research was program leadership development. Senior leaders who cultivated program leadership by empowering faculty and mid-level administrators to collaboratively develop and implement the change were among the transformational award-winning programs. Leaders who displayed effective listening and communication skills were able to develop a level of organizational trust that is needed in effecting transformational change (Cejda & Leist, 2013). The research highlighted the necessary in-depth planning and preparation that is required for award-winning change initiatives and programming; however, successfully implementing the programs required senior leadership to develop an organizational culture of change through shared vision and responsibility across institutions (Cejda & Leist, 2013). Although Cejda and Leist's research was focused on the narratives of award-winning transformational change initiatives in community colleges, the implications include recommendations for leaders to prepare their higher education organizations for transformational change. This study further examined the strategies necessary for preparing higher education institutions for transformational change by exploring the concept with women presidents from both 2- and 4-year colleges.

McKinney and Morris (2010) found that transformational change can have an impact on internal policy and practice in higher education institutions by conducting a qualitative, phenomenological study that investigated how higher education administrators managed the process of multifaceted, transformational change on their campuses and how it affected the day-to-day college operations. Kotter's (1996) award winning 8-step process for leading change model was used by McKinney and Morris as a

framework to highlight the behaviors of the leaders in a successful transformational change process. Purposeful sampling was utilized to identify two community colleges with similar institutional characteristics and to identify three executive administrators (i.e., vice presidents and academic deans) who were considered to be leading change agents from each college. Transcripts from six semi-structured interviews with the three men and three women were analyzed using initial coding, focused coding, and axial coding (McKinney & Morris, 2010).

Five major themes were identified as a result of the McKinney and Morris (2010) study: justify the need, acquire authorization, lead the process, challenges, and changes in policy and procedure. These five themes highlight the opportunities, challenges, and details associated with leading transformational change on college campuses. All six participants stated that the change was implemented to address an unmet need for either internal or external key stakeholders and that identifying this need was an essential first step in leading transformational change in their organizations (McKinney & Morris, 2010). Similar to Cejda and Leist's (2013) findings, all of the participants in McKinney and Morris' (2010) study noted that changes should not be employed because of trend or best practice, but they should be employed based on research, data collection, and analyzation to support why a transformational change should be implemented.

Acquiring authorization from the McKinney and Morris (2010) research included the numerous steps and obstacles in the attempt to receive state and regional accreditation in order to offer baccalaureate degrees. Added to the navigation of obstacles for authorization, McKinney and Morris's (2010) findings included an abundance of challenges in the transformational change process. The participants in McKinney and

Morris's (2010) study reported that leaders can expect both internal and external resistance when implementing transformational change. For example, it takes resources (i.e., time, money, and people) to work through the challenges that come with change that is transformational to organizations.

A third theme that emerged from the McKinney and Morris (2010) study, which was reported in all six interviews, was the need for a clear leader or *change agent* to continuously move the change forward for the transformation to occur. The college presidents were the clear leaders who accomplished transformational change on these two campuses through open communication and shared vision, which was necessary to guide and sustain the dynamic change process (McKinney & Morris, 2010). Furthermore, open communication about the institution's transformation was key in keeping the changes moving forward and for sustainability of the change. Based on their findings, McKinney and Morris advised campus leaders to encourage collaboration across departments to determine what changes in policy and procedures were needed in preparation for this type of change. The researchers recommended that college administration should have a solid understanding of the process of multilayered, transformational change in order to make well-informed decisions for their campuses. Although the McKinney and Morris study included three women and three men as participants, leader gender was not a focus in the research. This study expanded upon McKinney and Morris's (2010) findings relating to the presidential role in leading transformational change in higher education institutions with a focus on women presidents in both 2- and 4-year colleges.

Added support for preparing organizations and leading transformational change in higher education came from the work of Barnett (2011). To learn about the organizational

complexities of higher education and the differing perspectives on change, Barnett conducted a 9-month grounded theory case study. The transformational change event Barnett was studying was a new state-wide enrollment system that consisted of significant changes to curriculum and admissions policies, which resulted in fewer students, decrease in tuition dollars, and a focus on retaining, rather than recruiting, students. Data were collected through comprehensive fieldwork consisting of interviews with stakeholders, written and electronic document collection, and multiple observations of both internal and external stakeholders (Barnett, 2011). Three groups of internal and external stakeholders were purposively selected as interview participants based on their roles in the new state-wide enrollment framework. External stakeholders included members of the Board of Regents state governing agency as well as professional consultants from an agency who specialized in implementing change in higher education systems. Barnett (2011) described the internal stakeholders as “a multitude of administrator/staff positions in departments of admissions, student records, student affairs, and academic affairs” (p. 133).

Barnett’s (2011) data analysis identified two themes regarding different individual interpretation of the transformational change. The themes regarding individual perspectives were either global (best for the overall system) or institutional (best for individuals). Barnett concluded that the members of the organization experiencing the change tended to conceptualize their own visions based on their individual experiences rather than adhering to one shared institutional vision. Barnett also claimed that the change research had been focused on the leaders attempting to create a shared organizational vision; however, her research found that change leaders/agents should

embrace the differing views on change rather than strive for one vision. Contrary to McKinney and Morris (2010) and Cejda and Leist (2013), Barnett (2011) concluded that strategic management of divergent perspectives, rather than aligning members into one shared vision, is necessary for leading transformational change in higher education institutions. This study added a female perspective to the literature and further explore if women presidents communicate a shared vision or manage divergent perspectives when leading or supporting transformational change in higher education institutions.

Empirical research on gender, transformational leadership behavior, and vision was also conducted by Arnold and Loughlin (2013). The purpose of Arnold and Loughlin's study was to investigate the leadership behaviors of male and female senior leaders across three different employment settings, but higher education was not one of the employment settings, and the research was conducted outside of the United States. Arnold and Loughlin focused on whether the leaders engaged in participative or directive transformational leadership behavior within the context of the military, business, and governmental arenas. According to Arnold and Loughlin participative leaders utilize a democratic style for decision making and work collaboratively with, and invite input from, all team members. In contrast, leaders who utilize a directive approach are considered autocratic with decision making and set the direction for the organization by telling subordinates exactly what to do, and they expect the subordinates to follow through. Arnold and Loughlin (2013) noted that to create buy-in among employees, female leaders would engage in more participative leadership than their male counterparts.

The source of data for the Arnold and Loughlin (2013) qualitative study were semi-structured phone interviews with 64 leaders from private businesses, government, and the military across four provinces in Canada. Interview questions were related to intellectual stimulation and were modeled from a valid and reliable measure of transformational leadership, such as the MLQ (Bass & Avolio, 1995). The data were first analyzed with NVivo 7.0, then, the data were further analyzed by breaking them down into thought items that were related with similar logic (Arnold & Loughlin, 2013). Finally, two graduate students independently coded the data based on participative and directive problem-solving behavior definitions that were determined by Arnold and Loughlin (2013).

One major finding of Arnold and Loughlin's (2013) study was that, overall, leaders were more likely to report using a participative versus directive leadership approach, regardless of the context of their employment or gender. In government, however, leaders reported engaging in twice as much directive leadership than in the businesses. Arnold and Loughlin noted their surprise in finding some gender differences in leadership within the military, which included men reporting more participatory leadership behavior than their female colleagues. Last, the Arnold and Loughlin findings support future research focused on the transformational leadership behavior of inspirational motivation (creating and communicating an organizational vision) because this was an element of leadership where women have been rated less effective than men (Arnold & Loughlin, 2013). This study further explored leadership behaviors and experiences of women presidents who are leading transformational change in both 2- and 4-year colleges in New York State.

A more recent study on leading transformational change, which was conducted within the United States, was performed by Hamilton (2016). According to the Hamilton, the problem the research addressed was the process by which leaders establish and secure buy-in from internal and external stakeholders to implement planned change. Hamilton's (2016) phenomenological case study investigated how a community college president influenced support from stakeholders to implement a successful transformational change. The researcher purposefully selected a new community college president who was in his role less than 4 years, and who was undergoing a strategic change initiative for this qualitative research study. The source of the data for the study was a semi-structured phone interview that lasted for 45 minutes. Hamilton (2016) conducted an initial data analysis for specific statements and themes, and the themes were then analyzed for meaning in relation to leadership practices.

Hamilton (2016) reported the most common theme that emerged from the data, and what the author considers the most important for getting buy-in for change, was visionary framing. Visionary framing is described as the leader's ability to communicate a conceivable vision in relation to where the institution is headed with both external and internal stakeholders. Hamilton referred to this type of framing as a leader's most influential means to drive participants of change toward understanding and making sense of the direction the institution is headed in the long term for transformation (Hamilton, 2016).

The second theme that emerged from Hamilton's (2016) data was step-by-step framing. Step-by-step framing is a leader's ability to assist the change participants to move systematically toward the overall vision by creating incremental outcomes with

short-term goals (Hamilton, 2016). Step-by-step framing should also be used to celebrate the situational achievements along the way which is an important process in helping move an institution toward long-term goals (Hamilton, 2016).

A critical contribution of the Hamilton (2016) study, and one that has not been previously researched regarding higher education leadership, is “frame bridging” (p. 629). Frame bridging is a type of leadership practice which involves the alignment of different stakeholders by linking unconnected frames that have not previously been organized together. For example, leaders who engage in frame bridging are able to join the forces of key constituents to work collaboratively to create solutions and for all to work toward achieving the same goals (Hamilton, 2016).

The Hamilton (2016) research provides strategies for college presidents to implement transformational change initiatives, however, a limitation in the study was that it was based on a 45-minute phone interview with one male president. A further limitation in Hamilton’s study was that the data were only analyzed by the researcher, and a peer review was not conducted. Despite the limitations, the implications of Hamilton’s (2016) findings on the leadership strategies necessary to communicate vision and secure buy-in for transformational change informed the study that explored the experiences and perceptions of women presidents who lead transformational change in higher education institutions.

The Littlepage et al. (2017) research adds support for the necessity of leaders preparing for transformational change. Littlepage et al. conducted a study to explore how student service administrators responded to an externally imposed legislative change that was transformational to their institutions. The researchers sought to understand how this

type of change disrupts an organizational system and how student affairs administrators could better prepare themselves and their employees for change. According to Littlepage et al. (2017), response to an imposed change tends to be reactive and administrators view this type of reaction to change as noninnovative. The authors postulated that preparing institutions for an imposed transformational change is necessary for higher education leaders.

A qualitative methodological approach was utilized in this multisite case study of community colleges that were responding to a state legislation promise of free college tuition scholarship for students in the state of Tennessee (Littlepage et al. 2017). Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with student affairs administrators in a two-phase process: pre- and post-implementation of the scholarship. Littlepage et al. utilized a purposeful sampling of the community colleges as the participants for this case study, and data collection involved both interviews and fieldwork conducted to gain familiarity with the organization being studied. Prior to the first interviews, Littlepage et al. (2017) reported reviewing online documents, student handbooks, mission statements, organizational charts, and websites for the three participating colleges.

Littlepage et al. (2017) found the administrators who anticipated the change in a timely manner and planned for what impact the change would have on their institution created employee buy-in, and they responded in innovative ways with their approach to change. Conversely, Littlepage et al. found the colleges that refused to accept the imposed change struggled with unity and experienced a disruption in their systems that created more of a reactive response to the change. The authors concluded that imposed changes can disrupt the status quo and can test organizational infrastructure; however,

leaders who anticipate and prepare for a transformational change create a culture of innovation within an organization (Littlepage et al., 2017).

Transformational Change Summary

Leading transformational change involves in-depth planning and preparing an organization for changes in underlying assumptions, norms, and values (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Kezar, 2013, 2014; Schein, 2017; Springer et al., 2012). Although a clear change agent is needed to move the process forward, transformational change that impacts culture should be seen by internal and external stakeholders to be bottom up as well (Kezar, 2013). The organizational buy-in necessary for transformational change is created when stakeholders make sense of, and understand, the need for change (Arnold & Loughlin, 2013; Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Hamilton, 2016; Kezar, 2013).

Transformational change leaders should create a shared vision, or a visionary framing, that enables those who are participating in the change to see the purpose and the goal of transformational change (Cejda & Leist, 2013; Hamilton, 2016; McKinney & Morris, 2010). Furthermore, researchers have concluded that transformational change leaders need to use data driven and in-depth planning to continuously move the change forward through what can be a long and challenging process (Cejda & Leist, 2013; Hamilton, 2016; Kezar, 2013; McKinney & Morris, 2010). Navigating through employees' resistance to change involves strategic management of different visions and perspectives (Barnett, 2011), dealing with negative implications and fear of change (Gearin, 2017), as well as leading through conflict and discord among employees (Barnett, 2011; Gearin, 2017).

Although women reportedly utilized a more directive than participative leadership approach in the military in Canada, overall, both men and women reported utilizing participative, transformational leadership behaviors in business and government settings (Arnold & Loughlin, 2013). Of the 10 studies included in the literature review on transformational change in higher education, only two of the studies interviewed college presidents (Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016). Despite only two of the studies having focused on the college president, a majority of the research found the need for a clear change leader, often the president, to prepare for, and consistently drive, a transformational change that impacts organizational culture (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Cejda & Leist, 2013; Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; Kezar 2013; McKinney & Morris, 2010). What was still unknown were the experiences of women presidents leading transformational change in higher education institutions.

Women Leaders in Higher Education

Across the United States, women are underrepresented in senior leadership positions in higher education institutions (ACE, 2016). Additionally, historical conditions, stereotypes, and gendered organizational cultures pose significant challenges for women leaders in today's higher educational systems (Davidson, 2018; Enke, 2014; Savigny, 2014; Tedrow & Rhoades, 1999; Wheat & Hill, 2016).

Despite the movement of the leadership research from agentic leadership traits, which are considered masculine, and toward more collaborative, relational styles that are considered more feminine, there are still barriers and inequities for women in leadership roles. (Fletcher, 2004; Tedrow & Rhoades, 1999; Townsend & Twombly, 1998). Several empirical studies on women leaders in higher education institutions have been conducted

in Western societies outside of the United States. Savigny (2014) sought to understand why women are less likely to be hired, promoted, or paid as much as men in senior administrative positions in British universities. The purpose of Savigny's study was to bring women's voices to the forefront on the obstacles that still exist for female academics, despite some advancement in feminist theory and practice. The qualitative study explored the cultural norms and practices within higher education that hold women at a structural disadvantage (Savigny, 2014).

The methods Savigny (2014) utilized were grounded in narrative form, and they were gathered over a 5-year period, through the sharing of stories from self-selected female participants responding to the author's work. Savigny reported a major outcome of the study was the identification and experience of cultural sexism for women in academia. Cultural sexism is the concept that masculinized, hegemonic sexism has been normalized in higher education and across Western society. The implications of Savigny's study are that despite some progress, there is still a need for transformational change to cultural norms, and there are assumptions that favor males and disempower and marginalize women leaders (Savigny, 2014). This study further investigated the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and norms in the culture of higher education by giving voice to women presidents leading transformational change.

Similar to Savigny's (2014) research, Redmond et al. (2017) sought to explore the experiences and characteristics of women who successfully achieved senior leadership positions at an Australian university. A regional university was purposefully selected for the study because of the higher representation of female leaders in regional universities versus the national university average. Of 20 women leaders, seven agreed to participate

in the Redmond et al. (2017) qualitative study with semi-structured interviews as the data-collection instrument. A constant comparative method was utilized to analyze the data, which were independently coded, and member checked.

The themes that emerged from the Redmond et al. (2017) data regarding the experiences and characteristics of the women participants were a working-class family background, resilience, achievement of work and life balance, high expectation and career aspirations for themselves and others, as well as having a deep value for people and relationships. A significant finding of the study was that all of the seven women experienced gender-based discrimination, by both men and women, at some point during their life. Of the seven participants, six described more subtle gender-based discrimination throughout their career; however, this occurred particularly when they were seeking promotions to higher level positions within higher education. The participants' perceptions of this less obvious discrimination was that it was institutionalized, and many used the terms *old boys' club*, feeling underappreciated, and *sidelined*. Redmond et al. (2017) urged consideration for future research to focus on the gendered organizational culture that exists in higher education. This study further examined the gendered organizational culture that exists in higher education for women presidents who are leading transformational change in both 2- and 4-year colleges.

Exploration of female academic experiences outside of the United States involving transformational change within higher education came from Parsons and Priola (2013). Parsons and Priola's study explored the experiences of feminist academics who were focused on change in their organizations by hearing from women faculty in business and management schools in British and Northern European universities. Specifically,

Parsons and Priola wanted to fill a gap in the literature on the gendered nature of organizational change and intervention processes for change.

Parsons and Priola (2013) conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with nine female faculty leaders in their qualitative study. The data were independently coded by the authors with an interpretative perspective analysis that involved iteration among the data, feminist theory, and the context of a business school (Parsons & Priola, 2013). The researchers found that gender inequalities implicitly exist as a result of the culture, practices, and organizational systems that often go unchallenged. The participants in the study described strategies of both incorporation and resistance to achieve cultural change, such as creating awareness about gender inequities through everyday talk, stressing the importance of feminist research, and educating students by encouraging self-reflection on gender assumptions, as well as creating safe spaces to openly discuss gender stereotypes (Parsons & Priola). The women leaders from the business school described resisting some gender stereotypes but also *playing the game* of conforming with some male norms to change the culture. As a result of the study, Parsons and Priola (2013) found the culture of academia to be deeply and covertly political and one that privileges men and excludes women in power relations. This study further explored the underlying assumptions and gendered culture women presidents have experienced in higher education and whether they have felt the need to *play the game* when leading transformational change.

Gill and Jones (2013) conducted a study about the barriers and male-controlled systems within higher education that make it hard for women to advance into senior level positions in the United States. Gill and Jones explored how women have dealt with a

culture that is focused on male domination and power as well as how women administrators have navigated through the adverse culture and patriarchal systems in higher education organizations.

The Gill and Jones (2013) qualitative single-case study of four female administrators (two presidents and two vice-presidents), who were the first females to hold their positions, took place in west Texas. A grounded approach and inductive naturalistic inquiry were utilized, and the participants were purposively selected from a convenient sample. Open coding and constant comparative methods were used to analyze the data that was also member-checked with the participants (Gill & Jones). The themes that emerged from the data analysis in the study are similar to the findings from Redmond et al. (2017) regarding evidence of a discriminatory work environment, leadership traits that include collaboration and collective support among people, as well as the need of mentorship for professional development both for themselves and acting as a mentor for others (Gill & Jones). Unlike the women leaders in the Australian study, the four participants from west Texas did not perceive their work environments to be overtly discriminatory based on their gender. The women in the Gill and Jones (2013) study, however, did share evidence of discriminatory attitudes and ingrained values within the organizational culture that kept people from seeing women as successful leaders. Moreover, the women leaders from west Texas viewed their power as a way to achieve change at their institutions and by networking with others and getting all stakeholders involved in the process that resulted in transformational change. Gill and Jones (2013) suggested future research be conducted on changing the campus climate and culture for women because females are still significantly underrepresented in administrative roles in

higher education. This study sought to better understand how women presidents viewed their power in leading or supporting transformational change in their higher education institution.

Support for giving women a voice in higher education research came from Wheat and Hill (2016) who sought to understand the multifaceted aspects that influence women in senior administrative roles. The researchers identified a gap in the research regarding woman, as most research was based on male leadership models, an assumption of gender equity, and it was predominately conducted on, and by male, researchers. A post-modern feminist framework and pluralistic leadership theory guided the qualitative study (Wheat & Hill). Pluralistic leadership examines the connection among a leader's many identities (race, gender, education, spirituality) and unique differences. Similarly, post-modern feminists recognize that women have unique experiences and do not assume that all women perceive and practice leadership in the same way (Wheat & Hill, 2016).

Purposive, criterion sampling to include women with at least 1 year of experience as a senior administrator at doctoral-granting universities garnered 14 female participants who were vice presidents, deans, provosts, and presidents. Wheat and Hill (2016) conducted semi-structured interviews, and a constant comparative method of data analysis generated three central themes involving multiple leadership characteristics and behaviors. According to Wheat and Hill, pluralistic leadership was the first theme that was practiced by each participant where she drew from the many different attributes of her identity, with gender being the most significant. Additionally, half of the participants described utilizing a blending of feminine and masculine approaches to leadership (Wheat & Hill). This combination of leadership behaviors was more accepted, and the

women were considered more credible than when they were when acting *too female* or *too male* in their leadership approach (Wheat & Hill, 2016).

A second theme, and a major outcome of the research that emerged from the Wheat and Hill (2016) study, was the prominence of gender in shaping the participants' leadership experiences. None of the participants reported gender as being a barrier in advancing to their existing senior administrative positions in higher education. The women administrators in the Wheat and Hill study recognized gender bias against women by some, but they did not see gender as a barrier in their careers, and, instead, they drew upon their individual pluralistic leadership styles for advancement. The participants also developed their leadership behaviors through an intersection of their identities, which was the third central theme of Wheat and Hill's research. The most common identities that were reported by the participants as influencing their leadership were motherhood, spirituality, and their professional or educational background. According to Wheat and Hill (2016), an implication of this study is for more research to be conducted on the underlying cultural barriers that exist for women in higher education and what leadership programs should be developed to provide women with practical training and encouragement. This study aimed to investigate the barriers that exist for women presidents within the higher education culture and whether women view their gender as a supportive factor or a challenge to overcome when leading transformational change.

Similar to Wheat and Hill's (2016) work, Enke (2014) conducted a qualitative study on women senior leaders in higher education to gain an understanding of how their identities facilitated their leadership styles. Positionality theory supported the research on eight women from liberal arts colleges in the upper-midwestern United States.

Positionality theory suggests that an individual's position, which is informed by complex identities, simultaneously impacts his or her perspective. The theory postulates that intersecting identities, power relations, and context in which he or she is leading inform leadership style (Enke, 2014; Kezar & Lester, 2010). Positionality theory also suggests that although women may share experiences and identities, they do not have a particular leadership style or way of leading that should be considered feminine (Kezar & Lester, 2010). Enke (2014) noted, however, that higher education institutions often have gendered processes and perceptions of male and female leadership characteristics that create challenges for many women in leadership roles.

Enke (2014) utilized purposive sampling methods to select eight participants out of 20 women senior administrators who completed an online demographic questionnaire. The participants were diverse according to their age, marital status, religious/spiritual beliefs, and socioeconomic backgrounds; however, seven of the eight participants were White. One of the participants identified as Latina/White, and all of the women participants were heterosexual. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant and followed by a 6- to 8-hour observation by Enke who focused on behaviors that reinforced or challenged the interview responses. Furthermore, Enke (2014) asked each participant individualized clarifying questions and integrated their responses into the data analysis, utilizing a constant comparative method.

Like Wheat and Hill (2016), Enke's (2014) study demonstrated that the complexity of women's multiple identities, the power relations they experience, and the contexts in which they work intersect to form their leadership experiences. Specifically, the two major themes that emerged from the data were intentionality and institutional fit.

Enke described intentionality as when leaders intentionally manages workplace expectations by monitoring and negotiating their position and aligning behaviors with gender roles. The female leaders in Enke's study described using intentionality when interacting with others, sharing personal information, or displaying certain identity traits in their work environments. Enke (2014) reported intentionality as being difficult for women leaders because of their constant monitoring and compromise of context, identity, and power.

A second theme that emerged from the Enke (2014) study was institutional fit. Institutional fit is defined as how an administrators' identity meets an institution's norm for a leader. Institutional fit also represents the mission of the college and determines the relationship between the leader and her community of stakeholders as being easier or less stressful (Enke, 2014). All of the participants described identities that set them apart from the institutional norm for college leadership. The subthemes that emerged within the institutional fit theme were gender, marital status, and age. Additionally, the women noted downplaying parts of their identities as well as being cautious about sharing personal details, having close relationships, and showing sensitivity in certain situations. Two of the participants described this leadership enactment as being *politically savvy* and not something male colleagues had to do (Enke). The implications of institutional fit are important as to why it is difficult to increase the diversity of leadership in higher education (Enke). Specifically, leaders who do not fit institutional norms or organizational culture must constantly monitor their identities or take on new or different identities and are perceived or perceive themselves as not fit for the institution (Enke, 2014). This study sought to explore how women presidents interact with, share, and

display identity traits with others in their work environments when leading or supporting transformational change in higher education institutions.

Research on the gendered organizational culture of higher education and the masculine stereotypes that affect women leaders was conducted by Davidson (2018). Recognizing that women leaders are up against gendered organizational culture and stereotypes of leadership that favor male approaches, Davidson examined the relationships between females who contribute to the positive experiences of women leaders in higher education institutions. Relational-cultural theory was applied in this qualitative, exploratory study with 15 female participants who held positions of department chair or higher at doctoral-granting institutions in the United States. Relational-cultural theory proposes that individual growth and development flourishes through relationships and mutual positive connections between people (Davidson, 2018).

Davidson's (2018) qualitative, phenomenological study explored the factors contributing to the quality of women's leadership experiences from hearing descriptions by using of their own voices. Out of the 15 participants, 13 described their collegial relationships with other women as a positive contribution to the quality of their experience as a female leader in higher education (Davidson). The results of the research provide a different view into women's leadership experiences within the gendered culture of higher education—specifically the power of women helping women to positively affect their leadership experience and improve their organizations and cultures. Davidson (2018) noted that even though the findings of the study support women leaders benefitting from relationships built and shared experiences with women colleagues in higher education, mentoring and leadership development for women are highlighted more

predominantly in the literature to assist with women's advancement to leadership positions. This study further explored the experiences of, and give voice to, women presidents improving their organizations by leading transformational change in their 2- and 4-year higher education institutions.

Research on the gendered culture of higher education, as well as the barriers and inequities that exist for women in leadership roles, has been conducted both within and outside of the United States. Women who lead in higher education institutions in other countries have defined more overt gender-based discrimination and cultural sexism (Parsons & Priola, 2013; Redmond et al., 2017; Savigny, 2014); whereas, women leaders within the United States described covert gendered cultural experiences (Enke, 2014; Gill & Jones, 2013; Wheat & Hill, 2016). The leadership characteristics identified by women leaders who have successfully navigated through obstacles and male-dominated cultures are drawn from their many complex identities with gender being the most significant (Enke, 2014; Wheat & Hill, 2016). Furthermore, women leaders who have successfully challenged the hegemonic, masculinized culture of higher education have reported doing so by blending masculine and feminine leadership traits and by specifically incorporating power into their leadership style (Enke, 2014; Wheat & Hill, 2016). Still, some research supports that women leaders can positively affect their experiences and transform gendered organizational culture through collaborative and collective decision making, relationship building, and mentoring with women colleagues (Davidson, 2018; Gill & Jones, 2013).

A majority of the empirical research in the literature review on women leaders in higher education was focused on the gendered culture and structural disadvantages that

women leaders face (Enke, 2014; Parsons & Priola, 2013; Redmond et al., 2017; Savigny, 2014; Wheat & Hill, 2016). Of the seven empirical studies reviewed on women leaders in higher education, only two included women presidents as participants; however, other senior leaders (deans, vice presidents, and provosts) were included as well (Gill & Jones, 2013; Wheat & Hill, 2016). In addition, the research that included women presidents as participants was conducted at community colleges (Gill & Jones, 2013) and at a doctoral-granting institution (Wheat & Hill, 2016).

Chapter Summary

In reviewing the literature related to transformational change and women leaders in higher education, most of the empirical studies were identified as using qualitative methods, and a majority of the qualitative studies used a phenomenological approach and the researchers purposefully selected the participants for the study (Barnett, 2011; Cejda & Leist, 2013; Davidson, 2018; Enke, 2014; Gearin, 2017; Gill & Jones, 2013; Hamilton, 2016; Kezar, 2013; McKinney & Morris, 2010; Savigny, 2014; Wheat & Hill, 2016). Qualitative methods of inquiry allow the researcher to discover an individual's meaning of the problem, interpret the meaning of the data, and hear silenced voices by talking directly with participants in the research (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Very few quantitative and mixed-methods empirical studies were found on the topic of women leaders and transformational change in higher education. Specifically, out of the 17 studies reviewed, none were quantitative, and only two (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Springer et al., 2012) utilized a mixed-methods research design. Commonalities between the two mixed-methods studies were longitudinal and focused on examining the

transformation of organizational cultures by gathering both qualitative and quantitative baseline data and, again, at certain intervals for comparison purposes.

All of the empirical research reviewed in the literature regarding women leaders in higher education called for future research on organizational culture and, specifically, on the norms, values, beliefs, and underlying assumptions of women as leaders.

Additionally, most of the research on women in higher education utilized feminist theory to frame the study on senior leadership roles and gendered culture (Gill & Jones, 2013; Parsons & Priola, 2013; Savigny, 2014; Wheat & Hill, 2016). However, none of the studies in the literature review utilized Schein's (2017) cultural theory, along with a feminist framework, to study female college presidents. This study on women presidents leading transformational change in 2- and 4-year higher education institutions intended to fill the gap in the literature.

Chapter 3 outlines and discusses the research design, research context, research participants, instruments used for the data collection, and the procedures for data analysis for this study on the experiences of women presidents leading or supporting transformational change.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction – General Perspective

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the leadership role as perceived by women facilitating transformational change as presidents in their higher education institutions. Transformational change encompasses changes to the beliefs, values, and underlying basic assumptions that provide stability, guidance, and meaning for group members' behavior (Schein, 2017). Leading transformational change can be a long and challenging process (Kezar, 2014; Norris, et al., 2013). Moreover, many females in higher education find themselves up against multiple challenges and resistance due to a culture that has been created, maintained, and controlled by men (Bierema, 2001; Gill & Jones, 2013; Redmond et al., 2017; Savigny, 2014). The research question guiding this study was: What are the leadership experiences of women presidents facilitating transformational change in their institution of higher education?

A phenomenological, qualitative form of inquiry was utilized for this study to explore and understand women's perceptions and experiences facilitating transformational change in higher education. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), phenomenological research focuses on commonly lived experiences as described by individual participants of a study. The phenomena under investigation for this study was the women presidents' leadership role in facilitating transformational change in higher education. Qualitative methods of inquiry allow the researcher to discover an individual's meaning of the problem, interpret the meaning of the data, and hear silenced voices by

talking directly with participants in the research (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, an interpretive paradigm framed this study to best understand the experiences and perceptions of women presidents involved in transformational change. Interpretive researchers view reality through a sense-making process which allows for an understanding of the subjective interpretations of the participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertens & Wilson, 2012; Saldana, 2016).

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with women presidents involved in transformational change to understand their lived experiences regarding this phenomenon. Currently the literature is lacking in information regarding women presidents leading transformational change within higher education (Bierema, 2001; Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; Littlepage et al., 2017; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). This qualitative study allowed the voices of women to be heard and provided primary insight into their leadership experiences with transformational change. The few studies that did include women did not examine if gender was a factor in leading transformational change in colleges and universities (Arnold & Loughlin, 2013; Deprez et al., 2012; Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016).

Research Context

The study of women presidents leading transformational change was conducted in 2- and 4- year public or private colleges in a state on the East Coast of the United States. According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE, 2019), there are 181 accredited private (non-profit) and public 2- and 4-year colleges within this East Coast state. "Middle States accreditation is an expression of confidence in an institution's mission and goals, its performance, and its resources. An institution is accredited when

the educational community has verified that its goals are achieved through self-regulation and peer review” (MSCHE, 2019). Furthermore, the scope of this study was broadened to include both 2- and 4-year public and private colleges to expand the pool of participants of women presidents.

Research Participants

In 2018, the author of this study conducted an Internet search of 181 2- and 4-year public and private accredited colleges in a state on the East Coast of the United States. Each college’s website was individually researched and a total of 50 women were identified as presidents. The participants for this study were purposefully selected from the 50 women presidents of the 2- and 4-year public and private colleges in the state. In phenomenological studies, purposeful sampling is a strategy used in qualitative research to select participants who are situated in and can inform the researcher about the problem being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Polkinghorne (1989) encourages researchers to interview between five and 25 individuals with a shared experience while Creswell (2014) recommends three to 10. The goal for this study was to interview between five and eight women presidents to produce robust descriptive data regarding the phenomena being studied (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Inclusion criteria for this study was (a) female presidents, (b) at least 1 year of presidential experience or retired within the last 4 years, and (c) facilitated a transformational change as defined by the study. Exclusion criteria for the study was (a) less than 1 year of presidential experience or retired for more than 4 years, and (b) not facilitated a transformational change as a college president. As an incentive for

participating in the study, the researcher will share the abstract with participants upon completion.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

This study on the leadership experiences of women presidents involved with transformational change in higher education institutions utilized the following instruments to collect data: an interview protocol (Appendix B), a demographic survey (Appendix C), and the researcher.

Interview protocol. An interview protocol was used during the semi-structured interviews with the participants to ensure that standard procedures were followed by the researcher. The interview protocol included an introduction to this study, a review of the consent for participation, and the questions and follow up questions for the semi-structured interviews. To provide an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of women presidents, 12 interview questions were developed using Schein's (2017) cultural model, feminist theory, and previous research on transformational change.

Demographic survey. A demographic survey was included in the recruitment email for participation in this study. The survey included 10 questions to gather demographic data from the participants and should took less than 10 minutes to complete. The information from the demographic survey was utilized to determine inclusion of the participants for this study of women college presidents facilitating transformational change.

Field notes. Field notes were taken prior to, during, and immediately after the semi-structured interviews. Field notes provided an opportunity to capture descriptive observations regarding the participants' environment and non-verbal attributes. Field

notes also provided an opportunity for the researcher to record personal reflections as well as clarify any researcher bias.

Researcher. The researcher was situated within this study and is identified as a key instrument to collect data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). “Researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation and position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Bracketing occurred to set aside personal experiences and place focus on the experiences of the participants and the problem being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher has over 20 years of experience working in higher education ranging from an adjunct instructor to an associate dean overseeing student services and enrollment management. Moreover, the researcher has been involved in multiple transformational change efforts, such as the reorganization of academic and student services, implementing a customer relations management (CRM) system, and the implementation of a college-wide student success model based on Columbia University Community College Research Center (CCRC) concept of Guided Pathways. The researcher separated her experiences, engaged with the participants within this study, and had an open perspective toward the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Procedures for Data Collection

The semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data collection for this study of women presidents facilitating transformational change in higher education institutions. Following approval from the Institutional Review Board at St. John Fisher College, an email letter of encouragement to participate in this study from the researcher’s college president was sent to the 50 women presidents. Three days following

the encouragement email, an invitation to participate in this study was emailed from the researcher. The email invitation included a brief introduction to this study and a link to the Qualtrics survey that included the consent form and demographic survey. An email response of receipt was sent to the college presidents who completed and submitted the survey and consent form. Finally, 1 week from the invitation to participate in this study, a reminder e-mail was sent to the non-responsive college presidents.

Data from the demographic surveys were reviewed and the interview sample for this study consisted of presidents who met the inclusion criteria and signed the consent form. The eligible participants were contacted by phone to schedule a date, time, and location for a face-to-face interview immediately followed by an email confirmation of the scheduled interview. All seven interviews were conducted face-to-face at a private location of the participant's choice and at her convenience. Each interview was approximately 60 minutes in length and all interviews were recorded with an audio recording device, along with a backup recording device in the event of technical issues.

Prior to beginning each semi-structured, face-to-face interview, a review of the signed informed consent (Appendix D) was conducted including assurance of confidentiality as well as a reminder that participation was voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time during the interview. Additionally, the researcher briefly reviewed the description of transformational change as it originally appeared in the invitation email as an introduction into the interview.

To preserve confidentiality, the names of the participants and colleges were de-identified for this study by assigning a pseudonym for each president and removing any institutional identifiers of their colleges. All audio recordings, transcriptions of the

interviews and field notes, and any other electronic files were immediately uploaded to the researcher's personal, password protected computer stored securely in her private residence. Field notes and other paper materials related to data collection and analysis have been securely stored in unmarked boxes and locked inside a file cabinet also in the private residence of the researcher. Only the researcher has access to any electronic or paper materials and all data will be cleared, purged, and destroyed after a period of 5 years.

Procedures for Data Analysis

Following each interview, audio recordings were immediately transcribed verbatim by Rev online transcription while field notes and demographic surveys were transcribed by the researcher. Member checking was used to obtain participant feedback on the accuracy of their experiences in the interview transcript. Qualitative research is both deductive where the researcher codes the information within the significant statements; as well as inductive where related codes are generated into clusters of meaning and themes about a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation of the data from the semi-structured interviews, field notes, and demographic surveys occurred to produce thick, rich descriptions of and build connections between the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In phenomenological studies Saldana (2016) suggests utilizing several coding methods for data analysis to expand the researcher's perspective on the phenomenon. The first coding method used to analyze data was a priori or *in advance* codes which were generated from Schein's (2017) cultural model, feminist theory, and previous empirical research on transformational change. The second level of coding conducted to develop

significant statements and understand the participants' experience facilitating transformational change was in vivo coding. In vivo is a form of inductive coding where a word or short phrase comes from the participants' actual language in the qualitative data (Saldana, 2016). A third level of coding that was utilized to develop broader meaning units or themes is values coding. Values coding is suitable for qualitative studies that explore culture and participants' reflections on values, attitudes, and belief systems (Saldana, 2016). Values coding is applicable to multiple sources of data collection and will enhance the trustworthiness of the findings by corroborating the interview transcripts with the observed actions of the participants (Saldana, 2016). Furthermore, the values codes were categorized by collective meaning among the women presidents' leadership experiences facilitating transformational change.

According to Moustakas (1994), every statement or meaning has equal value and phenomenal analysis involves horizontalizing the data into clustered themes and meanings to develop textural and structural descriptions of the participants' experience. After clustering codes into themes, textural descriptions were integrated and constructed into the essence of the experiences of women presidents facilitating transformational change in higher education institutions (Moustakas, 1994). A description of the themes and findings of the analysis are represented in both narrative and table form.

Creswell and Poth (2018) described validation in qualitative research as an assessment of the accuracy of the data and findings by the researcher, the participants, and the reader. In addition to triangulating the data and member checking for accuracy and credibility, an external audit was conducted by a colleague in higher education who has no connection to this study. The external auditor examined and provided an objective

assessment of the findings, interpretations, and conclusions of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

A phenomenological, qualitative form of inquiry was utilized for this study to explore and understand women college president's perceptions and experiences with transformational change. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected women presidents involved with transformational change in 2- and 4-year public or private colleges. Instruments used for data collection in this study included demographic surveys, interviews, field notes, and the researcher. An interpretative framework was used to understand the experiences and perceptions of women presidents, recognize the influence of the researcher's background, and shape the interpretation of the participants' construction of meaning about transformational change in higher education institutions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Transformational change requires leaders to be persistent and keep people focused on the journey toward the desired future (Burke, 2018). Successful facilitation of transformational change in higher education calls for a college president who is a *change agent* and committed to working through challenges (Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; McFarlin et al., 1999; McKinney & Morris, 2010). The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the leadership role as perceived by women facilitating transformational change as presidents in their higher education institutions. This chapter is guided by the research question: What are the leadership experiences of women presidents facilitating transformational change in their higher education institutions?

Chapter 4 describes the findings of this phenomenological study. It is organized into three main themes, along with subthemes, based on an analysis of the transcripts of the interviews with the research participants and supplemented by a field notes and a demographic questionnaire. The themes and subthemes are:

1. Leadership is not one dimensional
 - a. Take charge by leading with confidence
 - b. Step back into a supportive role
2. Cultivate a culture for transformational change
 - a. You've got to do the legwork
 - b. Nurture authentic relationships

3. Lead intentionally through gender-based challenges

Participant Demographics

A total of nine presidents responded out of the 50 women presidents invited to complete the demographic survey. Two individuals who responded to the demographic survey were excluded from participating in this study because they did not meet the criteria of having been a college president for at least 1 year. Results from the demographic surveys (Table 4.1) include data from seven college presidents who participated in this study with experience ranging from 3 to 24 years. At the time of this study, all but one of the women were serving in their first college presidency, and five of the seven were the first females to serve as the president of their institutions. All seven of the presidents identified as White. Of the seven women, five shared that they were married and had children. Two of the seven presidents led 4-year private colleges, two led 4-year public colleges, and the remaining three participants were presidents of public community colleges. The participants were assigned pseudonyms based on the names of historical female leaders. Specific college identifiers/identifications were removed to protect confidentiality.

Further results from the demographic surveys are shown in Table 4.2, which includes examples of transformational change and the number of presidents who facilitated each type. Included in the demographic survey, and prior to the start of the semi-structured interviews, each president was provided with the definition of transformational change and a reminder of the types of changes indicated on their survey responses. When answering the questions during the semi-structured interviews, the presidents were asked to focus on a transformational change they had facilitated.

Table 4.1

Research Participants Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Race	Type of Institution	Total Years of Presidential Experience	First Female President at Her College?
Dr. Susan B. Anthony	White	Public 4-year	7	Yes
Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell	White	Public CC	6	Yes
Dr. Rosa Parks	White	Private 4-year	3	Yes
Dr. Elizabeth Cady Stanton	White	Private 4-year	4	Yes
Dr. Harriet Beecher Stowe	White	Public CC	4	No
Dr. Sojourner Truth	White	Public 4-year	4	Yes
Dr. Harriet Tubman	White	Public CC	24	No

Table 4.2

Transformational Change Examples

Change Examples	Number of Presidents
Addition of student housing to a nonresidential campus	2
Change or addition of a student information system (i.e., Banner, PeopleSoft, Colleague)	2
Implemented online academic programs/degrees	3
Addition of a division/department	2
Elimination of departments, divisions, or long-standing academic programs	4
Combination or restructure of departments or divisions	7
Major revision in core curriculum or addition of new academic programs or degrees (i.e., adding Bachelor or graduate degree options)	4
Change in institutional vision, mission, or values	3
Change in governance structure or unionizing	3
Change in academic schedule (i.e., semesters to trimesters)	2
Other (presidents indicated being involved in other transformational change efforts)	3

Participant Profiles

The participant profiles were developed based on the information shared during the in-person interviews as well as the answers provided by the presidents on the demographic survey. Additionally, the profiles include nonverbal observations about their spaces and interactions with other people regarding the campus climate of their institutions. The profiles include the career path as well as a brief description of their leadership style as described by each participant during their interviews.

President Susan B. Anthony was the first president to respond to the demographic survey and the first to be interviewed for this study. At the time of her interview, Dr. Anthony had been president of her 4-year public college for 7 years. The first piece of information she shared, upon entering her office to conduct the interview, was that she was nearing retirement. President Anthony was a woman of quiet demeanor and appeared small in comparison to her very large office. We sat in comfortable chairs next to each other and she was very warm, caring, and unassuming throughout the interview. President Anthony appeared to care deeply for the students and she continued to teach one course a semester to stay connected to them. She shared that she would often bring snacks and food into the library to be sure students were eating while they were studying.

Both the exterior and interior of her office were fully decorated with formal furniture and artwork, but they were dark, quiet, and the mood was somber. Throughout the interview President Anthony described a low morale on campus because of enrollment and budget issues, and her morale appeared to be low as well. Dr. Anthony described her leadership style as collaborative, and she used a team-based approach to leading. She also appeared to value open communication and said she liked to talk

through decision making by engaging others in conversation. The interview seemed to be a time of self-reflection, and she appeared melancholy. “I’d like to leave with a sense of optimism. Like, I’ve done a great job and the place is in good shape. That’s not how I feel.”

President Elizabeth Blackwell was the second president to respond to the demographic survey and the second interview conducted for this study. At the time of her interview, Dr. Blackwell had been president at a community college for 6 years. The waiting area was decorated with pictures of students, and her assistant was friendly and welcoming. President Blackwell’s office was bright, open, and seemed to match her upbeat personality. President Blackwell appeared energetic, optimistic, and extremely positive. She described a strengths-based approach toward leading, and she often looked at challenges as opportunities to make things better. One of the challenges President Blackwell experienced as a leader and as president was the “academic enterprise” of higher education because she “didn’t grow up in the traditional academic pipeline” as her background was in student affairs. Although she seemed warm and friendly, President Blackwell came across as very deliberate in her actions and used words like “instigate,” “execute,” and she described a “bring-it-on” attitude toward proving herself as a female college president in a community that she described as having predominantly White male leaders.

President Rosa Parks was the sixth president to respond to the demographic survey and the third woman interviewed for this study. At the time of her interview, Dr. Parks has been president of the 4-year college for 3 years. President Park’s exterior office/waiting area had a lot of wood paneling and leather furniture with a masculine and

formal atmosphere. Inside, President Park's office was more wood and leather, however, it felt warmer and more personal than the waiting area. We sat in comfortable chairs across from one another and, despite her cut to the chase personality, she was very friendly. Similar to President Blackwell, Dr. Parks described herself as not a "traditional academic" and that while she was interviewing for the presidency, 90% of the faculty had an "almost visceral reaction" to her. President Parks came across as a confident, detail-oriented leader who spoke her mind and was not afraid to "push back" if necessary. She believed that those characteristics give her an advantage in leading, and she advised more women to do the same. Although she described herself as "tough" and "competitive," she also said she often "wears her heart on her sleeve," and she thought that people appreciated this quality. President Parks described an authentic approach to leading with confidence and conviction. She further described herself as extremely transparent, "probably the most transparent college president you will find." Near the end of the interview, President Parks shared how important it is to care for yourself because the job can be "crushing."

President Elizabeth Cady Stanton was the third president to respond to the demographic survey and the fourth participant to be interviewed for this study. The president's office was tucked away inside a large building with many classrooms and not easy to find. Although it was midday and several people were working and walking around the waiting area outside President Cady Stanton's office, it was extremely quiet, and the employees spoke to each other in whispers. While the waiting area was clean, organized, and pristinely decorated, the opposite was true inside the president's office, which felt crowded with furniture, and it was somewhat cluttered. At the time of her

interview, President Cady Stanton was a slight woman with a loud voice and very expressive mannerisms. She spoke with her hands and often hit the table between us during the interview when she wanted to stress the point she was making. President Cady Stanton's higher education experience included moving through the faculty ranks to a provost role prior to becoming a college president. She used vivid adjectives when describing routine things such as "gorgeous disciplines," "beautiful processes," and the "slow, glacial pace" of change in higher education. President Cady Stanton described herself as intentional and always thinking about ways to grow enrollment at her college. President Cady Stanton first appeared as being very serious, however, she described herself as a wife and mother who liked to have fun. She described a collaborative approach to leading and although the interview started out very business-like, by the end, she appeared relaxed and her warm and caring demeanor was evident. Her advice to future women leaders included doing the opposite of what your male counterparts are doing. "You've got to be yourself, try not to emulate men. It's a trap, an absolute trap. I look at what the other presidents are doing, I do the opposite. When they send emails, I write handwritten notes. When they do handwritten notes, I send emails. I don't want to look anything like that."

President Harriet Beecher Stowe was the fourth respondent to the demographic survey and the fifth president to be interviewed for this study. The waiting area outside of President Beecher Stowe's office was very plain, undecorated, and seemed informal. Her administrative assistant did not get up from her desk and called out to President Beecher Stowe, by her first name, to inform her of my arrival. Inside the presidential office were plenty of decorations, and soft music played in the background throughout the interview.

President Beecher Stowe came across as warm, friendly, and she asked many questions about my research and about me in general. She seemed understated, thoughtful, and was the only participant in this study to ask if we could go back to a question because she wanted to either provide more information or answer a question in a different way. Additionally, prior to answering a question President Beecher Stowe would say, “I don’t know if others would answer in the same way” and “I hope this doesn’t sound like a negative statement to prior administrations.” She came across as caring and nurturing, however, she was still very intentional in her leadership of transformational change. Her care and concern for others came across in her description of a team-based inclusive approach throughout the interview, however, her vision and decision making were clearly informed by data and details. Similar to four of the other participants in this study, Dr. Beecher Stowe described herself as a “traditional academic” who previously served in a provost role prior to becoming president.

Dr. Sojourner Truth was the last president to respond to the demographic survey and the sixth interview to be conducted in this study. The waiting area outside of the president’s office was bright, cheery, and somewhat informal, and her assistant was chatty and welcoming. President Truth had a very firm handshake and appeared businesslike and professional throughout our time together. Prior to beginning the interview, she took a minute to point out the beautiful and holistic view she had from her office window that overlooked her campus and surrounding area that encompassed the college. President Truth talked about being a visionary and a transparent leader, and she would often nod her head to confirm the point she was making verbally. She described a participatory leadership style and felt it was important to get a lot of people “at the table.”

to take part in decision making and strategic planning. Similar to a majority of the presidents interviewed for this study, Dr. Truth had been a “traditional academic” prior to becoming a college president.

President Harriet Tubman was the fifth respondent to the demographic survey and the final participant to be interviewed for this study. The exterior of the president’s office felt open, welcoming, and seemed vibrant. There were many people in and out of the waiting area who were openly joking and chatting. It appeared to be a friendly atmosphere as people were introducing themselves and fawning over an infant who was in the office. The employees seemed happy and excited about being at work. The interview took place in a conference room, and we sat across from each other at a large table. President Tubman appeared quiet, reserved, and calm during the entire interview. Her voice and mannerisms remained at the same even keel, regardless of what information she was sharing. President Tubman’s wisdom and knowledge seemed to flow easily from one answer to the next. All seven of the presidents that participated in this study seemed to value open and consistent communication, however, President Tubman named her style as “conversational leadership” and shared that although there is a formal structure at her institution, she also “has non-presidential conversations” and she knew “everybody and their kids and their dogs and their babies.” Her many years of experience as a college president was evident in the stories she shared, and although President Tubman’s interview was the shortest in length, she provided clear descriptions that produced thick, rich, data for this study.

Data Analysis and Findings

Three themes were identified through analysis of the data. The first theme, *leadership is not one dimensional*, was a phrase used by one of the female college presidents to describe the multifaceted leadership approach/styles she utilized when leading transformational change. All seven of the participants described having to adjust their leadership styles often, as well as utilizing a blended leadership approach when facilitating transformational change. The blended approach the seven women described was a combination of leading and supporting others in leading transformational change in their institutions.

The second theme, *cultivate a culture for transformational change*, explored the behaviors necessary to create an environment that was ripe for successful transformational change. These leadership behaviors and characteristics included cultivating people and the environment for which they worked. Additionally, cultivating a culture for transformational change appeared to be an ongoing process for development of growth through consistent communication and support for the change to move forward in their organizations.

The third and final theme, *lead intentionally through gender-based challenges*, explored the perceptions expressed by the women presidents regarding the unique challenges they experienced as a female while facilitating transformational change. This theme also include descriptions of the leadership behaviors and strategies necessary to successfully navigate through the gender-based challenges that the women presidents experienced while facilitating transformational change in their 2- and 4-year higher education institutions.

Theme 1: Leadership is not one dimensional. The women presidents interviewed for this study described having complex, multifaceted leadership styles which were flexible according to where they are in the transformational change process. All seven of the presidents shared stories about adjusting their leadership according to the situation or the stakes involved. President Harriet Tubman described her leadership role throughout a transformational change including the adjustment she made:

I did a lot of cheerleading. I depended on a number of people to let me know when I needed to show up at a meeting. That's really sort of the art of this whole role is . . . because your voice is big when you show up. Even if you're whispering, it's like a hammer, so you have to be careful and artful about when you show up.

Additionally, the women presidents described adjusting their leadership styles and defining their leadership as more than one dimension by determining when to step forward and take the lead in facilitating transformational change, as well as knowing when it was necessary to step back and support others in leading the change. According to President Beecher Stowe on her multidimensional leadership style with transformational change:

Depending on where we are in the process, I think all of them started with me, my position being the lead position and bringing forth either, well, either charging a task force or an ad hoc group to look at the topic that I had been thinking about with some parameters and then providing data. And then once information was brought back, then it was either a continuation in the lead or then moving into

more of a supporting role. So it really always started with the lead and then moving back into a supportive role.

The leadership is not one dimensional theme was developed based on the women's descriptions of their experiences with transformational change, which included initiating, instigating, acting as the *principal architect* as well as charging task forces, supporting, and advocating. All of the women presidents interviewed for this study shared stories about a transformational change that impacted the culture of their institution which they initiated or led and then at some point in the change process they stepped back and allowed others to lead. According to President Tubman, regarding whether she led or supported the transformational change, she described, "Leading, supporting; it's a blurred line, you're just in it."

The blurred line and the multidimensional leadership President Tubman referred to supports the leadership is not one dimensional theme as well as the two subthemes, *take charge by leading with confidence* and *step back into a supportive role* of transformational change. The many dimensions of leadership for the women interviewed for this study included having confidence in their visions for their institutions to step up and initiate a change as well as to step back and trust others to lead the change on their campuses.

Take charge by leading with confidence. All seven of the presidents expressed the need at some point to take charge and lead the transformational change with confidence. The women talked about having confidence in their vision and knowing when to step up, make a decision, and lead the change. For two of the presidents taking charge meant assuming the role and being comfortable doing so based on their

experience and background. President Elizabeth Blackwell's description of how the transformational change unfolded on her campus:

I assumed the leadership role, and then the two deans reported to me for almost 2 years, because the next year, we didn't have the budget to be able to bring the position back. It was fine. It wasn't ideal but it was okay because it really did give me a better insight into what's happening on the ground. I'm the kind of leader that likes to know that.

The ability to take charge and lead with confidence included knowing exactly where their colleges needed to go or seeing the needs ahead of time and having a strategic vision for their future and guiding the institution toward that vision. Whether it was leading the strategic planning process or envisioning a major reorganization or restructuring at their institutions, the seven women presidents in this study described taking the lead in the direction they wanted to go and keeping people focused on the end goal in mind. According to President Harriet Tubman:

We have to create the vision and the framework, and that's not isolated work either, right? You create that through dialogue and discovery with your staff and with your faculty, and, sometimes with your students. But you have to articulate that. That articulation has to come from you.

The presidents described leading transformational change as taking on many roles with confidence in knowing the mission and the values of the institution and guiding decisions with this knowledge. The women used words such as stabilizing, focusing on efficiencies, and confidence in decisions about creating and eliminating positions, departments, and programs. They also described bringing clarity and focus to strategic

missions and decisions regarding how to run an institution based on confidence in their knowledge, experiences, and background with leading transformational change. President Sojourner Truth's response to whether she led or supported a transformational change:

So I took the lead of our strategic planning process. I did not intend to lead that. I really wanted to set it off and have other people take the lead on that, but that is not how that worked. But it turned out that the people that I wanted to be able to step up to do that were not necessarily the right people and, therefore, I needed to lead it myself. And I think it was important for the college that I did it at that time. I think they needed to see me. I think, especially when you're fairly new in your presidency, they still need to know who you are, and they need to see you, and they need to have you be the face of that plan. So I was. And still am.

Taking charge also involved leading with confidence in the president's knowledge of the mission and values of their institutions and proactively envisioning the future with a clear view of where the college needed to go. President Susan B. Anthony, on leading transformational change, which impacted the culture of her institution:

There was no vision for what diversity would be, no proactive education, and when I became president, we did a search right away for a full-time CDO [Chief Diversity Officer] and that's before it was required. We were ahead of that and that is really an important part of the culture.

For President Rosa Parks, taking charge and leading with confidence gives women an advantage in leadership roles:

I often tell people; I don't have to work here. I've got experience doing all kinds of things. The thought that I don't have to be here is actually sometimes what

keeps me here, because I can be me, and if they don't like it, they can change it, and I won't get caught up in that. That's a pretty freeing thing, and I would encourage more women to think like that because you've got to have confidence in yourself. It's what got you to be a college president in the first place.

According to the women presidents interviewed for this study, there were many dimensions to their leadership, and it was necessary for them to have the confidence and wisdom to know when to step up and take the lead with transformational change and when it was the right time to step back and allow others to lead the way.

Step back into a supportive role. All seven presidents described an adjustment in their leadership style as a success factor for transformational change. Each participant moved from a taking charge or leading role toward a more supportive role in the change. The supportive approach for transformational change was described using words such as support, encourage, include, and collaborate.

Although the presidents described their behaviors as “recommending from behind the scenes” and “getting underneath people in the participating role,” the women also described this strategic or intentional approach to achieve desired outcomes or decisions. President Rosa Parks, on having the knowledge and experience necessary to move her institution forward, however, needed to do it in a strategic, participatory way:

It's like, I know exactly what the goals of our strategic plan should be, and I actually think through this process, I'm going to get them without How do you make everyone in the room feel vested in part of the process but still get to the end point that you want as a leader? It's to be really supportive of people, but to push so that I'm getting to where I need to be. So, that's my role.

A supportive or participatory approach for transformational change includes advocating for resources, be it funding or rationale for the change. Additionally, this approach to change involves major collaborations on brainstorming ideas, providing feedback, embracing visions, periodic check-ins, and relying on trusting advisors to inform the presidents when to become more involved. Periodic check-ins were described with phrases such as: “I’m here,” “That’s mine,” and “How can I help?” President Tubman, on her participatory, rather than directive approach, for transformational change:

So, I did rely on people to advise me, people who were in the conversations. I built a ton of them. That’s how I work anyway. So, just supporting. I like conversational leadership, so supporting at various levels. I had a few leaders in the institution who I would have described as more authoritarian, so part of it was working them back from an authoritarian position to a more collaborative position.

President Elizabeth Blackwell described stepping back from leading with confidence into a more collaborative role as *recruiting more champions* for the change. President Truth described what the opposite of her supportive approach would be as being more direct when she shared, “what I wanted to say was ‘I’m the president, damn it. Get it done.’ And I couldn’t say that. Well, I could. It would have been differently received from me than from, say, the former guy.”

Successful transformational change involves many dimensions of leadership and the seven presidents interviewed for this study all described initially taking charge by leading the change with confidence and stepping back into a more supportive role. The dimensions necessary for the women presidents leading transformational change included

having the confidence in knowing when to step up and lead, when to step back and get others involved, as well as when to come back in to continually support and drive the change that impacted the culture of their institutions.

Theme 2: Cultivate a culture for transformational change. According to Vocabulary.com, to cultivate something is to nurture and help it grow. When an individual cultivates something, he or she works to make it better. All seven of the participants discussed the need to transform their institutions into better places. President Harriet Tubman described her perception of transformational change:

Nobody is given the job of president and said, “Just hold it right where it is now.” Even if a board says that to you, they don’t mean it. They want you to make it better than it was. Your job is to lead the institution to transform.

The presidents talked about cultivating a culture that is ripe for change and what behaviors or strategies are necessary to accomplish this type of environment on their campuses. All of the women shared stories of restructuring or reorganizing through strategic decisions that were helping their institutions develop and grow. The presidents of the private colleges shared transformational change stories about adding schools, academic majors, nontraditional scheduling, and other deliberate strategies for growing their institutions. President Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s description of a less-visible culture change:

We are allowing the college to be a part of a market-driven sector of the economy that is red hot, not only locally but nationally. So, the long-term implications for the economic stewardship of the institution are really clear from this particular decision.

President Rosa Parks' description of a more visible impact on the culture, due to a transformational change:

It's all cultural. We have a responsibility to, again, strengthen these revenue streams so that excess revenue can come back and support this ground campus. When I look at that, I think of us like a mothership, like this is the mothership here, but I've got all these different sources kind of feeding it. Then, we have a responsibility not just to take that revenue, but to be really good stewards of the money when we get it.

The women presidents of the public institutions shared stories about transforming their institutions through budget crises, enrollment declines, and other internal and external forces of change. President Sojourner Truth gave her description of how a transformational change unfolded on her campus:

Okay, we need to take 3 million dollars out of our annual operating budget, two-and-a-half million to right size our budget, and half a million to invest in new initiatives. Because I've always said, you can't just cut, you've got to actually grow as well. So, we'll fund what you want to do that supports the mission, vision, [and] values of the institution. But everything has to be linked to that.

According to the presidents in this study, cultivating the culture of an institution involves being creative, saying yes, and developing people to want to transform. The presidents interviewed for this study appeared to be doing more than preparing or creating buy-in for change. They shared stories about how they were motivating and encouraging their employees to transform. Cultivating a culture for change and motivating people to transform takes time, patience, and a collaborative approach to

decision making and policy development. President Elizabeth Cady Stanton's description of cultivating her culture for change sounded like she was sharing a recipe verbatim:

So, let me call forth the task force, the committees that we are known for, and we love our shared governance. A task force with representatives from different groups, so they own the decision. Here's the charge: Identify the pros and cons, then research the institutions who look like us who have gone through this. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this particular model, all while continuing to ensure the mission of the institution? This committee was carefully selected and given data and information carefully cultivated. Then they were given a time frame to come up with a recommendation. Processes are beautiful. I love it!

Cultivating a culture for transformational change takes time, energy, and patience on behalf of the leader to continuously develop the environment and support the growth and production of the change. This type of cultivation is beyond getting buy-in or preparing for change; it includes getting and keeping the constituents most impacted involved with the change. For example, President Elizabeth Blackwell described how getting her campus involved with transformational change was a priority:

Those are our big goals that we said to the campus community, "now you, closest to the work, you tell us how you think you're going to do that." It's really a top-down, bottom-up approach to planning, which most of the time our plans tend to be pretty top down. Like, "Hey, we think you should be doing this. Go do it." Of course, you get minimal buy-in that way.

A majority of the women described the time, energy, and complexities involved with transforming their cultures. The subthemes developed from cultivating a culture for

transformational change were *you've got to do the legwork* and *nurture authentic relationships*.

You've got to do the legwork. All seven women presidents shared stories about the work involved with cultivating a culture for transformational change. Doing the legwork includes taking the time to understand your culture, providing data, and supporting the constituents most impacted by the change. President Sojourner Truth described what happened when she did not do the legwork when leading and supporting transformational change:

It was absolutely the right plan, but I didn't do the legwork. I didn't talk to the people who would be most impacted, as to what we were trying to achieve. It was an obvious thing to me that this was the way we had to grow. It was very clear how we had to narrow what we were trying to achieve. It made perfect sense and it was absolutely the right strategy. But just because something's a good idea, doesn't mean it's going to happen. Lesson, lesson, lesson, learned. And then I talked to a couple of people who said, "The idea's great [Sojourner]. You didn't do the work. Go back and do the work."

When describing doing the work, the presidents used words such as consult, provide structure and focus, building, understanding, making sense, reiterate, and communicate. According to President Tubman, doing the legwork involves communicating with as many people throughout the institution:

I think part of my responsibility is that I'm supposed to have this view. I don't expect anybody else to think like that. But I have to walk them from this view to

this view. So, building that understanding from top to bottom for people, it takes a really long time.

Additionally, doing the legwork to cultivate an environment for transformational change involved intentionally creating diverse teams and providing data, professional development, and other resources to implement change and transform their institutions. For example, this is President Harriet Beecher Stowe's description of how she was inclusive in preparing her campus for change:

I like to be inclusive. I like to say, "here's an observation and here's what I'm thinking about and I'd like you to consider it." I've charged several different task groups with looking at process flow. So, I think that's a subtle culture shift where we're not just doing things as we always did them. Providing individuals with these are the tools or the information they need to do the job, being I will provide not only the data but also articles and books for them to read.

Doing the legwork includes leaders getting everyone involved with a transformational change by creating cross-departmental or diverse teams and committees and encouraging collaboration. The women interviewed also described continuously providing support, resources, and the tools necessary, through continuous follow up, by bringing things to be visible on behalf of the leader. This visibility was described as "I'm here," "is there anything else you need," and openly sharing data to inform decision making and recommendations. In her interview, President Rosa Parks shared how creating an understanding of the need for a transformational change in the institution was part of doing the legwork:

So, we have the same shared governance, the same issues that you find at every college campus, but I do think there is a level of people believing that they understand where we are, and knowing is powerful. I go through our financial statements and share as much data with the campus as possible. I publish minutes of everything, so everybody knows where we are. It requires spending a lot of time with people, talking to people, and doing what you say you're going to do, following it up with saying what you did."

For many of the participants doing the legwork consisted of creating diverse, cross-departmental teams to cultivate an environment for transformational change. The presidents described that development of these teams included careful consideration and strategic methods in forming and charging committees and task forces. Several of the presidents discussed having diversity in people at the table for decision making and strategic planning. This intentional approach to forming teams creates collaboration and connections and engages employees in change and assists in the transformation of the institution. President Parks described forming and leading exploratory teams staffed with different departmental- and administrative-level representation to look at operational efficiencies. President Anthony shared in her interview how she intentionally broadened her cabinet to create more diverse and inclusive decision making and communication:

I said, "we should have more people at the table when our cabinet makes decisions." I think we should be talking about what data we use, and we need to look at strategic communications. We need to make sure that we are using data and being consistent. So all of those questions become a part of the decision

making. And I think my style is to really have a strong team that communicates with each other, and they don't work in isolation.

All seven participants discussed the importance of creating committees with representatives from different groups and involving shared governance, so any changes or decisions were owned by the employees. President Harriet Beecher Stowe not only charged a cross-departmental task force to take a look at a change she was considering, but she provided data and professional opportunities, such as books, articles, and conferences, to support interdepartmental and collective development experiences for her staff. In addition to developing cross-departmental teams, two out of the seven participants stressed the need to meet frequently, and all of the presidents identified the importance of setting timelines and holding teams accountable.

When discussing the need to do the legwork, the presidents talked about paying attention to, and understanding, their culture, which is very time consuming, however necessary for cultivating a culture for successful transformational change. The women accomplished this cultural understanding by doing the legwork and nurturing authentic relationships.

Nurture authentic relationships. Cultivating a culture for transformational change includes nurturing authentic relationships with people. The women presidents in this study developed authentic relationships with people through transparency, trust, and open, intentional communication. Nurturing authentic relationships also involved the participants gaining a thorough understanding of the culture of their institutions.

During their interviews, the presidents described the importance of taking the time getting to know and understand their culture. For example, President Beecher Stowe

described spending almost a full year understanding her culture with “talking and listening tours.” President Tubman’s description included “yapping and getting to know people” and through other conversations that assisted with building relationships. During her interview, President Blackwell shared her thoughts on the importance of taking the time to understand your culture prior to introducing a transformational change: “Culture change is hard. Transformation, culture, of course, go hand in hand. We failed when we didn’t really take a real good look at culture.”

Gaining a thorough understanding of culture takes a great deal of time, energy, and work, however, it is essential when leading or supporting transformational change. For the presidents in this study, a thorough understanding of their culture was a necessary ingredient in nurturing authentic relationships and cultivating a culture for transformational change. Understanding culture and nurturing authentic relationships also involves transparency and trust. Transparency and trust, for some of the presidents, meant openly sharing their goals, budgets, and other data with their institutions. For others, transparency was defined as asking for honest feedback and advice as when to become more involved in the change process. Many of the presidents discussed the necessity of spending a lot of talking with people, getting to know them as well as their families. Nurturing authentic relationships, as described by President Harriet Tubman, “Yes, there’s a formal structure, but I also know everybody and their kids and their dogs and their babies, so having a lot of non-presidential conversations, like, ‘How’s that thing going?’ and, ‘Do you need anything from me?’”

For many of the presidents, nurturing authentic relationships meant understanding and knowing their employees as people with goals and aspirations as well as having

human, interpersonal interactions with them. According to President Elizabeth Cady Stanton:

I do a lot of listening sessions, I do a lot of communication, and [with] as much as I do, it's never enough. So that's something I work on every day. I'll meet with all of the departments, and I'll listen to their hopes, their aspirations, their fears, and I say, "Look you need to understand the data. The demographic changes. You need to understand that the funding streams and the state and federal levels are not keeping up with inflation."

According to President Anthony, nurturing authentic relationships involves infusing a sense of humanity into your leadership:

The people you work with are human. They have things happen to them. They have family events, they have times when they're at their best, they have times that they're exhausted. They have times that they're going through things that have nothing to do with their work here, but they're humans, and I'm not going to defend bad decisions they make or . . . but I'm also not going to expose them either.

This sense of humanity assisted the presidents with nurturing authentic relationships while holding people accountable and navigating through the resistance of change that is transformational to culture. The participants described that building authentic relationships takes time and requires consistency in their behaviors as well as in communication. Every one of the presidents in this study discussed the need for consistent, repetitive communication and staying the course with the communication plan in order for trusting relationships to develop and to cultivate a culture for

transformational change. For example, President Beecher Stowe shared during her interview how she worked through a challenge she was experiencing during a time of transformational change:

You have to be consistent in your message and to have that communication plan totally, totally developed and laid out. Because, what I have found is, you can't waver in what you're saying. It's the consistent message as to why we've made the decision.

For the participants in this study, nurturing authentic relationships in their colleges and universities involved working through disagreements and allowing discourse to be a part of the discussion when necessary. For example, engaging and involving people in transformational change efforts opens the door for disparities in opinions and ideas, however, many of the presidents discussed the necessity of having everyone at the table for decision making. During her interview, President Truth described nurturing relationships by using phrases such as “shared governance doesn't mean shared agreement” and allowing for disagreement or conflict of opinion by “trying to understand why this person sees things so differently than me.” All of the participants in this study described utilizing and providing data to create a sense of urgency or to bring people along with a transformational change, however, they also said the relationships they developed assisted with successfully working through differences of opinion and cultivating an environment for transformational change. According to President Blackwell, nurturing authentic relationships helped her cultivate a culture for transformation, “All of them came, [faculty and department chairs] even though two of

them came in begrudgingly and told me, ‘I am not interested in this, but I like you and I’m willing to come.’”

Finally, nurturing authentic relationships involves having fun, celebrating milestones, as well as recognizing the positive steps toward transformation. Several of the women presidents described being enthusiastic and feeling proud of their focus on success. Some shared stories about motivating and encouraging their employees with parties and celebrations to publicly recognize their work and how this creates an interconnectedness and allows for and builds a continuous improvement model within their culture. President Blackwell described the importance of how celebrations and recognition of success is to nurturing authentic relationships and cultivating a culture for change:

I met with the team this morning, because you have different milestones you have to meet as a team. When we do, we do little celebrations and receive certificates. These are generally guys that are not usually that vocal, don’t necessarily feel connected. They were so excited. For them to connect all of that and focus on something that is going to have a meaningful impact, I think that’s pretty transformational from a central standpoint. I think it really has made an impact on our culture and even engaged people that never would be engaged in thinking about how my role impacts the institution’s success.

All seven of the presidents described a supportive and collaborative, rather than directive, approach to cultivating their environment for transformational change. A supportive approach engages people in decision making through collaboration and creating connection with cross-departmental teams. A supportive approach engages,

rather than directs, employees in change and assists in the transformation of the institutional culture. Additionally, transparency and authenticity were woven throughout the seven interviews, as well to build authentic relationships, engage employees, and cultivate change.

Theme 3: Lead intentionally through gender-based challenges. The third and final theme of this study involves the women presidents navigating through the unique challenges they faced while facilitating transformational change in their 2- and 4-year colleges. The college presidents interviewed for this study identified challenges to leading transformational change such as: budget and fiscal constraints, enrollment declines, changes in funding sources, working through governance, slow pace of transformational change in higher education, and the pushback or resistance from faculty and staff who were holding onto the past or clinging to historical policies and procedures. The presidents described responding to these challenges with consistency in their communication plans, seeing challenges as opportunities, and utilizing collaborative leadership behaviors that supported transformational change.

The women presidents interviewed for this study also shared stories about the challenges and resistance they experienced from working in gendered cultures, how they navigated through gender-based leadership stereotypes, and the unequal standards for men and women leaders. A major challenge the women perceived when interviewed for this study were the expectations of them as leaders. One expectation the women talked about was for them to always be patient and nurturing. The presidents, again, described adjusting their style through self-awareness, controlling their emotions, and being

intentional in their behavior when necessary. President Cady Stanton's description of her self-awareness and intentional behavior:

Yeah, I mean, but this is the case with every major initiative, but the adjustment is, try to be patient. I'm not a patient person by nature. In case you haven't picked up on that. I mean, I'm just not a patient person. Yes, not my strong suit. So, I have to be very intentional about how, but I want to get there. So, I would say my leadership has to be tweaked when I get really impatient. I'm for deliberation, but I'm also for outcomes. But these things require a certain timing and reflection so that people don't panic. If they sense that irritation in me or panic to get to a decision, it makes matters worse. So, I have to really be reflective and intentional on how I think these things through.

According to President Blackwell, adjusting her leadership style was necessary but also difficult:

Well, I would say transformation—in general, in anything—that I've done here is to try to be patient. That's hard for me and hard for a lot of leaders. We like to get things done. But being patient is probably the hardest part, because I can see what they should be doing, and I need to keep my mouth closed and let them figure it out.

The unique challenges the women presidents perceived also included higher or more measurable expectations and stricter accountability because of their gender. Several of the women described being treated differently than the male presidents who served prior to them. President Rosa Parks, stated the gender-based challenges she experienced as a female college president:

Do I get treated differently? I do. And you know what? People don't even know they do it. I think people expect more from women leaders than they do from men. I'm pretty certain that my predecessor, his goals we're mostly qualitative, even his own personal goals. My goals are very quantitative, they're measurable. I sensed a shift with my board right away. I just find it interesting.

Of the seven presidents, five shared perceptions of gender-based challenges, such as having to prove themselves, not being taken seriously, being left out of conversations, being disrespected, and having to insert themselves or speak up or repeat themselves in meetings, in order to be heard. President Blackwell, on dealing with gendered stereotypes and culture she has experienced, stated:

So, yeah, I've heard things like "oh hey, great job, and you've got nice legs."

Those are the things that happen that's just like . . . I guess the way I've responded to it is I've told people the story. I don't mention names, but when I'm in certain settings, I've shared the story. I don't know, confronting it? It's not worth my time or the political clout that could come with it.

The women described responding to these gendered or stereotypical expectations and challenges by using humor to disarm, to push back, using the story to educate or break barriers, and taking advantage of their gender depending on the situation. All of the presidents shared stories about being self-aware of their emotions and incorporating power appropriately when dealing with the unique challenges they perceived or experienced. President Truth's strategies on controlling emotions and incorporating her power as a response to gender-based challenges she experienced:

Don't let them see you mad. Don't let them see you cry. Have them see you happy and joyful, certainly laugh in public. And is this fair? It's not fair, but they're going to remember how you said it, they're not going to remember what you said. Now, very occasionally, anger strategically used can be useful. But it has to be a very small audience when that happens, and they have to know you mean it, and you have to be in control of it. So, you have to choose to use it. Screaming and shouting doesn't work. But people knowing you're disappointed in them, that's pretty effective. So, it sounds performative, but to a certain extent, it is.

The two presidents that did not share perceptions of gender-based challenges when facilitating transformational change were not the first females to lead their institutions. These presidents did share stories of incorporating power into their leadership when necessary. President Beecher Stowe, on needing to insert herself, hold people accountable, and make decisions when timelines were not met:

But then, at the end of the day, I sit back and then, if I have to insert myself, I do. It's kind of an ebb and flow, depending on, it's a shift because, at the end of the day, you need to get the work done, and I believe in timelines. And if there's some reason why the timeline can't be met, I'm flexible on that to a certain degree and then it's like, no, we really need to finish this.

The women presidents interviewed for this study led intentionally through the gender-based stereotypes and gendered cultural expectations with self-awareness and emotional intelligence. Additionally, the women used humor and storytelling to educate people and transform culture in productive ways. Finally, some of the presidents led

intentionally through gender-based challenges by using their female characteristics to their advantage and incorporating power into their leadership (Enke, 2014; Gill & Jones, 2013; Wheat & Hill, 2016).

Summary of Results

This study examined the perceptions and experiences of women presidents facilitating transformational change in their 2- and 4-year higher education institutions. Three major themes and four subthemes emerged from the data analysis. The major themes and subthemes are supported by the experiences and perceptions of the female presidents in this study who shared the same experiences of facilitating transformational change in their 2- and 4-year higher education institutions.

The first theme, leadership is not one dimensional, explains the many dimensions of leadership the women presidents incorporated into their approach when facilitating transformational change. This theme is supported by the experiences of all seven women presidents who described initiating transformational change by taking charge and leading with confidence, which is a subtheme of leadership is not one dimensional. The women presidents in this study had confidence in their vision and knew when to step up, make a decision, and lead the change. Leadership is not one dimensional is further supported by a second subtheme, step back into a supportive role, which was also shared by all of the women presidents. Each participant described moving from a taking-charge or leading role into a more supportive role in the change.

The second theme, cultivate a culture for transformational change, explains the leadership behaviors and characteristics necessary to create an environment that is ripe for transformational change. Cultivate a culture for transformational change is supported

by two subthemes: you've got to do the legwork and nurture authentic relationships. You've got to do the legwork was a phrase used by one of the presidents to describe the time it takes to understand your culture, provide data, and support the people who are most impacted by the change. Nurturing authentic relationships with people was another way the women presidents in this study gained a thorough understanding of the culture of their institutions, which assisted in leading and supporting transformational change.

The third and final theme, lead intentionally through gender-based challenges, explains the unique challenges the women presidents experienced when leading and supporting transformational change. Leading intentionally through gender-based challenges includes descriptions of the leadership behaviors and strategies necessary to successfully navigate through the challenges the women presidents experienced. The presidents interviewed for this study shared reflective understandings of themselves, their cultures, and the behaviors or factors of successful transformational change. Their thoughtful understandings included self-awareness of their strengths as well as areas for improvement and the importance of asking for feedback and utilizing the feedback that they received.

Chapter 5 presents a summary of this study and the conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter 4. The key headings in Chapter 5 discuss the implications, limitations, and recommendations of this study. The chapter ends with a concluding summary.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The topic of transformational change is well documented in the literature, researched across the disciplines of business and education. Leading transformational change involves understanding and assessing organizational culture as well as creating readiness for change (Armenakis et al., 2011; Burke, 2018; Kezar, 2014; Springer et al., 2012). Creating readiness for transformational change will produce more innovative, rather than resistant, responses from employees experiencing this type of change (Littlepage et al., 2017).

College presidents involved with leading transformational change will need to continually move the change forward and navigate through both internal and external organizational challenges (Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; McKinney & Morris, 2010). Additionally, women face many challenges in their leadership roles in higher education. One challenge females experience is their underrepresentation in college presidential positions with the majority of college presidents across the nation being male (ACE, 2016; NCES, 2015). Although women have exceeded men in earning more college degrees over the past two decades, they are more likely to experience less leadership opportunities than men (NCES, 2015). Furthermore, women experience more challenges than males because of the gendered organizational culture that exists in higher education (Davidson, 2018; Gill & Jones, 2013; Savigny, 2014) and leadership stereotypes that are male centered (Bierema, 2001; Schein, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the leadership role of women facilitating transformational change while serving as presidents in their 2- and 4-year institutions. An intended outcome of this study was to learn more about the challenges women presidents experience while leading transformational change as well as the leadership behaviors that may support or hinder the success of transformational change in higher education institutions. All seven of the women presidents in this study were the change agents or champions who took charge with confidence in their vision to initiate and lead a change. Additionally, the women adjusted their leadership style in order to step back into a more supportive role for others to sustain the leadership of change that was transformational to their organizational culture. One outcome of this study was a majority of the women described having to lead through challenges and resistance due to gendered cultures and male-centered leadership stereotypes. An unintended outcome of this study was that two of the women participants did not report experiencing gender-based challenges or stereotypes when leading transformational change in their higher education institutions. These two women were also the only participants who were not the first female presidents to lead their institutions. This phenomenological study filled a gap in the literature on leading transformational change in higher education institutions by giving voice to women presidents who had been left out of research.

Implications of Findings

The results of this study provide several implications relating to the experiences and perceptions of women presidents in higher education. The implications for research and expanding the body of knowledge on transformational change is discussed in the first

section. The second section includes implications for leadership behaviors that support the success of transformational change in higher education institutions. The last section is focused on the implications for the leadership role and professional practice for female college presidents.

Implications for research on transformational change. A majority of the research on transformational change in higher education found the need for a clear change leader, often the president, to prepare for and consistently drive, a transformational change that would impact organizational culture (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Cejda & Leist, 2013; Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; Kezar, 2013; McKinney & Morris, 2010). McKinney and Morris (2010) identified college presidents as the change agents necessary to guide and sustain a change process forward to transform an institution. The results of this current study are consistent with previous findings where change that impacts culture needs a clear leader or change agent who can prepare for and continuously drive transformational change.

Leadership is not one dimensional is a theme that emerged from the experiences and perceptions of the participants in this study, and it suggests that all of the women presidents served as both a clear leader and as change agents in their colleges. The women presidents described their role as leading transformational changes, however they also provided support and advocacy to consistently drive the changes that impacted their organizational culture. For the presidents in this current study, being a change agent involved taking charge and leading with confidence. The women presidents in this study had confidence in their leadership and vision and knew when to step up, make a decision, and lead the change.

All of the presidents who participated in this current study described a time when they initiated a change by taking charge and directing it to happen or by taking the work on themselves with confidence. Additionally, the women presidents reported moving from a taking charge or leading role into a more supportive role in the change. Stepping back into a more supportive role meant engaging, advocating, and collaborating with others for the women presidents in this study. The findings from this study imply that it is necessary for women presidents to initially take charge and lead and then step back to support transformational change. These findings add to the body of knowledge on leading transformational change in higher education because this study included women's experiences and perceptions which has been left out of the research on transformational change.

Much of the research conducted in higher education institutions related to transformational change does not fully reflect women's perceptions and experiences because the population consisted of mainly White male presidents (Bierema, 2001; Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; Littlepage et al., 2017; Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Of the 10 studies included in the literature review on transformational change in higher education, only two of them interviewed college presidents (Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016). Despite only two of the studies having focused on college presidents involved in transformational change, neither of those studies included the female perspective in the research. This qualitative study was designed to give voice to the population of women presidents who are leading transformational change, where their experiences and perceptions have been left out of literature. Therefore, the results of this study add to the

body of knowledge on the role of female presidents leading transformational change in their higher education institutions.

College presidents who anticipate and prepare for change respond with more innovative methods than those who refuse to accept or resist change (Littlepage et al., 2017). Leaders who prepare an organization by providing data driven in depth planning and educational opportunities for employees reduce resistance to transformational change (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Cejda & Leist, 2013; Kezar, 2013; Springer et al., 2012). The college presidents who participated in this current study anticipated and prepared their campuses for innovative change by cultivating the culture and doing the legwork.

You've got to do the legwork is a theme that emerged in this current study to describe how the presidents prepared their institutions for change. Doing the legwork meant providing data, professional development opportunities, and continuously providing resources to support change. Additionally, the women presidents in this study created cross-departmental, diverse teams to build collaboration and collective buy-in for transformational change. Furthermore, the women presidents cultivated the culture for transformational change. Cultivating one's culture involves nurturing and helping to grow or transform for the better. All of the women presidents in this study discussed the need to transform their organizations into better places. The women who participated in this study cultivated their culture for transformation through motivation, engagement, and nurturing authentic relationships with people. They shared stories of reorganizing or restructuring using strategic decisions that were helping to develop and grow their colleges and universities. The findings of this study add to the body of knowledge from Littlepage et al. (2017) and Bystydzienski et al. (2017) who found college presidents who

anticipate and prepare for change respond with innovative methods and reduce employee resistance to change that transforms culture.

Understanding the structural levels within organizations will assist leaders in facilitating transformational change (Burke, 2018; Kezar, 2013; Schein, 2017). Schein's (2017) three levels of culture include visible observations, shared values or beliefs, and the underlying reasons for organizational behavior. Assessing and understanding organizational culture creates readiness for and reduces resistance to change that is transformational to institutional culture (Armenakis et al., 2011; Kezar, 2013; Springer et al., 2012). The results of this study support previous studies that found it necessary to assess attitudes, behaviors, values, and beliefs for successful implementation of transformational change (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Gearin, 2017; Kezar, 2013; Springer et al., 2012). The participants in this current study assessed their organizational cultures and created readiness and motivation for change by cultivating a culture for change, doing the legwork, and nurturing authentic relationships.

One implication of this current study is how leaders assess and come to understand their organizational culture. Bystydzienski et al. (2017) and Springer et al. (2012) found formal surveys and online questionnaires to be effective cultural assessment tools for the leaders in their studies, however, the participants in this current study did not utilize formal instruments to assess and understand their culture. The theme, cultivate a culture for transformational change, as well as the subthemes nurture authentic relationships and you've got to do the legwork, suggest alternative, more personal strategies and behaviors for leaders to understand the norms, values, and underlying assumptions of the culture (Schein, 2017). Therefore the results of this current study add

to the body of knowledge regarding assessing organizational culture and creating readiness and motivation for transformational change.

Many female leaders in higher education face multiple challenges and resistance due to a culture created, maintained, and controlled by men (Bierema, 2001; Gill & Jones, 2013; Redmond et al., 2017; Savigny, 2014). Women in higher education institutions are up against a male-centered organizational culture and stereotypes that favor male approaches to leadership (Davidson, 2018; Enke, 2014, Redmond et al., 2017; Savigny, 2014, Wheat & Hill, 2016). It would appear from the results of this current study that women presidents still face multiple challenges and resistance due to gendered organizational culture and male-centered leadership stereotypes. The women presidents in this study navigated through gender-based challenges by leading intentionally with self-awareness, controlling emotions, and incorporating power into their leadership style. This finding implies that women presidents face unique challenges when leading transformational change in higher education and adds to the body of knowledge by providing leadership strategies and behaviors to help overcome challenges and resistance.

Leadership behaviors that support the success of transformational change.

Transformational change is a type of change that impacts organizational culture (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Gearin, 2017; Kezar, 2013; Springer et al., 2012). An assessment of attitudes, behaviors, values, and beliefs prior to implementing transformational change can create motivation and readiness as well as reduce resistance to change (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Springer et al., 2012). Leaders who assess and understand the organizational culture support the success of transformational change (Armenakis et al., 2011). Cultivate a culture for transformational change is a theme that

emerged from the descriptions of how the participants in this study assessed and came to understand the culture of their institutions to create readiness and motivation for change. According to the presidents in this study, cultivating a culture involves growing and developing people to want to transform. Cultivating a culture for transformation involves a lot of time, energy, support, and patience on behalf of the leader; however, it produces an environment ripe for transformational change. For the presidents in this study, assessing and understanding a culture to prepare for transformational change also involved nurturing authentic relationships and doing the legwork.

The findings in this study include the women presidents assessing their cultures and creating readiness and motivation for change by nurturing authentic relationships with those who were most impacted by the change, which is a subtheme of cultivate a culture for transformational change. Nurturing authentic relationships includes taking the time to get to know and understand employees as people by having human, interpersonal interactions with them. For the presidents in this study, authentic relationships were developed through transparency, trust, and open, intentional communication on behalf of the leader. The findings from this study suggest that assessing attitudes, values, and beliefs, and understanding the underlying cultural assumptions can be done by nurturing authentic relationships and cultivating a culture for transformation.

The theme cultivate a culture for transformation is supported by a second subtheme, you've got to do the legwork, which also emerged from the experiences of the participants in this study. You've got to do the legwork involves taking the time to understand your culture, providing data, and supporting the stakeholders most impacted by the change. Doing the legwork includes creating cross-departmental and diverse

teams, encouraging collaboration, and developing strong communication across the institution. Furthermore, doing the legwork involves continuously providing support for change through resources such as data, professional development, and follow up on behalf of the leader.

It is important to understand the leadership characteristics and behaviors necessary for successful transformational change. Leadership characteristics, such as taking charge, confidence, independence, and decisiveness, are typically seen as masculine, while taking care, sensitivity, nurturing, supportive, and collaborative are viewed as feminine characteristics (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Enke, 2014; Gill & Jones, 2013; Vinkinburg et al., 2011; Wheat & Hill, 2016). Women leaders who have successfully challenged the hegemonic, masculinized culture of higher education have reported doing so by blending masculine and feminine leadership behaviors and by specifically incorporating power into their leadership style (Enke, 2014; Gill & Jones, 2013; Wheat & Hill, 2016).

Leadership is not one dimensional is a theme that emerged from the participants in this study, and it implies that women presidents who adjust their style and blend their leadership characteristics successfully facilitate transformational change. For example, all seven of the participants in this study had confidence in their visions to take the lead and initiate transformational change. This confidence was shown by the women presidents taking charge and being decisive, which have been considered masculine leadership characteristics. Additionally, the women in this current study knew when to step back from taking the lead into a more collaborative role for facilitating transformational

change. Stepping back into a supportive role for the presidents in this study involved engaging others to participate in and collaborate on leading the change.

Leading intentionally through gender-based challenges emerged from the women presidents' descriptions of a self-awareness and balance of power, emotions, and behavior in response to challenges they experienced and perceived while leading transformational change. It would appear from the results of this study that women presidents incorporate a collaborative, transparent, and genuine leadership approach along with being detail-oriented, intentional, and confident when leading transformational change. This blending of what has been considered masculine and feminine leadership behaviors or characteristics is consistent with what Enke (2014), Gill and Jones (2013), and Wheat and Hill (2016) found in their research conducted on women leaders in higher education. For the women presidents in this study, this blending of leadership behaviors contributed to the success of leading change that was transformational to their institutions of higher education.

Leadership role of women presidents. Today's college president will need to manage resistance to and navigate obstacles around change initiatives in order to successfully lead change that is transformational to an institution (ACE, 2016; Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; McKinney & Morris, 2010). College presidents who anticipate and prepare for change respond with more innovative methods than those who refuse to accept or resist change (Littlepage et al., 2017). McKinney and Morris (2010) identified college presidents as the change agents necessary to guide and sustain a change process forward to transform an institution. Based on the results of this study, the leadership role of women is multidimensional; meaning, they have more than one role in facilitating

transformational change as presidents of their 2- and 4-year institutions. All seven of the participants in this study described their roles as both taking charge in leading transformational change, as well as stepping back into a supportive role at some point in the change process. One theme that emerged, leadership is not one dimensional, is supported by the leadership experiences of the seven women presidents who participated in this study. The women described their roles as both leading and supporting others in leading transformational change. The findings from this study imply that the leadership role for women presidents consists of both leading and supporting. Additionally, the transformational change situation may impact which role the participants took and at times may be blurred.

For the women presidents in this study, facilitating transformational change involved them having more than one leadership role. All seven of the presidents described moving from initially taking the lead on a transformational change and then stepping back into a more supportive role. For the presidents in this study, leading transformational change involved taking charge with confidence by initiating a change or taking on the work themselves. It would appear from the findings in this study that taking charge with confidence in one's vision is an important leadership role for women presidents who are leading transformational change in higher education. The findings from this study imply that the women presidents were the change agents necessary to initiate and lead a change with confidence in their vision.

The participants in this study also described knowing when to step back from a taking-charge leadership role into a more supportive role when leading transformational change. Stepping back into a supportive role included the presidents engaging and

collaborating with others while continuing to advocate for the change. The role of stepping back and allowing others to participate in and lead the change was necessary to continuously move the change forward, as well as to create buy-in and motivation for change. The results of this study, specifically the leadership is not one dimensional theme, as well as the findings regarding the adjustment in their leadership role from taking charge with confidence to stepping back into a supportive role, suggest leadership strategies for women presidents to employ as change agents to initiate and sustain a transformational change.

The results of this study imply that the women presidents utilized a situational approach when leading transformational change in their 2- and 4-year higher education institutions. According to Northouse (2016) situational leadership involves applying both directive and supportive leadership behaviors based on the situation. Taking charge and leading with confidence is a direct approach to leading while stepping back is a more supportive leadership behavior. Situational leaders adapt their style based on the competence of those they lead (Northouse, 2016). The findings from this study suggest that a situational leadership style allowed the women presidents to lead and continuously support a change that was transformational to their culture.

The leadership role of women presidents also involves navigating through challenges and resistance to changes in norms, values, and beliefs, which make up organizational culture (Schein, 2017). Leading intentionally through gender-based challenges is one theme that emerged from the experiences and perceptions of the participants in this study. This theme is supported by the women presidents employing self-awareness, being intentional in their behavior, and incorporating power into their

leadership style when responding to the gender-based challenges they were experiencing (Enke, 2014; Gill & Jones, 2013; Wheat & Hill, 2016).

For some of the women presidents in this study, leading intentionally through gender-based challenges meant incorporating power or pushing back against the challenges they faced. For other presidents in this study, their leadership involved a self-awareness that allowed them to balance their emotions and control their responses to the gender-based challenges or male-centered stereotypes they were experiencing. The self-awareness, reflection, and intentional control of emotions, behavior, and power in their approach were strategies necessary for the women presidents in this study to lead intentionally through gender-based challenges. These findings imply the women presidents utilized a high degree of intelligence with balancing their emotions and behaviors when faced with gender-based challenges and resistance to their leadership.

The results of this study, specifically the lead intentionally through gender-based challenges theme, suggest the women presidents demonstrated a high level of emotional intelligence as a strategy to lead through the challenges they experienced. According to Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2013) leaders who are emotionally intelligent have an in-depth understanding of one's own, as well as others' emotions, abilities, perceptions, and attitudes. Additionally, a leader with emotional intelligence is highly effective in understanding and improving how to handle others' emotions which results in better outcomes, motivation, morale, and commitment to change (Goleman, et al., 2013). The four domains of emotional intelligence include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Goleman, et al., 2013). The women who participated in this study displayed leadership characteristics and behaviors that were

consistent with the four domains of emotional intelligence when successfully leading transformational change as presidents in their 2- and 4-year higher education institutions.

Two of the participants in this study did not report having to lead through gender-based challenges or male-centered leadership stereotypes. These two women, however, were not the first female presidents to lead their institutions. It would appear from these findings that a female president may not experience gender-based challenges if a woman has already served in that role. Furthermore, these findings imply if a female has already served in a presidential role, the culture of the institution may be less gendered or contain less male-centered leadership stereotypes, norms, beliefs, or underlying assumptions about women leaders.

Limitations

There are several limitations that may have impacted the results of this study. The first limitation to this study is a lack of diversity in the research participants. Although the invitation was sent to 50 women, the presidents who completed the demographic survey and consented to participate in this study were exclusively White females. Having a more diverse population of women presidents would have produced different perspectives and experiences to the findings of this study. A second limitation is that the participants in this study only represented one state on the East Coast of the United States and had between 3 years and 24 years of experience as a college president. Female college presidents with less than 1 year of experience were not included in this study. Therefore, any generalizations that may be inferred are limited to female college and university presidents with more than one and less than 24 years of experience from the same eastern part of the country. A third limitation to this study is the likelihood of researcher bias.

The researcher is conscious of the possible bias due to her experiences as a female leader facilitating transformational change in higher education. This study, however, adds to the current body of knowledge on transformational change and gives voice to women leaders in higher education.

Recommendations

The findings of this study provide several recommendations that relate to the experiences and perceptions of women presidents leading transformational change in 2- and 4-year institutions. The recommendations are for future research, professional practice for current female presidents as well as women who aspire to be executive leaders, and for higher education trustee leadership.

Future research. This study focused on the experiences and perceptions of women presidents facilitating transformational change in higher education institutions. The participants in this study were all White women, and they were leading a 2- or 4-year college in a state on the East Coast of the United States. Future studies should be conducted with a more diverse population of women participants to include racial and ethnic differences to allow for diverse perspectives of women presidents. Additionally, a similar study on women presidents facilitating transformational change in diverse settings, such as different states, or a national study, would add to the findings more perceptions of women presidents facilitating transformational change. Furthermore, a parallel study conducted on college presidents that includes both men and women as participants in the study is recommended to compare the leadership behaviors and experiences of a college president who facilitates transformational change. One final recommendation for future research is to conduct a study focused on women presidents

who are not the first female to lead a college or university. Based on the findings of this study, regarding the two women presidents who did not perceive gender-based challenges, gaining a better understanding of the experiences of women who follow other women as presidents would provide further insight into the organizational culture and any challenges they may experience.

Professional practice and leadership development for women. The findings from this study suggest that the leadership role for women presidents is not one dimensional. The women presidents in this study described adjusting their leadership roles depending on where they were in the change process and based on what was needed at the time. All seven of the participants described initiating a change by taking charge and leading with confidence and then stepping back into a more supportive role. Therefore, it is recommended that current female college presidents, as well as women in higher education who aspire to be executive leaders, become skilled in adjusting their leadership styles. The women presidents in this study described moving from leading to supporting, often, as well as having the knowledge and understanding of when to lead and when to step back and trust others to take the lead. Leadership development opportunities, such as leadership institutes that include training on adjusting one's leadership style and identifying when to lead with confidence and when to step back and support others, are recommended for women.

Based on the findings of this study, one recommendation is for current female presidents and other females in higher education aspiring to be executive leaders adopt a situational leadership style. Situational leadership includes both directive and supportive leadership dimensions, which are applied by the leader, given the situation (Northouse,

2016). Situational leadership involves a leader who adapts her style to match the competence of those she leads. According to Northouse (2016), situational leadership has four categories of behavior that all involve a focus on communication and goal achievement. The four categories of behavior in situational leadership include directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating. An effective situational leader will need to evaluate the competence of those she is leading and adapt her leadership behavior to match the need of the team (Northouse, 2016). The themes leadership is not one dimensional and lead intentionally through gender-based challenges imply the women presidents in this study incorporated a situational leadership approach to transforming the cultures of their institutions. Leadership development, such as mentoring opportunities from either current or recently retired female presidents who are skilled in using a situational approach, are recommended for women presidents.

The findings of this study regarding the theme, cultivate a culture for transformational change, as well as the subthemes, nurture authentic relationships and you've got to do the legwork, suggest interpersonal strategies for leaders to understand the norms, values, and underlying assumptions of culture (Schein, 2017). For the women presidents in this study, gaining a thorough understanding of their cultures was essential in creating readiness and motivation as well as successfully leading transformational change.

Cultivating one's culture for transformation involves building personal relationships with employees by understanding their hopes, dreams, fears, and aspirations as well as celebrating wins and having fun. The women in this study assessed and prepared their organizational culture for transformation by nurturing authentic

relationships and doing the legwork. Doing the legwork included providing data, resources, professional development, and support for people to understand the need to change and transform. For the participants in this study doing the legwork meant talking and listening tours with authentic, transparent conversations that allowed for personal relationships to develop. Therefore, a recommendation is for female presidents, as well as women who aspire to be presidents, develop an understanding and practice the strategies used by the participants in this study to assess and understand their organizational culture in personal and authentic ways. Developing an understanding of the time, energy, and leadership characteristics it takes to do the legwork, nurture authentic relationships, and cultivate a culture for transformational change will assist leaders, support the success, and reduce resistance to transformational change.

One final recommendation is for female presidents as well as board of trustees who may be considering appointing a woman as president of a higher education institution. The findings of this study reveal the gendered-based challenges women experience while leading transformational change in higher education and how the presidents of this study successfully navigated those challenges. Leading intentionally through gender-based challenges involves a level of self-awareness and a balance or control of emotions, behavior, and the appropriate amount of power into your leadership style. This level of self-awareness and intentional leadership behavior was a strategy used by the women presidents in this study to successfully navigate through gender-based challenges and male-centered leadership stereotypes. Therefore, a recommendation is for female presidents, as well as other women leaders in higher education, to develop an understanding and adopt the strategies used by the women in this study to lead

intentionally through the gendered-based challenges they experienced. Furthermore, higher education executive leaders or board of trustee members should also have an understanding of the underlying assumptions, leadership stereotypes, and gender-based organizational culture that may exist in their institutions prior to hiring a woman president. Gaining an understanding of any stereotypes that exist will assist in efforts to reduce or eliminate the structural levels of gendered organizational culture which will support a female president's transition into her leadership role. Finally, an assessment and understanding of the unique challenges' women face in higher education should be considered by potential female presidents and board of trustee members, especially if she is the first female to hold the role of president of the college or university.

Conclusion

Transformational change encompasses changes to the beliefs, values, and underlying basic assumptions that provide stability, guidance, and meaning for group members' behavior (Schein, 2017). Leading transformational change involves understanding and assessing organizational culture as well as creating readiness for change (Armenakis et al., 2011; Burke, 2018; Kezar, 2014; Springer et al., 2012). Creating readiness for transformational change will produce more innovative, rather than resistant, responses from employees who are experiencing this type of change (Littlepage et al., 2017). College presidents involved with leading transformational change will need to continually move the change forward and navigate through both internal and external organizational challenges (Gearin, 2017; Hamilton, 2016; McKinney & Morris, 2010).

Women face many challenges in their leadership roles in higher education. One challenge females experience is their underrepresentation in college president positions

with the majority of college presidents across the nation being male (ACE, 2016; NCES, 2015). Although women have exceeded men in earning more college degrees over the past two decades, they are more likely to experience less leadership opportunities than men (NCES, 2015). Furthermore, women experience more challenges than males because of the gendered organizational culture that exists in higher education (Davidson, 2018; Gill & Jones, 2013; Savigny, 2014) and leadership stereotypes that are male centered (Bierema, 2001; Schein, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the leadership role of women facilitating transformational change while serving as presidents in higher education. A phenomenological, qualitative form of inquiry was utilized for this study to explore and understand women college president's perceptions and experiences with transformational change. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected women presidents involved with transformational change in 2- and 4-year public or private colleges. Instruments used for data collection in this study included demographic surveys, interviews, field notes, and the researcher. An interpretative framework was used to understand the experiences and perceptions of women presidents, recognize the influence of the researcher's background, and shape the interpretation of the participants' construction of meaning about transformational change in higher education institutions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) described validation in qualitative research as an assessment of the accuracy of the data and findings by the researcher, the participants, and the reader. In addition to triangulating the data and member checking for accuracy and credibility, an external audit was conducted by a colleague in higher education who had no connection to this study. The external

auditor examined and provided an objective assessment of the findings, interpretations, and conclusions of this study.

The results of this phenomenological, qualitative study include three themes along with four subthemes that emerged from the experiences and perceptions of the women presidents facilitating transformational change. The first theme, leadership is not one dimensional, explains the many dimensions of leadership the women presidents incorporate into their approach when facilitating transformational change. This theme is supported by two subthemes: take charge and lead with confidence and step back into a supportive role. The second theme, cultivate a culture for transformational change, explains the leadership behaviors and characteristics necessary to create an environment that is ripe for transformational change. Cultivate a culture for transformational change is supported by two subthemes: you've got to do the legwork and nurture authentic relationships. A third theme that emerged in this study, lead intentionally through gender-based challenges, explains the unique challenges the women presidents experienced when leading and supporting transformational change. Leading intentionally through gender-based challenges includes descriptions of the leadership behaviors and strategies necessary to successfully navigate through the challenges the women presidents in this study experienced.

This study found that women presidents continually adjust their leadership role to successfully lead and support transformational change in their higher education institutions. The women presidents in this study all led with confidence in their vision for a transformation, however, they also knew when to step back and have confidence in others to lead and advise them when needed. Additionally, adjusting one's leadership

style includes self-awareness and the ability to balance one's emotions and behaviors. The findings of this study suggest implications for research, leadership behaviors that support the success of transformational change, as well as for professional practice for female leaders in higher education.

This study was limited by a lack of diversity as the research participants were exclusively White and only representative of one state on the East Coast of the United States. A further limitation of this study is the likelihood of researcher bias. The recommendations from the results of this study are for future research, leadership development and professional practice for women, as well as for boards of trustees or other executive leaders of higher education institutions. This phenomenological, qualitative study addressed a gap in the research on the experiences of women presidents leading transformational change in higher education.

“Different for Girls” is the name of a song written by JT Harding and Shane McAnally and performed by Dierks Bentley. The reason this song was chosen to be part of the title of this study is because the song sounds like it is about women, however, the lyrics are all about men. This reflects the outcome of the literature regarding transformational change in higher education where almost all the studies were about men, researched on men, or researched by men. The purpose of this study was to ensure that the voice of female leaders in higher education is reflected in the research related to leading transformational change. As more females become executive leaders and presidents in higher education institutions, the literature needs to reflect their experiences as well. This study provided women an opportunity to discuss the leadership behaviors that support the success of transformational change and filled a gap in the research.

Therefore, this study adds to the body of knowledge and implies that leading transformational change in 2- and 4-year higher education institutions is *different for girls*.

The challenges the women presidents described in this study were different than the challenges and resistance which had been previously identified in the literature on transformational change. This study provides strategies for women in higher education to successfully transform the culture of their organization and create a positive learning and working environment for all students, faculty, and staff. The results of this study suggest that female presidents leading transformational change in higher education need to understand and reflect on how their own underlying assumptions, values, and leadership behaviors are impacting the change process and culture of the organization. President Tubman shared at the end of her interview that women leading transformational change need to understand,

“Sometimes, transformation, it’s not so much in the thing, as it’s in the being.”

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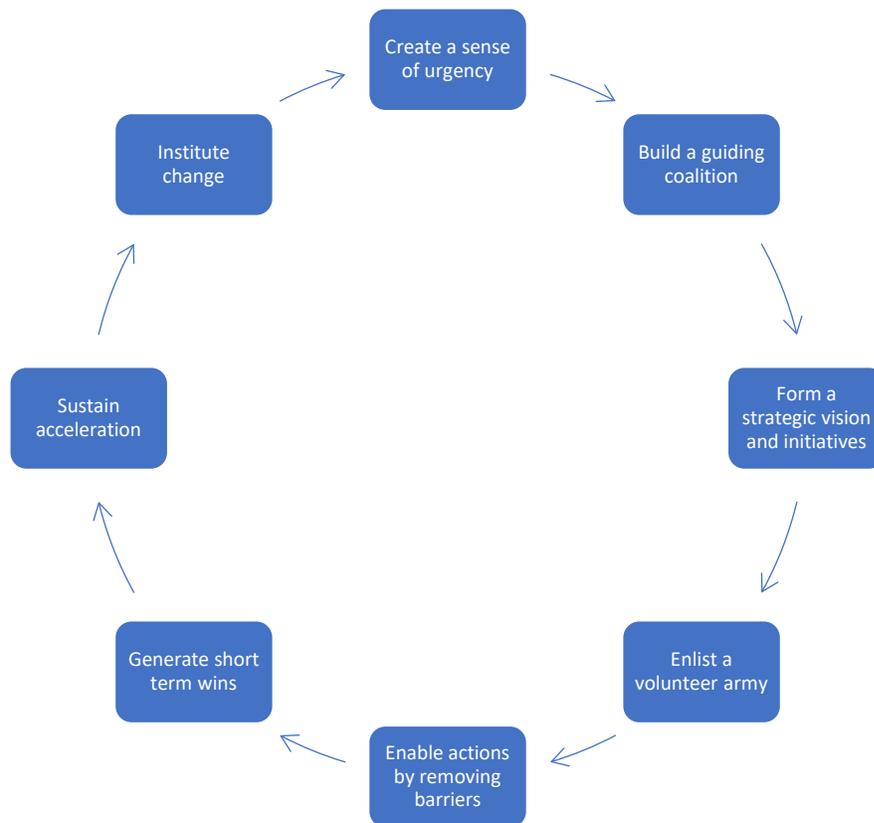
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Appendix A

Kotter's 8-Step Process for Leading Change



Note. Reprinted from “Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail” by Kotter, J.P, 1995, *Harvard Business Review*, March-April, 59-67.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Time of Interview: _____

Pseudonym: _____

2- or 4-year college: _____

Interview Questions:

- 1) Based on your answers to the demographic survey, you mentioned the following transformational change(s) experienced during your presidency (review of the 3x5 reminder card). How would you describe your role in each of the transformational changes you identified? (Follow up: did/do you perceive yourself as leading or supporting others in leading each change(s)?)
- 2) Of all these examples of transformational change, which one do you feel had (or will have) the biggest impact on the culture of your institution? If only one change was identified on the survey: Do you feel this change had (or will have) an impact on the culture of your institution? (Follow up: Can you tell me about how this change unfolded on your campus and describe it to me in as much detail as possible?)
- 3) Can you describe any visible changes in the culture of your institution? (probe: were there any behaviors, processes, or procedures that changed?) What about changes that are less visible but are reflected in your norms, values, or beliefs?

- 4) How would you describe your leadership role throughout this transformational change? (Follow up: What did you have to do differently, the same, or to adjust when it came to your leadership role in facilitating this transformational change along? Did you have to modify your leadership role during the transformational change process? Can you give me an example of what this looked like?)
- 5) Leaders often experience challenges when implementing a transformational change in higher education. Can you tell me about a time you experienced a challenge during this transformational change? If so, what happened? (Follow up: What did you do to overcome this challenge? What did others do to overcome this challenge? Did you face any resistance to this change? If so, how did you deal with it?)
- 6) Tell me about some of the actions you took in your role as President to prepare for this transformational change? (Follow up: Did you have to prepare yourself or others (i.e., board, senior leaders, faculty, staff, students) for this change? How did you come to the decision to embark on carrying out this transformational change in your institution?)
- 7) In your role as college president, what did you do to create motivation or a sense of urgency for this transformational change? (Follow up: can you tell me more about that?)
- 8) If you had the opportunity to relive this transformational change experience, what would you do differently and why? What would you do the same and why? (Follow up: Can you tell me a bit more about why you chose those words?)

In the last part of our interview, I want to shift into talking more about your role as a female college and university president when facilitating transformational change.

- 9) Research has found the culture of higher education can be less welcoming or supportive for women (Davidson, 2018; Enke, 2014; Savigny, 2014; Wheat & Hill, 2016). In your experience facilitating transformational change as a female president have you ever felt unsupported or not welcomed?
 - a. If yes, can you describe what happened? (Follow up: How did you react when faced with this experience? What do you do when faced with this culture to be successful?)
 - b. If no, have you experienced feeling unwelcomed or unsupported as a college president? Can you describe what happened? (Follow up: How did you react when faced with this experience? What do you do when faced with this culture to be successful?)
- 10) In all your experience in facilitating transformational changes in higher education, have you ever found yourself having to adjust your leadership style or behaviors because you are a woman? (Follow up: What changes in leadership behaviors or strategies helped you the most when facilitating transformational change?)
- 11) What advice would you share with other female leaders in higher education that find themselves facilitating a transformational change in their institution?
- 12) Is there anything else you would like to share that I didn't ask regarding your role in facilitating change as a female college president? (Follow up: What question do you wish I asked but didn't?)

Appendix C

Demographic Survey

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email address: _____

Community College or 4-year: _____

Years of experience as a college president at your current institution: _____

Years of experience as a college president at a former institution: _____

Ethnicity/Race (optional):

_____ American Indian or Alaska Native

_____ Asian Indian

_____ Black or African American

_____ Chinese

_____ Filipino

_____ Hispanic or Latino

_____ Japanese

_____ Korean

_____ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

_____ Vietnamese

_____ White

_____ Other Race

Transformational change encompasses changes to the beliefs, values, and underlying basic assumptions that provide stability, guidance, and meaning for group members' behavior (Schein, 2017). This type of change transforms processes, procedures, and impacts organizational culture; therefore, it can cause resistance and take a considerable amount of time to implement (Kezar,

2014). Based on this definition of transformational change, please answer the following questions:

- 1) Have you led or are you currently leading a transformational change as a college president? Yes _____ No _____
- 2) Have you facilitated a transformational change effort during your presidency by supporting employee(s) who have led or are currently leading this type of change? Yes _____ No _____
- 3) The following are some examples of transformational changes in higher education institutions. Please check all that apply to you as a college president who has led or facilitated transformational change:

- _____ Addition of student housing to a non-residential campus
- _____ Change or addition of a student information system (i.e., Banner, PeopleSoft, Colleague)
- _____ Implemented online academic programs/degrees
- _____ Change in academic schedule (i.e., semesters to trimesters)
- _____ Elimination of departments, divisions, or long-standing academic programs
- _____ Combination or restructure of departments or divisions
- _____ Change in institutional vision, mission, or values
- _____ Other (please list) _____

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

St. John Fisher College

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of study: Different for girls? The experiences and perceptions of women presidents leading transformational change in 2- and 4-year higher education institutions.

Name of researcher: Jacquelyn VanBrunt

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Shannon Cleverley-Thompson and Dr. James Hurny

Phone for further information: () - - or () - -

Purpose of study: The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the leadership experiences of women presidents facilitating transformational change in higher education. An intended outcome of the study is to learn about the challenges women experience and the leadership behaviors necessary to support the success of leading transformational change in higher education institutions.

Participation: Participation in the study involves completion of demographic survey and an in-person interview. First, participants will complete an electronic demographic survey that consists of xx questions and upon submission will be electronically sent to the researcher. Following data compilation of the surveys selected subjects will participate in an interview.

Place of study: The interview will take place at the participants' 2- or 4-year college, or at a more convenient location of your choice. Length of participation: Approximately 10 minutes to complete the demographic survey and 60 minutes for the in-person interview.

Method(s) of data collection: A phenomenological, qualitative form of inquiry will be utilized to explore and understand women's perceptions and experiences leading transformational change. The instruments used in the study will be an electronic demographic survey and an interview protocol that contains xx questions. The interview protocol will be utilized during an in-person interview which will be conducted by the researcher.

Risks and benefits: One possible risk involved with participating in this study is experiencing stress from recalling any challenges you may have experienced when leading change. To minimize this risk you may choose not to answer any question or withdraw from participating in the study at any time without penalty. A second possible risk involved with participation in the study is a breach of confidentiality. I will minimize this risk and protect your identity in the following ways: keeping your interview data confidential, removing all identifiable information from the data (email address, name, IP address, and name of institution). Furthermore, a pseudonym will be used in place of your name and a fictitious name will be created for your higher education institution.

Your information may be shared with appropriate governmental authorities ONLY if you or someone else is in danger, or if I am required to do so by law.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

Print name (Participant)

Signature

Date

Print name (Investigator)

Signature

Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher(s) listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact your personal health care provider or an appropriate crisis service provider.