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HOW UNDERGRADUATE WOMEN AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION VIEW LEADERSHIP: A PHENOMENOLOGY

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HOW UNDERGRADUATE WOMEN AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE
INSTITUTION VIEW LEADERSHIP:
A PHENOMENOLOGY

A Dissertation Proposal predominantly
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership

by
Carolyn Priddy DuPre
May 2011

Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, men have been the main actors and storytellers in the history of formal education. The United States is seeing progress in recruiting women into higher education classrooms, but does this increase in numbers equate to an increase in the understanding of their experiences? Further, are we supporting undergraduate women in their growth as student leaders, both for their benefit on campus and their lives post-graduation? This study begins with a literature review of the history of education in the United States. Gender is reviewed from the perspective of various disciplines to serve as a conceptual basis for understanding undergraduate women, including the disciplines of psychology, communications, business, and education. From there, a review of today's college woman is conducted, including the role of feminism and voice in her experiences.

A review of recent educational literature illustrates a plethora of challenges unique to women in higher education. What are missing, however, are the voices of these women. Instead, we are left with mostly quantitative data to tell the stories of women's challenges. The purpose of this study was to expand on this quantitative data to better understand women's perceptions of experiences as undergraduate students in higher education. Focus groups were used to collect the voices of undergraduate women at a public Southeastern institution to piece together the phenomenon of student leadership development within this population. The assumption was made that these experiences have not been adequately sought and heard in education, and that *voice* implies more than simple vocalizations. Insights from this research hold potential for increasing women's regular use of their voices and for impacting campus leadership education practices.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family.

Chris: I dedicated my Master's thesis to you, my boyfriend. Now I dedicate this to you, my husband. Pursuing a doctoral degree was a dream that came after our walk down the aisle. Thank you for sharing me with Clemson University.

Mom: when you went to college, did you realize you were a pioneer? Thank you for paving the way for the next generation (and for your amazing editorial insights). Dad: while researching this dissertation, I felt much like an investigative reporter. Thank you for supporting your daughters to be who we wanted to be (and for teaching me how to throw a curveball).

Tucker and Luke: writing is a solo endeavor, but I would not have been able to focus on my work without your distractions. Thank you for your unconditional love.

Maggie: when I was little, I wanted to be you when I grew up. Today, I still want to be you when I grow up. Thank you for setting the bar high. Sydney: who can imagine what college will be like for you in 15 years? Thank you for drawing pretty pictures on my early drafts. Carter: your little smiles are a great reminder of what means the most in life. Thank you for attempting to take enough naps to allow me time to edit my final draft.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must acknowledge the many people who gave their time and talents to walk with me on my journey to find my own voice.

This dissertation would not exist without the help of my committee. I thank my dissertation chair, Dr. James Satterfield, who was my first professor in this program and convinced me that I was tough enough to blaze my own path in academia. I thank Dr. Pamela Havice for what she taught me both inside and outside of the classroom (and for her excellent red pen). I thank Dr. Cheryl Warner for her guidance on counseling and gender issues. And finally, I thank Dr. Suzanne Price for her knowledge of leadership and student development. Had I not had the counsel of these four professionals, I would not have grown as much as I did during this process as a researcher, writer, and scholar.

I thank my professors in the Educational Leadership program who instilled in me the significance of leadership, research, ethics, diversity, and policy. I look forward to taking these lessons with me as I continue in my career.

I thank the students who so willingly shared their stories with me. It was the students who first inspired me to formulate my research questions, and it was their voices that motivated me to finish this dissertation. I hope I have served them well with this work.

And I thank the women who walked before me in higher education. I promise to honor the sacrifices you made in the face of a challenging educational culture as I continue my walk.

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PREFACE

*“What would happen if one woman
told the truth about her life?
The world would split open.”
~ Muriel Rukeyser,
Kathe Kollwitz, 1968*

I headed off to college in the fall of 1998 with extra-long bed sheets, a new 13-inch TV, and a roll of quarters for the laundry ... but without much confidence in myself. Sure, I had been a big fish in my small high school pond. I'd even held some leadership positions like features editor on the newspaper and athletic trainer for the varsity football team. In high school, you can even pretend that being the “smart girl” in Advanced Placement English is sufficient in defining yourself. But college would be different. I would go from a big tuna to a bitty goldfish. And a female goldfish at that.

College is one step closer to the real world. My “you can be anything your heart desires” parents told me to dream big and then to make those dreams reality, without letting anything, including—and especially—my gender, hold me back. But Mom and Dad had to let go of my hands at some point. Even if I didn't intentionally look for it when I arrived at campus (I was too busy finding my classrooms and figuring out how to get along with my new roommate who hailed from the far-off land of New Jersey), it was there: a man as university president, men as the majority of college deans, a larger number of men as professors, a man as my academic adviser, and men as student government officers.

I remember my parents' stories of heading to college in the late 1960s/early 1970s to the institution that serves as the location for this study. Gender stereotypes were

exemplified at this point in the university's history: upperclassmen shaved Dad's "rat" head as he enrolled in the obligatory ROTC course, while Mom had to figure out which dining halls were more welcoming to women. Dad rose to the ranks of editor of the college newspaper while other newspaper leaders (all men) questioned Mom's decision to be the paper's business manager. (A woman? As business manager? Surely not.)

Their stories of institutional division really stayed with me. Yes, the university admitted "coeds" 15 years before my mother was a first-year student. This shift told women they could feel equal to men students; yet women wouldn't see their sex reflected in the administration or in the ranks of tenured faculty. On paper, women were told they could pursue any degrees they desired; but in reality, they knew which degrees were actually welcoming for each sex. And, based solely on gender, men—including Dad—fell under the direction of the Dean of Students while women—including Mom—fell under the Dean of Women. What powerful institutional rhetoric: you are either a student or a woman. Why can't you be both?

My parents have said it best in their own words, how they were aware of gender as in-coming college students. (Isn't it interesting how the woman's perspective is much more impacted by the gender divide? We see that every day in our world: the group in the majority, with the support of the powers-that-be around them, is less aware of the divide, while the group who struggles to be "good enough" can't seem to stop seeing the divide.)

In the Words of My Mom

The first time my girlfriends and I walked into Harcombe Commons, we froze.

The dining hall was filled with nothing but guys, most of whom seemed to be staring at the three of us lost coeds. We promptly skedaddled over to Schilleter Hall, the accepted place for girls to dine in the fall of 1970.

That was my most memorable introduction to the inequities between female and male students at [the university]. We were still greatly outnumbered, and most of us seemed to be majoring in education or nursing. It was the brave coed who ventured alone into an engineering or business class. Female freshmen had curfews and dorm sign-out sheets; the guys didn't. And then, at the end of my freshman year, I had my big scary interview to become business manager of *The Tiger*. The all-male editors club sitting around the interview table had the nerve to ask me what I would do if my then-boyfriend (who also worked on *The Tiger* staff) and I broke up. I was pretty much speechless. (If only I'd had the guts back then to say, "I'll still be your business manager. What do you think he'll do?") For the remainder of my time at [the university], I simply remember coping and surviving on my way to a cap and gown—and to a teaching certificate in a subject area that was already glutted with unemployed teachers. Oh, well. (D. Priddy, personal communication, November 10, 2009)

In the Words of My Dad

When I was a freshman it was very unusual to have a girl in engineering.

Frankly, when I first heard of a girl in engineering I was wondering what in the

world she wanted to do with an engineering degree. It was that unusual. She was something of an oddity. Now, it's commonplace, and even in some courses women outnumber men.

Girls were different. Freshman girls had to wear ribbons in their hair, and of course there were no boys allowed anywhere near the girls' dorm rooms. And vice versa. Of course, when your mother actually wanted to be business manager of *The Tiger*, well, she must only want that because of me. What happens when we break up? Do they have to get a new business manager? (T. Priddy, personal communication, November 10, 2009)

From their freshman days in 1969 and 1970 to my freshman days in 1998, much had changed. Freshman men no longer had their heads shaved, and first-year women no longer feared being turned away from her desired major based solely on her sex. I do not argue that progress has not happened in higher education; it has indeed. We now have initiatives to bring more women into fields that are dominated by men; we now have more women in administration; and we now see women elected to student leadership roles. Progress is also illuminated by my Dad, who can now look back and see the injustice served to his then-girlfriend and can now translate that into telling his daughters to never let silly boys and their unfounded doubts of our abilities hold us back.

Apparently, though, Dad's confidence in me wasn't enough to instill confidence in myself when I was on my own at college. My questions and the catalyst for this study center on how we are actually supporting our college women through their internal

battles of confidence to be everything we (in the outside world) are telling them they can be, and how we can listen a bit more intentionally to their oft-silenced voices.

It's been said that researchers ultimately research themselves. This project is almost like me researching myself, as I reflect upon my experiences at college while listening to the perceptions of college women today. This is me looking for ways to inform higher education so students can be both students and women. So women can feel comfortable eating in any cafeteria (or any other campus location) and can speak up when questioned about abilities to serve as a business manager (or any other campus leader). So more women can enter the STEM fields, and, conversely, more men can feel welcome in the education and health fields. So other bitty goldfish never feel lost and can gain the institutional support they need to find their voices and realize their full leadership potential.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

*“Oh lifetime of silence!
Words scattered into a sybil’s leaves.
Voices thrown into a baritone storm—
Whose shrilling is a soulful wind
Blown through an instrument
That cannot beat time
But must make music
Any way it can.”*
~ Liz Rosenber,
The Silence of Women, 1994

Building a Quilt of Voices

The concept of gendered perceptions is one that exists from the very beginning of our lives, shaped by the “many messages we receive from the environment” (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006, p. 154). From our first days on earth, we are gendered, with pink or blue blankets, with dolls or toy trucks (Lloyd & Dureen, 1992; Zack, 2005). Both intentional and unintentional social influences greatly impact the way we view others and ultimately ourselves, and such views are often limiting in terms of self-perceived abilities (Holmes, 2009; Tannen, 1990). Socially influenced perceptions of gender and of the abilities of men and women played a role in the formation of the educational system in the United States (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001), and these perceptions continue to play a role in how students view their leadership potential.

Because gendering is unique to each person’s life, each woman must be the one to voice her own experiences. Women’s voices are like pieces of a patchwork quilt, stitched together to narrate stories of our history to future generations (Warren, 1996). Women

gain personal value as they give voice to their experiences, yet “women rarely quilt solely for themselves” (p. 1); instead, women join in the construction of quilted histories to tell a collective story to benefit the larger society. Poet Maya Angelou added to this quilt metaphor the value of diversity when intertwining lives together: “We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry and we understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter their color; equal in importance no matter their texture” (1993, p. 124).

When aiming to understand the experiences of women we must recognize that they are not all the same, yet there are shared experiences that unite them (Josselson, 1987). Nationally, women outnumber men as undergraduate students, yet there is inequity between the sexes in the employment structure of faculty in higher education (Curtis, 2004). Fewer women leaders in higher education offer fewer role models for the diverse undergraduate population, which is a problem, as it is typically the student-faculty interaction that provides advice and fosters encouragement for the development of the student (Kinzie, Thomas, Palmer, Umbach & Kuh, 2007). Without equal representation in the non-student leadership on their campuses, we cannot assume that each undergraduate woman has examples to model how one recognizes personal leadership potential. If women do not have these role models, how do they view themselves as student leaders?

The institution of education produces gendered messages that students internalize to shape their gendered self perceptions from an early age (Davies, 1989), including self perceptions of leadership potential. Considering the guiding principle of this study that

all students have the potential to be leaders, understanding how women perceive their leadership potential merits investigation (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006). Each woman is a person and therefore inherently has something to say from her unique core being (Gilligan, 1987). If we give women undergraduates the opportunity to voice their leadership experiences in higher education, and we then patch these voices together, the emerging quilt holds the potential to encourage future generations to add their voices for a better understanding of their institution's overall educational landscape.

Assumptions

Several assumptions were made entering into this research. First, it was assumed that leadership development is essential in a person's life, and higher education plays a large role in an individual's personal and leadership development (Astin & Astin, 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998). This assumption led to the belief that understanding the experiences of students and their perceptions of leadership development warranted investigation in order to allow educators to provide the best support to students. It also upheld the idea that leadership development can be obtained, as opposed to the idea that only certain people are born to be leaders.

Second, it was assumed that: "Women are not all alike, although they may be alike in some ways" (Josselson, 1987, p. 6). From that belief, this study assumed that each woman has something to say. Gilligan (1987) postulated that "to have something to say is to be a person" (p. xvi). The use of voice can be both a tool for individual expression and a vehicle for uniting women across differences to discover shared experiences. Unfortunately, "access to an audience through the wide dissemination of the

written word has frequently been closed off to women” in education (Warren, 1996, p. 2). Given its use in feminist research (Gilligan, 1982; Pickering, 2003) and educational research (Cairns, 2009; Mitra, 2009), using one’s voice is a valid vehicle for self-expression.

Third, it was assumed that men and women students deserve equal opportunities in higher education. Access to education is essential in a person’s career advancement and lifetime earnings, yet sex-based inequalities exist first in higher education and then in post-graduation earnings (Chapman, 1990; Williams, 2008). Legislation during the 1960s provided a foundation for legal equality between the sexes with the Equal Pay Act (1963) requiring equal wages for equal work and the Civil Rights Act (1964) prohibiting discrimination against women by companies employing 25 or more people. Specific to higher education, Title IX (1972) stated: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (20 U.S.C. § 1681).

Statement of Problems

The first problem addressed by this research is the exclusion of women from most historical accounts of higher education. Because “historians traditionally ignored one half of mankind” in the writing of the history of education, the voices of women have not been as audible as the voices of men (Cunningham, 2000, p. 273). The inequality of voices in education promotes an unbalanced understanding of the experiences of each sex in education. Today, as women consist of a larger percentage of students in higher

education (Stoops, 2004), the voices of the women in these institutions need to be pieced together to form a better understanding of their experiences for the benefit of generations to come.

The second problem addressed was born from a recognition of the different experiences of men and women in higher education (Josselson, 1987; Sax & Harper, 2007). Differences alone do not automatically constitute a problem. However, these different experiences result in a higher education gender gap, with the different experiences manifesting themselves in the classroom in such a way that suggests men and women belong to different sub-cultures (Melizza, 2009; Sax & Harper, 2007). Post-college, the experiences and perceptions of men and women continue to differ in business settings (Eagly & Carli, 2003). A gap in income also divides the sexes, a division noticeable across fields including higher education (Sax, 2008; Umbach, 2007). The possible long-term implications of not recognizing different experiences in higher education warrants analyzing the foundational leadership development that occurs on the college campus.

Purpose of the Study

Literature addressing concepts of personal development are historically based in men-dominated research (Gilligan, 1982; Sax, 2008). To counter a lack of representation of a given population in research, researchers must avoid the incorrect assumption that what worked for understanding men will work for understanding women (Henderson, 1996). Because of this, and because leadership literature is also historically based on post-college aged individuals (Dugan, 2006), the current study employed a qualitative

methodology to allow undergraduate women to voice their experiences with the phenomenon of leadership on a specific college campus.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to begin the collection of voices of women undergraduate students to explore their personal experiences of developing and recognizing leadership abilities during their college years. While the study began as open to undergraduate women of any age, only traditional aged students, ages 18 to 22 years old, volunteered to participate; therefore, non-traditional-aged students are not addressed in the literature reviewed here. By threading together the voices of the women who share in a phenomenon, we begin to see the tapestry that is part of our women students' realities and discover how their university can better serve them. Ultimately, the themes that emerge will hold the potential to positively inform future initiatives and curriculums to positively shape future initiatives and curriculums at this university (and comparative universities) in a way that simple quantitative data could not.

Research Questions

One question guided this inquiry of this study: How do undergraduate women perceive leadership on their college campus, both as a general concept and in their own lives? The desired outcomes of asking such a question are two-fold. First, giving undergraduate women the opportunity to use their authentic voices will address the lack of such voices in historical accounts in higher education. Second, discovering the perceptions of students can inform the university as to ways to support its women undergraduates in developing leadership abilities and their interest in seeking leadership activities. Within this second outcome is the need to understand the university the

participants attend and any impact the campus environment has on them. For that reason, an overview of the campus context is addressed in the institutional context analysis in chapter three.

As a phenomenological study, the questions were general and open-ended to allow the experiences of the participants to guide the data collection and therefore the emergence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The specific questions addressed in data collection were:

1. How do you view student leadership on your college campus?
2. Please talk about your experiences with leadership since becoming a student on this campus.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are used:

Higher Education

Higher education refers to post-high school education offered at public or private institutions in the United States that grant at least associates degrees, unless otherwise specified. The terms *college*, *university*, and *higher education institution* are used interchangeably.

Undergraduate

Undergraduate students are those seeking a bachelor's degree from a higher education institution who identify themselves as freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior.

Predominantly White Institution

A predominantly White institution is one where the majority of the student population classifies itself as White.

Sex

Sex is a product of biology and recognized by anatomy (Butler, 1990, 1993). The words *man* and *woman* are used to refer to a person's sex.

Gender

Gender is "the culturally determined behaviors and personality characteristics that are associated with, but not determined by, biological sex" (Howard & Hollander, 1997, p. 11). The words *male* and *female* are used to refer to a person's gender. For this study, participants self-identify based on their sex; yet their culturally influenced experiences as women guide understanding of their involvement in a phenomenon.

Voice

As defined by Gilligan (1982), voice comes when a person speaks "of the core of the self. Voice is natural and also cultural . . . and voice is a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds" (p. xvi). The feminist post-structural lens argues the power of giving a voice to women as a means toward personal growth (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

Feminism

Feminism is "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression," (Hooks, 2000, p. 1). This definition implies an action on behalf of seeking equality yet holds within it no leaders and therefore no power structure.

Leader

Leader refers to “any person who actively engages with others to accomplish change” (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006, p. 19), thus encompassing a broad range of activities and intentions. This study assumes that “all students are potential leaders” (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996, p. 181).

Significance of the Study

Leadership and the life skills that leadership opportunities teach college students are strongly connected to self-development, an idea often cited as a primary goal of higher education (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998). The development of leadership abilities is necessary in virtually every part of adult life (Astin & Astin, 2000). Still, theorists have debated its definition for decades. The term “means different things to different people” (Yukl, 1994, p. 2) and therefore leads to about as many definitions as there are people (Stogdill, 1974). Leadership is both “one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (Burns, 1978, p. 2). The significance of this study is not to present a definitive definition of this abstract concept, but rather to listen to the voices of undergraduate women to form a better understanding of how they perceive this concept in their lives.

This study will fill two gaps in current literature: literature that uses a phenomenological perspective of the experiences of women in higher education and literature that investigates leadership in higher education (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Zack, 2005). While a plethora of literature addressing higher education and leadership exists, the literature is short on qualitative methods and therefore lacks the understanding

of why differences exist (Sax, 2008). More specifically, the literature is short on the voices of women, and especially undergraduate women. To understand the perceptions of leadership among undergraduate women, researchers need to provide the opportunity for them to give voice to their experiences (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008).

By encouraging undergraduate women to use their authentic voices, this study opens the door of “personal testimony,” a vehicle employed by feminist scholars (Pickering, 2003, p. 1). Feminist researchers stress the importance of, yet lack of, listening to the experiences of women when seeking understanding (Devault, 1990). Providing the opportunity to speak does not by itself provide the opportunity to use one’s voice; to use one’s voice means the words shared must be heard and appreciated (Rakow & Wockowitz, 2004). Beyond filling a gap in literature and seeing insights into this phenomenon to allow institutions to better support undergraduate women, there exists a secondary benefit of using this method of research for the participants. When individuals feel encouraged to share personal testimony, they perceive greater trust and collegiality in the organizations to which they belong; and organizations in which trust and collegiality are present tend to enjoy higher productivity (Cohen & Prusak, 2001). In addition, sharing these women’s thoughts and the common themes we might discover from them could serve in combating stereotypes regarding women and their abilities to lead (Dugan, 2006).

Organization of the Study

Chapter two focuses on literature related to this study. The chapter begins with the history of education in the United States and the role gender has played in its emergence and growth. Gender is reviewed from multiple disciplines that affect women undergraduate students, including gender from the perspectives of psychology, communications, business, and education. From there, a review of today's college woman is conducted, including the role of feminism and voice in her experiences.

Chapter three includes a detailed description of the methodology of the study. The rationale for selecting a qualitative approach is discussed along with a description of the data collection and analysis methods. A detailed historical and institutional context is provided. Procedures for data analysis and interpretation are discussed. Next, this chapter chronicles the pilot study that served as the foundation for this larger study, including the participants, results, and how the experience shaped the study's methodology. Validity, reliability, and ethical considerations are addressed. The chapter concludes with an overview of the role of the researcher and her subjectivities related to this work.

Chapter four explains the results of the data analysis. Significant statements were identified to create a list of coded topics, which in turn allowed for five main themes to emerge. Themes included definitions of leadership that focus on position held; challenges of college-related transitions; elements of the campus environment that affect experiences, particularly the encouragement of organizational involvement and the role of Greek life; costs of leadership, including stress and time constraints; and benefits of

leadership, including application to their futures. Using this data analysis, the chapter concludes with what we now know about today's undergraduate women at this institution.

Chapter five includes an interpretation of the results with emphasis on the relationship to existing literature on gender, society, and perceptions of leadership. Social construction is presented for a thematic understanding of how these participants came to know what they know. A suggested program for this institution is presented, and each theme is discussed in relation to this program. The chapter also includes the implications for future research.

Summary

The concept of gendered perceptions is one that exists from the very beginning of life and greatly influences the way we see others and ourselves (Lloyd & Dureen, 1992; Zack, 2005). Socially based gender perceptions impact men and women in multiple facets of life, including education. As more women enroll in higher education, their experiences need to be understood in order to ensure equitable representation in the history of education and to help universities address the unique needs of this population of students (Cunningham, 2000; Josselson, 1987; Sax & Harper, 2007; Stoops, 2004). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to begin the collection of voices of undergraduate women to explore their personal experiences of developing and recognizing leadership abilities during the college years. The resulting study will fill two gaps in current literature: literature that uses a phenomenological perspective of the

experiences of women in higher education and literature that investigates leadership in higher education (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Zack, 2005).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*“Education could be, next to the home,
a strong force in helping young people
recognize and develop their free will,
the power of their reason,
and the reach of their hearts.”*

*~ Liz Dodge,
Weaving in the women, 1993*

This chapter covers issues of gender in undergraduate education, from the creation of the educational system in the colonial days of the United States to today’s educational landscape. The chapter chronicles a review of literature regarding the admittance of women into higher education, the curriculum these institutions prepared for them, and legislation that affected women in education. The concept of gender is then reviewed from the perspective of various disciplines to serve as a conceptual basis for understanding undergraduate women: psychology, communications, business, and education. The chapter concludes with a review of today’s college woman, including the roles of feminism and personal voice in her experiences.

In this review of literature, there is brief mentioning of the influences of foreign educational systems and education during the United States’ colonial period to establish historical background; however, the bulk of literature analyzed for this study was conducted in the past several decades. The bulk of the literature that served as the foundation for this study came from the past 60 years. The 1950s and 1960s generated a plethora of research in the fields of educational instruction and psychology, and 1960s and 1970s generated a plethora of research in the field of business. In the 1990s and

early 2000s, educational researchers began investigating student leadership and development in colleges and universities. The relative youth of campus-based literature helps build the need for this study, illustrating what we currently know about undergraduate women and what gaps in knowledge still exist.

History of Gender in Education

The concept of higher education originated as a man's enterprise, "created by and geared toward men" (Simonds & Cooper, 2001, p. 122). This enterprise isolated women and limited their participation then, and women still suffer inequality in higher education employment and salary compensation today (Curtis, 2004; Mason and Goulden, 2004). Primary school teachers during our country's colonial era were men, largely because men were "presumed to have superior intellects" and because men were viewed as better able to handle a classroom as, in colonial times, discipline equated to "physically overpowering young students" (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001, p. 63). Though these assumptions about classroom leadership are outdated and irrelevant in today's school system, they demonstrate the values of early education.

Beyond the practice of classroom instruction, men have also been the lead storytellers through the generations of our country's educational system in history books and through stories. Since men were more highly educated, they were the ones to write the first textbooks (Meyer, 1967). This muting of women's voices is not field-specific; it has long been a recognized occurrence by anthropologists in any situation where the experiences of men and of women differ (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Man's domination is even visible in the gendered rhetoric of history books, including references to "the

advancement of the common man” (Meyer, 1967, p. 171) and the “schoolboys’ life” (p. 198).

Historians “traditionally ignored one half of mankind” in the writing of the history of education (Cunningham, 2000, p. 273). Some education scholars argue that it was not simply that women did not want to participate in such storytelling, but rather that men “doctored the records” and purposely excluded their gender counterparts (Spender, 1982, p. 11). Whether this is true or not is beyond the goal of this study. Yet no matter the reasons for the long-time silencing of women, historical accounts illustrate men as the main participants in and the storytellers of our country’s educational system.

Emergence of Higher Education

Entry of Women

The United States lagged behind its European counterparts regarding the emergence of a higher education system, particularly in regard to the admittance of women. Italian noblewoman Elena Cornaro Piscopia is recognized as the first woman to earn a college degree, receiving a degree in philosophy from the University of Padua, Italy, in the late 1600s (Peril, 2006). Her degree did not, however, start a movement of women graduates; instead, the university decided that after Piscopia’s graduation, no other women were to be admitted. It would be several more decades before the second documented woman, Laura Bassi, earned a degree from the University of Bologna in 1732. In the United States, though Harvard opened in 1636, it was not until 1836 when all-woman Georgia Female Seminary opened its door, and 1957 when co-educational Oberlin College admitted its first women students (Komives & Woodard, 2003;

Newcomer, 1959; Peril, 2006). Still, the presence of women in these select classrooms did not mean an overall acceptance of women in higher education; that would take many more years.

The notion of women in higher education was a radical change in the country's views of gender roles. Gender roles are "especially resistant to change," and this attempt to change the status of women was heavily resisted (Komarovsky, 1985). The right for a White man to receive an education was never questioned; the right for a White woman to receive an education was a constant question (Newcomer, 1959). Essayist G. G. Buckler questioned a woman's capabilities—both mentally and physically—to engage in higher education, as well as questioning a woman's "proper sphere" (1897, p. 295). Even for mothers, who themselves never considered going to college, the idea of their daughters heading to school was quizzical. As one "American Mother" anonymously wrote into the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1900:

"Not once in a woman's life, perhaps, will she be called upon to quote from an Assyrian-Babylonian epic, or to dissect a cat. But three times every day a meal must be cooked under her supervision. At any minute ... she may be called upon to make a poultice for a sick child, to change the sheets under him, to know why the bread is sodden and the meat uneatable, to give medicine intelligently to the baby in her arms" (p. 15).

Once admitted to a college, what was a woman to study? Very little in the way of practical skills were taught. The teaching of writing was viewed as potentially aiding women in forging husbands' signatures, and the teaching of reading was viewed as

potentially providing women with a way to avoid housework (Newcomer, 1959). There was also the issue of inequality of pre-college education between the sexes. When women's college Vassar opened in 1865, then-president John Howard Raymond observed that a large number of students were not adequately prepared for the rigors of higher education and instituted preparatory classes. Other women's colleges followed suit with preparatory departments of study to bring women up to adequate comprehension levels on subjects such as the classics and high-level math, in which they might not have received the proper education in their previous high schools (Peril, 2006). It was not until 1914 when Vassar felt the pre-college education system allowed for equal education of men and women and decided to close its preparatory department (Peril, 2006).

Curriculum and Preparation for Women's Futures

Higher education professionals during the early- to mid-1900s questioned how to properly care for undergraduate women. *The College Girl of America*, a 1904 review (Crawford) of women's and coeducational colleges, contested that college girls were "subjected only to such rules as would naturally govern the action of any well-bred girl" (p. 41). These questions led to discussions regarding how to teach undergraduate women, resulting in the addition of courses on homemaking and wifely skills like cooking and sewing at universities. One must wonder: For what possible futures might such curricula prepare women except that of a housewife? Opinions were divided. Most men feared that educated women would feel entitled to the same rights afforded to men, while others argued that educated mothers raised better children and were more apt at being a spiritual leader in their households (Gordon, 2008). Even the argument in favor of a woman's

education focused on her domestic post-college life, not a career. Betty Friedan identified the quandary of entering higher education yet not receiving social support in her educational pursuits in her 1963's *The Feminine Mystique*:

The one lesson a girl could hardly avoid learning, if she went to college between 1945 and 1960, was not to get interested ... in anything besides getting married and having children, if she wanted to be normal, happy, adjusted, feminine, have a successful husband, successful children, and a normal, feminine, adjusted successful sex life (p. 156).

In the age of in loco parentis in the mid-1900s, when college administrations were seen as satisfying the parental role in a young person's life, women became over-watched and subjected to more excessive rules than their men peers. The matter was intensified by the rebellious, anti-authority reputation collegiate men had established prior to this time, which fueled parents' insistence for administrative control over their collegiate daughters (Peril, 2006). It appeared to administrators that women were in greater need of rules and guidance to ensure they kept their feminine graces. Both on and off campus behaviors were regulated, with restrictions on curfews, smoking and drinking (there was to be none), dormitory living and visitors, and even what local stores they were allowed to patronize (Peril, 2006).

Women's Rights Legislation

The Equal Pay Act (1963) established a foundation for legal equality between the sexes requiring equal wages for equal work, and the Civil Rights Act (1964) established a foundation for prohibiting gender discrimination by companies employing 25 or more

people. In the late 1960s, the women's movement was mainstream in United States culture, yet there existed almost no books, articles, conference sessions, or research agendas addressing gender discrimination in higher education (Sandler, 2002).

Congressional hearings began in 1970 regarding Title IX, a proposed amendment to the Civil Rights Act to include higher education. More specifically, Title IX (1972) stated that "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (20 U.S.C. § 1681).

It was not an easy passage; a representative from the American Council in Education testified that sex discrimination did not exist in higher education (Sandler, 2002). In 1974, the Women's Educational Equity Act was passed to authorize greater federal funding of research in biases in education, and in 1976 the Vocational Educational Amendments called for greater equality for enrollment in training programs (Wirtenberg, Klein, Richardson, & Thomas, 1981).

Gender Differences: Perspectives from Multiple Disciplines

When evaluating gender differences, literature largely centers on the debate of nature versus nurture, which "questions whether persistent differences between women and men can be attributed to inherent biological characteristics, or whether these differences are a result of socialization" (Sax & Harper, 2007, p. 670). The argument that biology dictates inmitigable differences between men and women, with the assumption that such differences left women with less intellect, was used in the early 1900s to argue justification for omitting women from formal education (Newcomer, 1959). More

recently, another perspective has dominated literature, in which gender is viewed as the “culturally determined behaviors and personality characteristics that reassocated with, but not determined by, biological sex” (Howard & Hollander, 1997, 11). This more largely accepted perspective distinguishes anatomical sex and socialized gender, as discussed in the next section (Pearson & Davilla, 2001).

Gender and sex are not the same thing (Francis, 2006; Glasser & Smith, 2008; Unger, 1979). Though this difference between gender and sex is viewed as important, the distinction is not often reflected in the language of empirical research, with the terms used interchangeably (Lloyd & Duveen, 1992). Researchers often refer to the impact of sex demographics of study participants only “in passing” (Rennie, 1998). There is danger in such blasé attention to gender versus sex; specifically, equating gender and sex could falsely lead readers to assume the dated argument of biology dictating differences (Unger & Crawford, 1992, p. 18). Even the national enrollment report supplied by the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, titled “College Enrollment by Sex and Attendance Status: 2004 to 2008” (2009), lists data under the categories *male* and *female*. One way to better reflect this distinction is to differentiate terms used, using the terms *male/female* and *masculinity/femininity* in reference to gender and the terms *man/woman* in reference to sex (Francis, 2006).

Gender Differences in Psychology

Identity formation is a critical function in a person’s life, and within this, gender holds an essential function of our learned identity (Erikson, 1968; Wood, 2004). Prior to the late 20th Century, gender was studied across fields of scholarship from the

perspective of how women differed from the norms set by men (Campbell, 2004). It has been largely the differences, not the similarities, that has directed gender research regarding interpersonal relationships, with men representing the norm and women representing the other (Ashcraft, 2004; Campbell, 2004). This created the “unfortunate implication that only women are gendered and men remain the genderless norm” (Dow & Wood, 2004, p. xiii).

Dating back to Freud (1933), theories of human development were conceived from the idea of men’s development, either ignoring women’s experiences or forcing it to parallel men (Gilligan, 2002; Josselson, 1987). Erikson (1968), Perry (1970), and Kohlberg (1973) furthered the fields of identity, intellectual, and moral development respectively, yet each continued the man-centered focus giving no attention to gender (Sax, 2008). Concerned that these theories view women as deviants as compared to the norms of men, Gilligan (1982) brought women into identity development research through a series of interviews to identify that “men and women may speak different languages” (p. 173). She concluded that women were excluded from consideration when early psychologists created theories of psychological development. Such research in psychology led the way for gender research in other fields, including communications, and is still relevant today (Sax, 2008).

Gender Differences in Communication

Women and men internalize “different norms for conversational interaction” (Maltz & Borker, 1982, p. 85). Modern sociolinguist researchers have sought to identify the socialized differences in gendered norms expressed by men and women and their

resulting differences in speech patterns (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Holmes, 2009; Tannen, 1990). Gender is viewed as something one does (Rakow, 1986). When acting out this gendered behavior, men act more dominant and competitive while women act more cooperative and democratic (Meiza, 2009; Thompson, 2000). In general, women communicate for solidarity while men communicate for power (Tannen, 1990). This difference is visible in the way women and men talk. Women use rapport talk as a means of building community, characterized by discussing “internal affairs, such as home, close relationships, and intimacy”; while men use report talk as a means of establishing status and independence, characterized by discussing “external affairs, such as sports, politics, and women/sex” (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006, p. 99).

Other characteristics have been identified as a way to show how women differ from the norm of men. Women are more likely to use first-person pronouns, fillers, and affirmative responses (Hirshman, 1994) and to apologize and pay compliments (Holmes, 1995). Women are more likely to talk less in mixed gender conversations (Spender, 1982), to begin with a disclaimer (Kendall & Tannen, 1997), to speak only when it is expected of them, and to use language to keep people working together in educational and organizational settings (Crawford, 1995). Women are more likely to keep contributions short and to ask for others’ opinions and to use verbalizations to encourage others to speak (Duncan & Fiske, 1977; Talbot, 1998). Such communicative expressions, while existent in education, are also visible in the business discipline.

Gender Differences in Business

Regarding gender and organizations, a common theme in research is that “organizational discourse is gendered” (Trethewey, Scott, & LeGreco, 2006, p. 126). Organizational leadership theories in the mid-1900s valued power and influence in leadership (Zaleznik, 2004). Because women are viewed more as participatory leaders rather than authoritative, the power theories of leadership identify men as more effective (Northouse, 2007). In our society, gender-based discrimination still supports the belief that men are more qualified and more competent than women for leadership positions (Sczesny, Spreemann, & Stalhber, 2006; Yukl, 2006). A foundational study on gender roles in the corporate context revealed that for both sexes, leadership behaviors viewed as stereotypically masculine were viewed as more effective than those viewed as stereotypically feminine (Schein, 1972). While assertiveness is viewed positively in men, women struggle for balance between being perceived as competent yet aggressive (Heilman, 2001; Williams, 2004).

The idea of power equating to leadership began to shift with a 1961 article in the *Harvard Business Review* that clearly rejected such a concept (Prentice). Instead, leadership was presented as accomplishing a task through working with others. A leader who used motivation to engage workers and employed a democratic leadership approach would be successful. *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977) proposed that a result of women’s under-representation in men-dominated occupations included negative perceptions of their business experience, with women in the business community provided less access to career development and advancement and lowered overall job

satisfaction (Kanter). After research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, scholars began to understand “women’s facilitation style and the way it matches the competencies that are required in new public and private management” (Holmes, 2009, p. 113). This style, commonly called transformational leadership, emphasizes relationships; this relational leadership style is reportedly more consistent with women’s styles than men’s (Burns, 1978). As we see in educational research, relationships are a central theme in successful women leaders (Northouse, 2007).

Gender Differences in Education

Education historian Clifford (1993) observed, “Gender ... is one of the most potent forces in shaping human institutions, including education” (p. 142). Higher education campuses have uniquely shaped cultures which impact students’ perceptions of gender roles (Barr, Desler, & Associates, 2000; Light, 2001; Lindsey, 1995). These cultures reflect the gendered stereotypes of men students characterized by “competition and dominance” and women students characterized by promoting “cooperation and equality of power” (Melizza, 2009, p. 84). Women undergraduates struggle more to develop autonomy compared to their counterparts (Josselson, 1987). In particular, first-year women are at greater risk of succumbing to the negative effects of gender-based discrimination given “the gender-specific self-doubt and faltering of intellectual self-confidence” characteristic of their developmental state (Chapman, 1990, p. 292). This history of women as afterthoughts in education persists today (Kinzie et al., 2007).

When investigating literature focused on women during their college experiences, two pieces of research repeatedly emerge as foundations for current investigations on

campuses (Komives & Woodward, 2003). Nevitt Sanford's (1966) longitudinal study of women at Vassar represented one of the first significant studies focusing on women in the college student population. Sanford agreed with previous theorists that personal crises lead to development, yet added that there must exist a balance between challenge and support for a student to experience development. His landmark work led to other empirical research to support the importance of the college years on a student, both the environment and the experiences (Canon, 1988; Pomerantz, 2006). This includes the Student Learning Imperative (1996), published by the American College Professionals Association, that states the important role of college environment to student growth.

The second study to lay a foundation for contemporary research is reported in the book *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). The authors conducted 135 in-depth interviews with college women to identify "five different perspectives from which women view the world of truth, knowledge, and authority" (Clinchy, 2002, p. 64). The first perspective is silence, representing voicelessness and powerlessness. Such a state of being might represent women's "struggle to claim the power of their own minds" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 3). Silence is a lack of self knowing, and therefore the knowing (and therefore influence) of others would have great impact on an individual (Clinchy, 2002). While the women studied in *Women's Ways of Knowing* were assumed to have developed their silenced and fragile state from social, economic, and educational factors (Love & Guthrie, 1999), silence is silence no matter the causes.

Researchers have built upon both seminal pieces of research to contribute to our understanding of today's undergraduates. Sanford's work is still recognized and

frequently cited for his concept of challenge and support, suggesting that students must encounter a balance of challenge within a supportive environment for growth to occur (Holcomb, & Nonneman, 2004; Ward, Trautvetter, & Braskamp, 2005). The authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing* saw such a prevalent body of research and reflections based on their book that they published an account of its impact in *Knowledge, Difference, and Power: Essays Inspired by "Women's Ways of Knowing"* (Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky, 1997). In the preface to the tenth anniversary edition of *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1997), the authors reflected upon the way the project spawned a discourse in society and encouraged colleagues to engage in further research on women's development.

Gender and Today's Undergraduate Women

Who is Today's Undergraduate Woman?

More than half the students in the United States' colleges and universities are women (Digest of Education Statistics, 2008); nonetheless, comparable numbers of each sex on campuses across the country does not equate to identical experiences. Today's undergraduate women come from grade-school classrooms that fostered gender differences that caused them to struggle with their confidence and academic performance and taught girls to stay silent in order to be successful (Hartman, 2006; Pipher, 1994). These differences are then reinforced upon entering college (Sax & Harper, 2007). Once in college, gender-role stereotyping continues to have visible consequences for women, who experience greater difficulty in developing academic confidence than their men counterparts (Harrop, Tattersall, & Goody, 2007; Simonds & Cooper, 2001).

The educational environment holds a powerful influence on student development, yet higher education as an institution provides a disproportionate experience to men and women (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Sax & Harper, 2007). Sexist oppression limits a person's ability to reach his/her full potential; to combat such oppression, we must each become "more active agents in our own lives" (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006, p. 22). Famed feminist author Rich advised students attending the 1977 Douglass College convocation to be active in claiming their own education: "You cannot afford to think of being here to receive an education: you will do much better to think of being here to claim one" (para. 2). This active role of engaging in one's college experiences remains a requirement for true self-development to surface in students today (Baxter Magolda, 2002).

Today's Educational Landscape

The majority of students filling today's classrooms belong to the Millennial generation. Millennials, born after 1981, are unique as compared to previous generations in United States history for many reasons, but largely because "they are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse" than ever before (Howe & Straus, 2000, p. 4). This generation's historical and cultural influences have shaped them into a generation characterized as sheltered, confident, team-oriented, achieving, pressured, and conventional (Coomes & DeBard, 2004). While these characteristics can be interpreted in varying degrees of negative or positive, they must be considered to grasp a full understanding of who composes the students on today's campuses.

Millennial students emerge as socially minded adults, poised to be a generation of “community shapers, institution builders, and world leaders” (Howe & Straus, 2000, p. 5). They are highly confident and talented achievers who set auspicious goals for themselves and expect only personal success (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Martin & Tulgan, 2001). Millennials are often at the forefront of social change and activist campaigns, which holds strong implications for their leadership development needs during the critical college years (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006; Loeb, 2010). This combination of social mindedness, confidence, and achievement requires institutions of higher education to offer adequate numbers of involvement opportunities for students in order to support them as they navigate through the unparalleled pressures that accompany these bold characteristics (Strange, 2004).

Students enter college with years of perceiving academic, social, and business activities segregated by gender; still, based on qualitative data, these students are more willing than previous generations to accept unrestricted gender roles for women (Broido, 2004). Even so, the higher education landscape shows men as the dominant leaders on campus (Wenniger & Conroy, 2001). The rhetoric of higher education can also reinforce ideas of men’s superiority, as illustrated by Harvard University President Lawrence H. Summers’s comments at the National Bureau of Economic Research in January 2005. Summers concluded that women are underrepresented in the tenured faculty ranks of science and engineering departments at top universities not because of discrimination but because they are not as interested in high power roles or not as apt as men to perform at such a level. While this highly publicized and controversial statement is arguably an

anomaly in communications from university presidents, it exhibits a disparity in gendered rhetoric from the highest level of education.

Role of Feminism and Personal Testimony in College

The idea of feminism often conjures images of radical political movements and issues of power and exclusion (Campbell, 1999; Maher, 2008). These images do not correlate with Millennials' ideas of collaboration and working together for social change. However, modern feminists argue more for personal happiness and equality than grand consciousness-raising movements, with the goal of the movement to end "sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression," (Hooks, 2000, p. 1). This definition of feminism implies an action on behalf of seeking equality yet holds within it no leaders and therefore no power structure. It also views gender not as a product of biology but of social interactions that lead to a person's predisposition relating to masculinity or femininity (Pearson & Davilla, 2001). The experiences we encounter through daily social interactions shape our concepts of who we are, including our sense of ourselves in terms of gender (Lederman, 2001).

Voice

A woman's self concept and ways of knowing are connected (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986); relinquishing her silence as a way of learning during her college years could be the first step toward creating a positive self concept. Educator Warren (1996) concluded: "The ability to speak from one's own experience is the best remedy to powerlessness. Yet the access to an audience through the wide dissemination of the written word has frequently been closed off to women" (p. 2). Voice, a term often

used in feminist scholarship, represents “the core of the self,” an expression that is often devalued in education (Gilligan, 1982, p. xvi). When women use this powerful tool of voice, they exercise a means toward personal growth (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Still, part of using one’s voice includes that her “experiences are heard and taken into account” (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004, p. 104). Based on literature presented earlier in this chapter showing a deficiency of such actions, this active attention to women’s voices would require a shift in campus attitudes.

Daily experiences, including those in college, shape who we are and how we understand ourselves as male or female (Lederman, 2001). Therefore, beyond serving as an end to powerlessness, using one’s voice while encountering college experiences can also serve as a tool in understanding one’s identity. Gender is commonly viewed as a social construction, with our self perceptions created only after social interactions (Lederman, 2001; Pearson & Davilla, 2001). It is through internalization of relationships in our lives and recognizing how others perceive us through social interactions that we learn to understand ourselves (Mead, 1977). By engaging in open conversations about injustices one perceives in the educational structure, a student can use her voice to affect positive change (Mitra, 2008).

Power and Gender Research

Before engaging in research to investigate how gender impacts today’s undergraduate women, it is important to understand the role of power in gender research. When examining diversity in a population, there exists an underlying comparison to the “norm of the White, male, heterosexual, upper-middle-class, able individual,” resulting in

all who fail to fit this norm to be viewed as “others” (Asher, 2007, p. 65). Over recent decades, there has been a movement to increase methods of understanding how to empower those viewed against the norm, yet some argue that to empower others is an act of using one’s power (Pease, 2002). Herein lies the contradiction: “The very act of trying to empower someone else presumes a degree of power over that person, in the form of greater knowledge, keener insight, or higher consciousness” (Bay-Cheng, Lewis, Stewart & Malley, 2006, p. 74).

The inspiration for involving voice in feminist research has historically been to create liberation narratives of oppressed people, with those possessing more power sharing it with those with less power (Cairns, 2009). This includes an underlying assumption of one having more power than another, even through the act of empowerment. While the concept of giving voice to others permeates feminist literature as a valid means of empowerment, some question researchers’ ultimate goals for trying to prompt others to end their silence (Orner, 1992). Who assumes that silence is bad, and is the decision to encourage others to use their voices simply the act of exerting one’s power? When evaluating silence, we must consider the difference between intentional silence, used as “symbolic gestures,” and silence as a result of oppression (Rakow & Wackowitz, 2004, p. 96). Researchers must also consider for whose benefit the act of giving voice is extended and “what use is made of the ‘people’s voice’ after it is heard” (p. 76). To keep power from negatively impacting research, we must first consider our intentions for giving others the opportunity to use their voices (Orner, 1992); ensure that one woman’s voice is not so loud as to silence others’ voices (Lugones & Spelman,

1983); and avoid speaking for others from our own privileged point of view (Rakow & Wackowitz, 2004).

Leadership Theories

Leadership is both “one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (Burns, 1978, p. 2). Despite this, numerous theories of leadership abound (Stogdill, 1974; Yukl, 1994). Leadership teaches college students critical life skills needed for their futures as adults (Astin & Astin, 2000). Several leadership theories relate to college students and are mentioned in this research: positional, transformational servant, and relational leadership.

Positional leadership, or the concept that leadership roles are connected to a position a person holds, is often connected with the idea of power (Bass & Bass, 2008). A leader is identified by a position, such as president, that has implied power within it. Positional leadership is frequently discussed in relation to transactional leadership, or the idea that a leader will use systems of rewards and punishments to get others to work toward a goal (Burns, 1978). Transactional leadership does not look at the individual and her needs or personal development but rather reaching an end goal for the good of the organization. The focus is highly focused on tasks and not relationships. In educational leadership literature, there has been a shift from transactional, task-oriented leadership to transformational, relationship-oriented leadership, a shift frequently viewed as a benefit to women and their tendency to favor relationship-based leadership (Dugan, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Komives, 1994).

Transformational leadership is a process that transforms people to transcend personal interests for the good of the greater group (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978). A leader assesses the needs of others and uses motivation to bring others on a path toward a common goal. There is a connection and interplay between the leader and the members of the group (Bass, 1990). While there exists potential for leaders to abuse transformational leadership by manipulating the motivation of others, it is generally viewed as an effective model for increasing member motivation and performance (Yukl, 2006).

Servant leadership emerges when a leader's primary motivation is a desire to help others grow as people (Greenleaf, 1977). Leadership begins with a desire to serve, and by serving others the leader also develops as a person (Crippen, 2005). The theory's altruistic slant emphasizes the leader putting others' interests first (Youngs, 2007). Such an altruistic model is not easy to achieve, as "the servant leader must stand for what is good and right, even when it is not in the financial interest of the organization" (Yukl, 2006, p. 420). Still, its focus on respect and social justice makes it a theory that seems to appeal to traditional-aged college students.

Leadership is by nature a relational concept (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006). Leadership is "dependent on the context," with the context established by relationships (Wheatley, 1992, p. 144). Relational leadership challenges a leader to be purposeful, inclusive, empowering, ethical, and process-oriented. The idea that such a leadership style is "inclusive of people and diverse points of view" makes it applicable to diverse college campuses (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006, p. 74). To be an effective relational leader, one must know herself, a process that is highly reflective and

ongoing; such personal introspection connects well with the use of voice in qualitative research.

Summary

Dating back to its inception in the colonial days of the United States, higher education was a man's enterprise that isolated women and limited their participation (Kinzie et al., 2007). Women were excluded from education over the decades, with men dominating multiple aspects of education: as public education teachers (Parkerson & Parkerson, 2001), as the tellers of educational history (Meyer; 1967), and the vast majority of higher education's teachers and students (Newcomer, 1959). Although Harvard opened in 1636, women did not enter the higher education classroom in the United States until much later, first with all-women's Georgia Female Seminary in 1836 and later with co-educational Oberlin College in 1957 (Komives & Woodard, 2003; Newcomer, 1959; Peril, 2006). Public acceptance of women pursuing such education was hard fought, with even women questioning the merits of educating women (Buckler, 1897; Gordon, 2008).

The debate of nature versus nurture has led discussions of the origins of sex differences (Sax & Harper, 2007). This study defined gender as a social construct rather than the biological differences that define sex (Pearson & Davilla, 2001). Gender as a concept has been studied from multiple perspectives. Early psychologists based the human norm on man's experience until the early 1980s (Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1987). Communications scholars argue that men and women internalize gender norms that are expressed through interaction, with women communicating more for solidarity and men

communicate more for power (Maltz & Borker, 1982; Tannen, 1990). This difference in communicative actions is also visible in the fields of business and education, both of which are gendered institutions that reinforce gender stereotypes (Melizza, 2009; Trethewey, Scott, & LeGreco, 2006).

Two studies serve as foundations for studies of contemporary college women. First, Sanford's (1966) longitudinal study of women at Vassar postulated that the college years serve as a time for personal change, with the college environment playing a role in that change. Second, research documented in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) identified five perspectives from which women view the world, including silence. Concepts of personal change and navigation through silence remain relevant to today's college students who encounter sex-role stereotyping and disproportionate experiences to men and women in the classroom (Sax & Harper, 2007; Simonds & Cooper, 2001).

The generation comprising the majority of today's college students, the Millennial generation, holds strong personal goals for shaping and leading their communities (Howe & Straus, 2000). Their combination of social mindedness, confidence, and achievement requires higher education to offer adequate numbers of involvement opportunities for students to support them as they navigate through the unparalleled pressures that accompany these auspicious characteristics (Strange, 2004). Modern concepts of feminism that argue more for personal happiness and equality rather than grand consciousness raising movements are more applicable to this generation (Hooks, 2000; Maher, 2008). Voice is a concept born from feminism and represents "the core of the

self,” an expression of self that is often devalued in education (Gilligan, 1982, p. xvi). When women use this powerful tool of voice, they exercise a means toward personal growth (Wrushen & Sherman, 2008). Despite considerations of power structures involved with giving others the opportunity to use their voices, voice remains a recognized practice in modern literature.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

*“No one would talk much in society,
if he knew how often
he misunderstands others.”*

~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Goethe’s works: Elective affinities, 1885

Social science research has long been criticized for marginalizing, misinterpreting, and even dismissing the experiences of women across fields (Mercier & Harold, 2003). The field of higher education is no exception. Women’s voices were omitted from historical accounts of the birth of the United States educational system (Cunningham, 2000; Meyer, 1967). Today, women comprise more than half the students in the country’s higher education institutions, yet to fully understand their experiences we need to go beyond quantitative methods and look at the people behind the numbers (Creswell, 2007; Digest of Education Statistics, 2008).

This chapter reviews and recognizes the value of qualitative research. Compared side-by-side with quantitative research, qualitative research has been recognized as a “legitimate form of science” that offers procedures acceptable in the realm of science (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008, p. 29). As Creswell (2007) articulates: “Qualitative inquiry represents a legitimate mode of social and human science exploration, without apology or comparisons to quantitative research” (p. 11). If we want to understand the phenomenon of women in higher education and what that experience entails, how they perceive leadership in themselves and others, we need to talk to the women who live this reality (Terrell & Gifford, 2005).

Theoretical Consideration

The purpose of this phenomenological study began with the intention of collecting voices of undergraduate women for a better understanding of their experiences with college leadership. This collection of voices is one effort toward addressing a lack of educational research articulating the experiences of college women. To assume that previous literature documenting experiences of college men is adequate for understanding college women would be incorrect (Henderson, 1996). In fact, to assume that one woman's experiences speak for all women is incorrect (Josselson, 1987). Each woman has something to say based on her uniqueness, and when given the opportunity to speak from her truest selves, a woman comes to understand her own realities (Gilligan, 1982).

The storytellers of educational history "traditionally ignored one half of mankind," causing the voices of women to be less audible than the voices of men (Cunningham, 2000, p. 273). This inequality of voices impacts the ongoing social construction of reality and promotes an unbalanced understanding of the experiences of each sex in education. Historical accounts are only one piece of what shapes perceptions of education; the remainder comes from the interplay between modern experiences the social construction of what those experiences mean to the people who lived them. Therefore, social construction serves as a theoretical framework for understanding the phenomenon of undergraduate women's experiences with leadership on their college campus.

Social Construction

Social constructionism focuses on the ways groups of people create a perceived reality (Luckmann & Berger, 1966). The emphasis is on the ways shared understanding is created, not on analyzing causes or effects of issues. It is an on-going process that continually re-shapes what is collectively agreed upon as real. This research claims a constructionist perspective that reality cannot exist without the individual acting as observer (Pitman & Maxwell, 1992). In inquiries guided by such a perspective, the researcher is concerned with understanding “the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live” (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). For the participants in this study, that process involves voicing their thoughts, following a tradition of allowing communication to serve as a “primary, constitutive social process” (Craig, 1999, p. 126). In other words, “when people talk to each other, the world gets constructed” (Burr, 2003. p. 8).

This epistemology is often compared with social constructivism and the ideas of educational theorists Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget (1960) regarding an understanding that “knowledge is constructed by interactions of individuals within the society” (Ben-Ari & Kedem-Friedrich, 2000, p. 154). This idea posits that social interaction is pivotal in cognitive development and that the “internalization of social interaction” leads to learning (Ben-Ari & Kedem-Friedrich, 2000, p. 154). This study does not ignore such ideas. This study does, however, draw more greatly on the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966), who argued that institutions like universities are socially constructed rather than

predetermined. Constructionism builds upon constructivist ideas with a great focus on the relational element of knowledge creation (Cronley, 2010; Gergen, 1993). Social construction centers more on an individual's interpretations of experiences within a context rather than the individual interpretive process itself (Papert, 1990). The constructivist idea that "knowledge is built by the learner, not supplied by the teacher" continues into the constructionist idea that knowledge is built "especially felicitously when the learner is engaged in the construction of something external or at least shareable" (Papert, 1990, p. 3).

The Role of Social Construction in this Study

The collection of voices of the participants brings light to the role of the social construction of students' perceptions of experiences. These students interact with their campus daily, thus leading to the role of that societal context in their knowledge creation (Burr, 2003). This is important because within that campus interaction, these students also engage with and internalize gendered norms that constrain their perceptions of academic, and ultimately, career success (Kinze, Thomas, Palmer, Umbach, & Kuh, 2007). External agents on campus, including official university-disseminated communications and informal campus politics, impact the campus society and the participants' "creative process" of the social construction of knowledge (Stacey, 1999, p. 18).

Focus groups will be employed to collect data, with the understanding that knowledge is created from interaction with others and that we know what we know because of these interactions (Ng, 2008). Again building upon the ideas of construction,

knowledge creation is not something that is done individually but rather in a group with other people (Gergen, 1985). In the study of social construction, it has been argued that “people take experience for granted,” meaning they accept what they see around them and their perceptions of what they see around them for granted (Fu-Lai & Man, 2008, p. 35). They stop questioning what they experience, which in turn gives the experience power over them. To encourage individuals to express themselves through language is to encourage them to examine their experiences in a given social context. Language is thus used as a collective tool to assist in “socially mediated interpretations” of shared experiences (Fivush, 2010, p. 89). Using a social form to gather data (the focus group) from within the center of the social context of the phenomenon of study (the college campus), the qualitative methodology presented in chapter three continues under the theoretical framework of social construction.

Selection of Qualitative Approach

With the purpose of collecting voices of undergraduate women as a means to discover commonalities of their personal experiences, a qualitative approach directed data collection and analysis for this study. The interpretivist paradigm guided this inquiry, as it focuses on “how people make meaning out of their lived, everyday experiences” (Duffy & Chenail, 2008, p. 30). The epistemological foundation of interpretivism argues that in order to understand reality, one must live it. In other words, we know what we know from lived experiences. Though interpretive research requires the researcher to use abstract thinking in the interpretation of participants’ expressions of

their experiences, it is vital that the researcher maintain objectivity to prevent biases from affecting analysis (Riehl, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The qualitative tradition relies on the researcher as the instrument for data collection and analysis, requiring characteristics including authenticity, intuitiveness, and sensitivity (Rew, Bechtel, & Sapp, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These characteristics highlight the interpretive nature of qualitative research, which focuses on the interpretation of participants' lived experiences rather than the creation of generalizable declarations that apply to all people (Riehl, 2001). From an axiological perspective, a researcher's values are central to the process of making meaning and must be identified to avoid bias (Duffy & Chenail, 2008). Understanding personal values is critical in establishing ethical results, particularly as an important consideration of this research tradition is that researchers regularly become "completely absorbed" in their work (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 6). (See later in this chapter for researcher subjectivities.) Phenomenology is one valuable methodology under the interpretivist paradigm.

Phenomenology as Methodology

Phenomenological research asks individuals to embrace the concept of research as "a search for wisdom" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). This methodology looks for meaning from multiple people based on their experiences with a phenomenon (such as leadership experiences on a certain college campus), allowing the researcher to describe commonalities of these participants consisting "of 'what' they experience and 'how' they experienced it" (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Phenomenology strives to eliminate any factors that might prejudice the experiences investigated and seeks to find the truth of a

phenomenon through a “transcendental state of freshness and openness” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). Its history of application in educational research to “preserve students’ voices and their lived experiences” provides justification for its application to this study (Arminio et al., 2000, p. 497).

Because this study sought to understand the essence of shared meanings through the understanding of individual experiences, transcendental phenomenology was employed (Barnard, McCosker, & Gerber, 1999; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Transcendental phenomenology focuses less on the researcher’s interpretations and more on the participants’ descriptions of their experiences (Creswell, 2007). Moustakas defined *transcendental* as “in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (1994, p. 34). While Moustakas has admitted that this state is difficult to perfectly achieve, it is a state for which to strive.

An element of intentionality exists within transcendental phenomenology, in which a person becomes intentionally conscious of something (Husserl, 1931). The knowledge that emerges from such intentionality requires a recognition that “world and self are inseparable components of meaning” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28). Another element of transcendental phenomenology is intuition, a primary tool a person uses to make judgments about the self (Descartes, 1977). Through both elements of intentionality and intuition, “all things become clear and evident through an intuitive-reflective process, through a transformation of what is seen” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32).

The data collected will be a result of the interaction between researcher and the participants (Fontana & Frey, 2003). As with other forms of qualitative research, the

researcher is the primary instrument for data collection (Merriam, 1998). As such, the interviewer must be a good listener and deliberately naïve to fully allow participants' lived experiences to emerge (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Strategic preparation must precede the interviews, including: crafting relevant questions, practicing the questions in pilot interviews and revising the questions as needed, selecting a comfortable environment for the interview, and securing reliable recording procedures (Creswell, 2007).

Historical and Institutional Context

In order to best understand the experiences of students, one must attempt to understand the historical and institutional context in which they live. The first institution of higher education in the home state of this study was founded in 1770, although it took years before enrollment of the state's men was a regular occurrence (Thelin, 2003). In 1811, the state of this laid the legal groundwork for state-wide public K-12 education. This public education was open to all White students, both men and women, yet the wealthy did not want their children exposed to the common folk, so a socio-economic division in education was formed (Meyer, 1967).

Military Heritage

Under the Land Grant Act of 1862, and with land donations from a prominent citizen, the institution of study formally opened in 1886 as a military college with an enrollment of 446 men. The Land Grant Act required institutions to offer military tactics and strategies, and most Land Grant universities elected to require young college men to enroll in ROTC during their first two years. This institution elected to go beyond this

minimum requirement to be all-men with a four-year military structure. It remained an all-White, all-men military college until 1955 when it changed to civilian status for students and began admitting its first full-time, degree-seeking women. This integration was in large part due to financial necessity; as young men returned from World War II, they did not want to enroll in a military college or in a college such as this that offered little in the way of family housing for these largely married men (Sams, 2006).

Enrollment decreased from 3,360 in 1949 to 2,690 in 1954. The Board of Trustees feared for the survival of the institution and saw the admittance of women as a way of remaining financially stable. The first degree granted to a woman by this institution was awarded in 1957 (Reel, 2006).

In these early years, the majority of women pursued degrees in education, liberal arts, and horticulture (Reel, 2006). Most students welcomed women co-eds, though there were stories of early women struggling to find places on campus to congregate and gain entry to classes taught by professors who refused to teach women (Sams, 2006). The number of women undergraduates was relatively small from 1955 to 1963, although not by the institution's choice. While the school administration began lobbying for gender integration through the building of a women's dormitory in 1944, the state legislature refused the request consistently with the argument that there was a women's college in relative distance and the state college was gender integrated. It was not until 1963 that women were permitted to live on campus when the first women's dormitory was built on campus (Reel, personal communication, November 29, 2010). In all, it was a "long, slow process" of integrating women into most aspects of the college (Reel, 2006, p. 20).

Greater Institutional Changes

The college encountered further changes in 1964 when the first Black student was admitted, and in 1965 when the college was renamed a university in recognition of its expanded academic offerings. This was a time of great changes; the institution was no longer all-men, all-military, or all-White, and it was growing in academic offerings and in enrollment. Without the structure of the military system, and with the growth in student enrollment, the need for systems to create student connections also grew. As the university historian observed, “there was no internal, vertical system that would tie a senior to a freshman. Students wanted to belong to something” (Reel, personal communication, November 29, 2010). Until World War II, students created regional clubs based on their hometowns, but this kept students from meeting new people once on campus. Thus began the movement to bring fraternities to campus. Prompted by student requests, the dean of students and the university president appointed a committee to assess the role of fraternities in 1959. The university historian noted:

“They came out with the conclusion that yes, with the lack of military, the infrastructures were so limited at the school, and the school was growing, and they were really worried, and rightly so, that the school would become an extension of high school, because all the Dillon County kids would stick together, and all the Mauldin County kids would stick together. That was not what they wanted. They wanted a more broadly based student body, and fraternity is one

way actually to achieve a broader base” (Reel, personal communication, November 29, 2010).

In 1959, the first social fraternities were formed: Sigma Alpha Zeta for men and Chi Chi Chi and Omicron for women. By 1968, there were nine men’s groups and three women’s groups. All were local, however, until students asked to affiliate with national organizations like other state institutions in their geographical region. By 1970, all but one group found the national organization with which it wanted to be connected. Despite a low Black student population, these students also felt a need for connections; by the mid-1970s, the first historically Black organizations came to campus: Omega Phi Psi for men and Delta Sigma Theta for women. From its beginnings, the Greek system was a significant part of the institution’s history. As will become clear in the results of this study, the Greek system still has a large impact on this campus environment.

The Institution Today

Roughly 2,223,349 women currently live in this state, representing 51.3% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The state’s education statistics show that women trail men in education, ranking 37th in the nation for women’s educational attainment and 40th in the nation for women’s career earnings (Williams, 2008). Nationally, women outnumber men in higher education enrollment by about 14% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009); however, this institution is an anomaly, as men outnumber women.

During the year data was collected for this study, 15,459 undergraduates were enrolled, 45% of whom were women (Fact Book, 2010). Out of 15,459 undergraduates,

23% are members of one of 40 national Greek organizations, consisting of three governing councils: the Interfraternity Council, the National Pan-Hellenic Council, and the College Panhellenic Council. Leadership is one of the Greek system's five stated values, along with unity, service, scholarship, and accountability. The value of leadership is defined for students by the Greek life staff below:

“We define leaders as brothers and sisters who have proven to be the best at setting examples. Leaders demonstrate good communication skills, responsibility, maturity; they have the ability to balance scholarship, service, and friendship in everything they do. We strive to be leaders not just in the Greek Community but around the Clemson University campus and community”
(Fraternity and Sorority Life, 2010).

Pilot Study

A focus group of five undergraduate women was conducted at the same four-year, public university that served as the setting for the overarching study. Broad demographics of the participants were collected to provide a better understanding of the participants; these included three White students and two Black students, with two sophomores, one junior, and two seniors. The rationale for conducting a pilot study was twofold. First, due to the large role of the researcher in qualitative methods, a pilot study allowed the researcher to practice conducting focus groups (Merriam, 1998). This included becoming aware of researcher subjectivities and actively working to keep such subjectivities from influencing the researcher-research relationship (Berg & Smith, 1988; Peshkin, 1988). Second, a pilot study focus group with members of the population

allowed the researcher to begin to understand the phenomenon to best recruit participants and prepare questions (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008).

Transcript-based analysis of audio recordings from the focus group was used as the primary analysis strategy, focusing more on commonalities spoken by the participants than the thoughts of the researcher (Anderson and Spencer, 2002; Morgan & Krueger, 1998). Two large themes emerged, with sub-elements within them. First, it became clear that participants defined student leaders as those who held leadership positions. Second, participants communicated societal pressures felt when accepting leadership responsibilities. Each theme is discussed further below.

Theme One: Positional Leadership

Participants spoke of leadership largely in terms of organizational positions and elected titles, such as president or vice president. When asked about student leaders seen on campus, they listed not names but titles, held in student government, Greek life, athletics, and student-led organizations. Still, having a title was not enough to earn the respect of these women; all five expressed frustration and even anger with individuals who held a title but did not take the responsibility seriously, labeling such individuals negatively as “resume builders.” A follow-up question was posed: *Are you leaders?* Three of the five women said they were leaders (with two as a definitive “yes” and one as an “I guess so”) and then listed positions they held in sororities and student organizations, and in one case with an on-campus job. The other two said no, they are not leaders. One self-proclaimed non-leader called herself “more of a mediator or team player,” while the other said she is “the helper. I like to get everything together but not have that title so it’s

not as much pressure if I don't get it all done.” (Of note: In later conversations with this “helper,” it was discovered that she is involved in a service student organization, an academic student organization, and holds an internship. Still, she did not think she was a leader.)

Participants voiced perceptions of gender's role on leadership, though the researcher intentionally did not ask about gender specifically to test if the subject would arise on its own. The subject arose in relation to characteristics of successful leaders. For example, one participant said, “I think males kind-of go with the flow,” while another participant said women “are planners. They have to make sure everything is, um, all the ducks are in a row.” One participant commented: “Women just can't let things go and men are just, like, okay I'll get over it in like two seconds. They can be more objective a lot of times.” Another added that men seek titles in their leadership roles with the intention of gaining “attention” and “recognition,” while women tend to “work behind the scenes.”

Theme Two: Pressure

The women voiced the perception that leadership equated to pressure to succeed, or alternatively to not fail. One woman said: “Sometimes it takes more responsibility and more dedication ... and more pressure. So a lot of people don't want to do that.” Another participant shared: “I don't even try because I think I'm going to fail already.” More comments included: “I feel like a lot of pressure comes from unrealistic expectations”; “You'll let others down too”; “You feel like if you're a leader you want to succeed and that's your goal, then you're, like, afraid to fail”; and “So many people are depending on

you. And, like, if something goes wrong, that's fine, whatever, but they're all going to be looking at you."

One comment led to a discussion of how all five felt pressure to say "yes" when asked to do things: "I think there's just a lot of gender expectations. I guess maybe people don't hesitate to ask you or you just feel like you're supposed to say yes." Others added: "I feel bad when I say no," "I feel like I'm letting you down," and "People always talked me into doing it." One participant further addressed the issue of gender in her comment:

In leaders it's common for the woman not to want to say no ... that's why they became leaders a lot of time, because they didn't choose it, because they didn't want to say no. And they end up doing a good job because they don't want to disappoint.

Significance of Pilot Study

Beyond providing the researcher with experience in conducting focus groups and providing a glimpse into the phenomenon, it was determined that more than five participants would be acceptable for future groups. It was also determined that a systematic method for collecting demographic data was needed; therefore, a voluntary demographic survey was created and approved by the institution's Institutional Review Board. The content of the group's discussion also provided significant direction in the study, specifically in the quantity and construction of questions. For the pilot study, the purpose for using multiple probing questions was to gauge the interaction of the participants and to judge if participants needed specific questions to prompt their

comments. Interaction flowed well and the participants did not appear to need such specific questions to share their experiences; so, in the spirit of phenomenological research, the larger study only used two general questions to guide discussion.

Participants and Data Collection

Students were invited to voluntarily participate in one of six focus groups. Criterion sampling was used to determine cases that met a “predetermined criterion of importance” (Patton, 1990, p.176). Here, the main criteria were sex and classification of undergraduate status. Participants were solicited from general education courses in the Department of Communications Studies at a Southeastern public, four-year research university to create a sample representing a cross section of students, including all majors and ethnicities. See Appendix A for full recruitment documents.

With a limited sample size on a campus of 15,459 undergraduates, generalizability was not a goal of the study. Rather, this study followed a central tenant of qualitative research by seeking thick descriptions of the phenomenon in its natural setting, with the understanding that reality and truth reside within the individual (Creswell, 2003). Still, such thick descriptions with regard to context might allow for select transferability to similar contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the end, the voices of this limited number of participants who share in a common experience in a given setting can ultimately lead to “enormous power” for all women students experiencing the same phenomenon (Seidman, 1998, p. 48).

Method of Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through focus groups, defined as “carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment” (Krueger, 1988, p. 18). The use of focus groups is effective in qualitative data-collection in various disciplines including education, with a format that allows for in-depth exploration of the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes across multiple groups of people (Glesne, 2006; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Patton, 1990). One advantage of such an approach is the “socially oriented” group environment, allowing participants to freely and naturally express themselves in a way that is more relaxed than the one-on-one interview (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 115). It is also important to acknowledge that this advantage can potentially alienate a participant who does not feel as if she identifies socially with her fellow participants, as discussed further later in this chapter in relation to social construction in data creation.

Multiple groups composed of participants who experienced the same phenomenon were held to yield patterns and trends across groups. Between six and 10 participants were sought for each focus group to make sure each group was small enough for each participant to feel welcome to contribute yet large enough to supply useful insights for analysis (Morgan, 1998). Thirty-five undergraduates women volunteered to participate in one of six focus groups, with the smallest group involving five women and the largest group involving eight women. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 21 years old. Non-traditional-aged undergraduates were not intentionally excluded from recruitment; however, no one over the age of 21 responded to the request for participation.

Each focus group was conducted on campus for ease of access for participants, in rooms that allowed participants to sit around a large table facing each other. Classroom settings were intentionally avoided in order to present a less formal setting that was open to dialogue. This informal setting removed the possible right-or-wrong answer feel that an academic setting might infuse. The researcher began each focus group with a review of the informed consent letter and the voluntary demographic survey (see Appendix B and Appendix D). After a welcome and an overview of the format, the researcher engaged in standardized, open-ended questions on experiences, behaviors, and opinions to invite discussion among the participants (Kreugher, 1988; Patton, 1990). The same open-ended prompts were used for each focus group. See Appendix C for full focus group questions.

The researcher must be well prepared to listen to the answers of current questions rather than think ahead to what should be asked next (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). The questions were established prior to the start of data collection with additional probing questions prepared in case participants needed prompting. The pilot focus group conducted in fall 2009 tested the scripted questions. The remaining focus groups were conducted in fall 2010, with the time in between used for literature review and applications to the Institutional Review Board. To ensure that the researcher allowed the women to share everything they hoped to share, each group concluded with a final question of: "Have I missed anything that you want to address?"

Description of Participants

Based on voluntary demographic information obtained before the beginning of each focus group, we know several demographic descriptions of the participants to provide a basic understanding of how this sample compared to the demographics of the undergraduate population at the university. (See Table 1.) Note that the demographics of the university population are for all undergraduate students, including men and women, while the participant sample consists of only women. Still, this comparison offers insights into how this sample represents the women on campus.

Table 1

Comparison of Demographics between Participant Sample and University Population

Demographic	Participant Sample	University Population
Ethnicity	91% White/Caucasian 9% Black/African-American	83% White/Caucasian 7% Black/African-American 10% Other
Residency	60% In-state 40% Out-of-state	70% In-state 29% Out-of-state 1% International
Class year	8% Freshman 9% Sophomore 40% Junior 43% Senior	21% Freshman 24% Sophomore 24% Junior 31% Senior
Age	8% 18 years old 11% 19 years old 40% 20 years old 41% 21 years old	Average age is 20
College	67% Architecture, Arts, Humanities 6% Business and Behavioral Science 3% Agriculture, Forestry, Life Sciences 0% Engineering and Science 15% Health, Education, Human Development 9% Undeclared	12.89% Architecture, Arts, Humanities 26.70% Business and Behavioral Science 19.83% Agriculture, Forestry, Life Sciences 27.06% Engineering and Science 12.97% Health, Education, Human Development .55% Undeclared

Looking at the comparison between the sample and the population, the two largest ethnicities of White/Caucasian and Black/African-American are represented at comparative rates. Other ethnicities represented in the population, such as Hispanic and Asian-American, are not represented in the sample. The sample was largely in-state, as is the overall population. Participants classified largely as 20- and 21-year-olds and as juniors and seniors; the population has an average age of 20 and is relatively balanced between the four levels, having a sample composed of more juniors and seniors and who

therefore had more time at college can be viewed as a positive to this study, as the greater amount of time with a phenomenon could yield greater insights. As for the college in which each participant studies, participants were overwhelmingly from majors within the College of Arts, Architecture, and Humanities and the College of Health, Education, and Human Development. One possible explanation might be that students studying in these colleges, which are more focused on the liberal arts than the others, were more interested in understanding cultural phenomena and therefore were more interested in volunteering for this study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began by reading the collective transcripts from each focus group to gain the holistic, global view that phenomenological studies require (Smith, 2008). From there, a systematic approach to analysis was used to ensure reliability. First, it was determined that phenomenology was the appropriate approach for the study by identifying the study as one that looks to understand several individuals' common experiences with a given phenomenon. The researcher then documented her personal experiences related to the phenomenon of undergraduate women's experiences with collegiate leadership before collecting data from participants who have experienced the phenomenon (Peshkin, 1988).

Transcript-based analysis served as the primary analysis strategy, with audio recordings of each focus group serving as the primary data source (Morgan & Kreuger, 1988). Using transcript analysis allowed the researcher to better keep personal experiences out of the findings, focusing more on commonalities spoken by the

participants (Anderson & Spencer, 2002). This ensured that words describing the experiences were those of the participants, not of the researcher. Still, as a member of the university community, the researcher attempted to remain aware of subjectivities during data analysis in an attempt to remain as unbiased as possible (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

When coding data in qualitative research, one must remember that “analysis is the interplay between researchers and data. It is both a science and art” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 13). Therefore, a thematic content analysis was applied to organize the data (Ritchie, Spencer, & O’Conner, 2003). As the transcripts were read and re-read, a clearer pattern of similar and dissimilar comments emerged. Through horizontalization, statements seen as significant in understanding experiences were highlighted (Moustakas, 1994). These statements were then given category symbols to break into “clusters of meaning” to identify emergent themes and assist with writing textual descriptions to synthesize the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). While this strategy is time-consuming, it allows for the most complete review of data (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). The researcher also journaled her experiences throughout the process to add an extra narrative element to the data (Moustaka, 1994; Smith, 2008). Finally, when writing the textual descriptions of the themes, the goal for the researcher was to present a description that allowed a reader to say, “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46).

Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

First, member checks were used to validate the accuracy of the data (Creswell,

2003). The coding process was discussed with a peer educated in scholarly research methods to improve its validity. To improve reliability of the coding process, this peer also served as an independent coder, applying the researcher-created category symbols to participant comments to ensure agreement (Gorden, 1992). When evaluating the data, the researcher remained aware of dangers in trying to generalize the experiences of these participants as the experiences of all undergraduate women, as illustrated by feminist movements (Steward & Phelps, 2004). The Black feminist movement also cautioned the overgeneralization of women, arguing for an expanded lens when studying minority women (Conversations with the Experts, 2001). The same expanded lens should be used for women from all backgrounds and is especially important when investigating diverse student bodies.

Focus groups center on the sharing of information, and therefore privacy is an ethical concern for researchers (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). First, to combat this concern, a statement of privacy was included in the recruitment documents, and this message was reiterated at the beginning of each group study. Second, each group was told prior to starting that the group would be recorded for data analysis and would not be shared with any other parties. Third, the researcher assured participants that their names and other identifiable characteristics would not be included in the study. Fourth, participants were asked to respect each other's privacy once they leave the room and to not share anything they learned with others outside of the group. (See Appendix B for verbiage shared with participants). To further protect the identities of each participant, the researcher kept all recordings and typed transcripts on a personal computer protected by a password login

with actual tapes locked in a desk drawer. All records will be destroyed after three years. The option to review transcripts and emerging themes will be extended to each participant, and each participant will be encouraged to share any concerns with the researcher.

Limitations

The choice of qualitative methods in this study led to limitations, largely due to the role of the researcher in data collection (Merriam, 1998). To combat this limitation, member checks were used for validity and reliability (Creswell, 2003). The same researcher presented structured, pre-planned questions to each focus group to attempt presentation of the same experience for each participant (Patton, 1990). However, the questions allowed for open-ended responses and included flexibility in allowing participants to voice themes not explicitly asked. Researchers taking a guided approach to questioning “will often find that interviewees will raise important issues not contained in the schedule, or will even summarize entire sections of the schedule in one long sequence of statements” (Denzin, 1970, p. 125). This method of data collection relies on the participants to be honest and forthcoming with their authentic voices, and data analysis assumes that such authenticity is embedded in participant comments. These questions and the process for coding data are outlined in this document in an attempt for transparency of methods.

The intention was to bring together a diverse mix of women to thread their voices together to discover previously undocumented shared experiences. Participant diversity was sought by recruiting participants in general education courses, which included

students from a variety of backgrounds, including school year, ethnicity, age, college of study, and state residency status. Even with this strategy, it would be highly unlikely that the sample would fully reflect the exact proportions of demographics within the larger undergraduate body. Also, this study does not account for experiences before college, which could significantly impact college leadership capacity (Sax & Harper, 2007).

Delimitations

The researcher imposed several delimitations on the study to set specific boundaries around the research. The location of the study occurred in a four-year, doctoral granting institution in the Southeast. Because the institution is co-educational, with the undergraduate class comprised of 55% men and 45% women, the results are likely different than would be expected at an all-women's college and potentially different than would be expected at a college with a majority of women. The sample was restricted to women as participants for focus groups, with focus groups kept under 10 in size to maximize participant comfort levels and encourage discussion. One and a half years was set as the boundary for the data collection, including one fall semester for the pilot focus group and a second fall semester for the collection of the remaining data.

Researcher Recognizes Her Role

The nature of social science is such that “findings are powerfully influenced by the relationship between the researcher and the researched” (Berg & Smith, 1988, p. 21). As the researcher in this study, I am aware of personal qualities that could affect how I view data (Peshkin, 1988). Peshkin likened these subjectivities to a “garment that cannot be removed” that have the potential to filter the way I view research (p. 17). My most

obvious intrinsic subjectivity is that I am a woman studying other women. My research setting is an educational institution, and I recognize the important role education plays in my life. Realizing this, my goal is to suspend “past knowledge and experience to understand a phenomenon at a deeper level” (Anderson & Spencer, 2002, p. 1341), allowing me to produce sound conclusions.

I received my kindergarten through sixth-grade education in public school in Columbia, SC, and I finished my middle and high school years in public school in Manassas, VA, on the outskirts of Washington, DC. My parents highly valued education and encouraged me to continue learning after high school graduation. I represent the third generation to graduate from college, earning communications degrees from James Madison University and Clemson University. This means that I am included in part of the privileged life of the educated, as US census projections estimated that in 2003 (the year between when I earned my two degrees), only 27% of United States citizens age 25 or older had attained at least a bachelor’s degree (Stoops, 2004).

As a woman born with rights fought for by first- and second-wave feminists, I bring to this study a third-wave feminist lens which is supported by the prospect of “more opportunities and less sexism” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, p. 83). Third-wave feminism is driven by personal empowerment, an understanding that each woman is unique, and a desire for social change (Kroløkke & Sørensen, 2006). I became aware of my feminist lens and my subjectivities as I began researching my work, and I understood the need to remain “meaningfully attentive” to them as I continued my research to be conscious of how it shaped interactions with my data (Peshkin, 1988, p.

17). I was careful to craft questions in my qualitative research in such a way as to not let subjectivities or beliefs interfere with the collection and analysis of information; through interviews, I was only the guide in the process so I could let the participants' views steer the research (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Another element of my background that affects my perspective is my race, particularly as I conduct research at a predominantly White institution. The majority of students on the campus identify as White, meaning I share a common demographic with the majority of the population. White privilege is an unacknowledged aspect of a larger social contract that emphasizes the ideals of the majority (Mills, 1997). This concept addresses power relations between people of the majority and everyone else, which is important to remember in education when the educator is part of the majority demographic (Noel, 2010). White educators carry with them racial privileges like tools and maps that guide interactions (McIntosh, 1989). These tools and maps are especially important to remember for an educators engaging in research with minority students. This element of White privilege goes even further in this study, as the institution has not been integrated for a very long time; it was all-White until 1965.

It would be unrealistic to expect a researcher who feels emotionally connected to her work to remain cognitively and emotionally distant from participant responses (Gilbert, 2001). To monitor my personal thoughts and feelings during the data collection process, I kept researcher notes. This allowed me to voice my own thoughts during the process without letting them interfere with the data collection or later the data analysis. The incorporation of such a technique was inspired by the increase of recent literature

that recognizes the emotional connection that qualitative researchers must have with their work and the resulting need for researchers to practice self-care as a means to avoid negative emotional responses to data (Rager, 2005). For example, when hearing women devalue their roles on campus, I felt emotional responses to their lack of self pride that I needed to address for my own self care, in a separate realm than my official data.

Summary

Given the goal of giving a voice to women undergraduate students in higher education to quilt together shared experienced, qualitative research methods offered the most appropriate means of gathering data. Transcendental phenomenology allowed for participants' descriptions of their experiences to guide the understanding of the shared experiences rather than the researcher's interpretations (Creswell, 2007). The institution of study and its home state have histories of men's domination in the education system, making this a prime location for the given study.

Thirty-five undergraduate women responded to a request for focus group participants to discuss their ideas on leadership development. Focus groups were employed to collect data in a manner that allowed individuals to openly express their ideas (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Each focus group contained an average of five or six students, with a total of 35 women. Strategic preparation preceded the interviews, including the following: crafting relevant questions; practicing the questions in a pilot study and revising the questions as needed; selecting a comfortable environment for the interview; and securing reliable recording procedures (Creswell, 2007). A systematic approach to phenomenological data collection and analysis was then used, including the

following: determining the phenomenon, bracketing my experiences with the phenomenon, collecting data in focus groups, and analyzing statements for emerging themes (Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). Transcript-based analysis served as the primary analysis strategy, using transcripts of the focus groups as the primary data source.

As a qualitative study, there were limitations, largely due to the role of the researcher in data collection (Merriam, 1998). Limitations were combated with member checks and having the same researcher present structured, pre-planned questions to each focus group to present the same experience for each participant (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 1990). Diversity of participants was sought by recruiting participants in general education courses, which included students from a variety of backgrounds to best represent the population. Delimitations set on this study included the location of the study at a four-year, doctoral granting institution in the Southeast and restriction to women participants. All data were collected over a span of one and a half years. The researcher also documented her subjectivities to become aware of her biases in an effort to keep them from impacting results. In the end, the methodology employed allowed for valid, reliable, and ethical data collection, leading to important results for this institution, as outlined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

“I feel like leadership is really vague or broad.
It’s funny how you can’t, like, define the word.”
~ *Study Participant*

This chapter presents findings from the data collection from the undergraduate women participating in this study. Comments from all focus groups were analyzed to form clusters of shared experiences to then illuminate common themes. This was accomplished by reading and rereading each focus group’s transcript and marking passages deemed as significant in the effort of “reducing the text” to begin constructing categories (Seidman, 1998, p. 100). Any comment that appeared to illustrate a participant’s experiences with or perceptions of student leadership were coded and then grouped by topic. Seventeen coded topics emerged from this process, leading in turn to five themes.

Emerging Themes

In total, 236 unique statements were identified as significant; this excluded comments of agreement (such as “yes” or “same for me”), experiences that did not relate to campus (such as experiences with parents or at church), and non-related comments (such as when the conversation strayed from the question). Coded comments were reviewed in the context of the participants’ full statements to confirm the participants’ overall meanings and therefore ensure their proper fit within the codes. Related codes were then grouped into five themes, representing concepts to guide the understanding of

the phenomenon of interest. (See Table 2 for a full list of all coded topics and the themes that emerged from grouping related topics together.)

Table 2

Explanation of Coded Topics and Related Themes from Data

Coded Topics	Themes
Traits of leaders Identification of leaders on campus Leadership positions in student organizations Visibility of leadership roles	Definitions of leadership
Difference between high school and college leadership Transition from high school to college Transition from first-year to sophomore, junior, and senior year Impact of age	Challenges of college-related transitions
Strong presence of student organizations Role of Greek life Role of peer pressure to get involved Role of peer role models Role of organized curriculum-based leadership opportunities Role of faculty advisers	Elements of the campus culture that affect experiences
Pressures and stress of leadership Time commitment of leadership	Costs of leadership
Formation of job skills Resume building experience	Benefits of leadership

Only two research questions were asked in each focus group. Despite the small number of questions, they inspired enough significant comments to allow five common themes to emerge among the participants. The first research question asked was: “How do you view student leadership on your college campus?” This generated discussions largely about what it means to be a student leader, whom they view as leaders on their campus, how leadership is different on campus than it was in high school, and the

campus culture that impacts their perceptions. The second research question asked was: “Please talk about your experiences with leadership since becoming a student on this campus.” While this question also prompted comments within the above three themes, it also generated discussions highlighting the costs and benefits of leadership. Each of these themes is explained in greater detail in this chapter.

The questions were posed in such a way as not to sway discussions toward gender differences, yet the participants used the closing statement (“Is there anything I didn’t ask that you would like to add?”) to touch on how men and women are perceived and/or treated differently. These comments hinted at issues relevant to a larger phenomenon in society. These final thoughts are also discussed later in this chapter.

Definitions of Leadership

The first theme that emerged reflected perceptions of how leadership is defined. Based on the definition of a student leader presented in chapter one, all the participants in this study were leaders. A leader refers to “any person who actively engages with others to accomplish change” (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006, p. 19). Yet, while this study assumed that “all students are potential leaders” (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996, p. 181), not all students articulated that they viewed themselves as leaders. Students who identified themselves as leaders did so by citing positions they held on campus as justification for this classification.

Participants appeared to equate leadership with holding a leadership position. When speaking of leaders they see on campus, they repeatedly mentioned not names but position such as presidents, vice presidents, or members of an executive board.

Underlining the idea of positional leadership was the idea of visibility on campus, meaning leadership roles required students to be in the public eye. One comment on sorority recruitment counselors echoed this thought, as well as the power such visibility can hold: “Girls like really look up to them as leaders cuz that’s the first person they interact with when they come to [this school] if they’re rushing. It’s not just their first impression of Greek life but also of [this school].”

Participants used positive adjectives to describe leaders, including: honest, strong, fair, confident, non-biased, and organized. They said leaders do what they say they will do, have a clear vision, and are team players. Participants shared traits of leaders that reflect transformational leadership: leaders are passionate, act as role models, earn respect from others, listen to others, and keep the lines of communication open (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). Other concepts shared included: “leadership is being involved”; the ability to “lead by example”; having “a sense of ownership in whatever you’re doing”; “taking responsibility”; being “able to stand up for what they think is right”; and “being proactive about something you’re passionate about.”

The idea of serving as a role model to other students also surfaced. In the words of one participant, student leaders need, “to relate to the rest of the student body.” Another said, “Being a leader isn’t just someone who speaks up at meetings or speaks up in the classroom but someone you like look up to.” When referencing a mentor role on campus, a participant added, “I’ve learned from that is you don’t have to be bossy about it or act like you’re better than someone else. It’s just the process of helping someone to

better themselves.” Other participants added their appreciation for having student leaders to go to rather than faculty, including this comment:

I’d go to a student with my problem more than like a faculty member or teacher cuz they’re near your age and they’ve probably been through what you’ve been through. I mean not saying a teacher hasn’t but they’re more on your level.

They’ll understand, like that’s leadership; you’re looking out for somebody as a role model too.

While students used leadership positions to identify student leadership, there were a handful of comments that articulated acknowledgment of a different, more collaborative leadership philosophy. These comments recognized the importance of being a part of the group being led. Select comments (including one below) referenced sex-based differences, using general terms to relate women to the concept of servant leadership, or serving others as a means of leading (Greenleaf, 1977). Comments included the following:

First comment: Even though you are, um, leading people, you are usually also part of, like, a group or a team and you can’t always think that you’re just gonna, um, get your way and everything’s going to be what you think. You also have to adhere to what other people in the group think.”

Second comment: It depends on, like, how you view what a leader is because, I mean, not having the position and title of president or you know, some big name, like doesn’t necessarily mean you’re not a leader. Just because you don’t hold an

executive position name, like you can still be a leader, um, maybe within a different subcommittee or something in the organization.

Third comment: I do notice that a lot of women are okay with being a leader that is behind the scenes that doesn't get the credit. But guys usually like the recognition and so if it's something pretty big or a big title, then they'll go for it.

Challenges of College-Related Transitions

Schlossberg's (1981) model of transitions stresses the diversity of different people experience transitions. Even if a transition is generally similar among people, such as the experience of transitioning from high school to college, the uniqueness of each person experiencing the transition leads to diverse outcomes. Dimensions impacting how a student copes with a transition include situation, self, supports, and strategies (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). People use different coping strategies when faced with transitions (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978); these differences require exploring transitions from the perspective of different students. As related to this study, feeling encouragement and receiving help from people who expect you to succeed can support an individual through the transition (Goodman & Hoppin, 1990).

Many participant comments highlighted the large impact of transitions on their experiences with student leadership, including the transition from high school to college and the transition from a first-year student to a sophomore, junior, or senior student. The challenges of the transition from high school to college and the importance of the first year in college are well documented (Levitz & Noel, 1990). Gender plays a role in this transition, though it is important to note that gender difference that are visible in college

started years before and come from various pre-college influencers (Sax & Harper, 2007). Experiences shared before entering this university and off campus were viewed as beyond the scope of this study and were not used in the formation of themes. However, such experiences by the participants did impact the study topic of the transition process from high school to college. For example, students from family environments that avoided expressions of emotions tend to experience greater difficulties adjusting to college than do their peers who come from expressive families (Johnson, Gand, Kerr, & LaValle, 2010). Had this study investigated pre-college family environments more deeply, we might have seen this reflected in this sample.

Comments about the transition to college focused on the total adjustment to living on one's own and accepting new personal responsibilities like laundry and cleaning. Participants also noted the new challenges of time management and the struggles they experienced as first-year students balancing school work with the demands of extracurricular activities. As stated by one participant, being involved in high school meant simply attending a "20-minute meeting after school ... but in college it's like a lot more interactive and you actually have to do a lot of stuff. So it's a lot more work, you know, more time in college." Another participant concurred, saying that involvement in high school required little more than just saying you were involved: "In high school you could be like, 'I'm in the fishing club.' Awesome. But it's not going to be like that in college." Participants agreed that they were more involved in high school because, according to them, it was much easier as compared to college.

Several participants noted the same struggles mentioned in this study's preface, going from a big fish in the small pond of high school to the suddenly much larger ocean of college. One participant said that she went to what she thought was a large high school with 1,800 students, yet when she came to college, she was struck by the thought that "this is just way bigger so it's just a lot to kinda be a leader." These comments prompted a discussion about how an adult was generally in charge of events in high school, and the process of learning to be in charge as students was an adjustment. Other comments regarding the impact of increased responsibilities in college have on participation in leadership activities included the following three:

First comment: With just, like, school, that takes up way more time than in high school. And then when you come home it's not like you have your mom there like, 'here's your dinner and your laundry's done and the whole house is cleaned.' Now it's like, you clean your whole house, you do your own laundry, you're cooking your dinner, so it's, like, you have a lot more responsibilities so it's like harder to be high up in the leadership.

Second comment: I feel like in high school I was like, you know, captain of this and like, you know, had a strong role in this, and different things. And now in college I feel like I'm so spread out and school takes up so much more of my time so I really, like, I'm still involved but I'm not so much a leader anymore.

Third comment: When I was in high school I used to be involved in, like, tons of things. It was easy to be in them and put them on a resume but like, now it's my first time having a position in my sorority and it's a lot more than you would have

ever thought it was, even if it's like a little position. You don't realize how much people put into, like, their organizations until you're like on the executive committee.

The transition from a first-year student to a sophomore, junior, or senior student was also noted by participants. Comments regarding their first-years were unanimously about either purposely avoiding leadership positions or only doing what was required of them by a class or participation in a Greek sorority. From there, comments showed reflection on the process of getting older. As one participant voiced, "To me it matters a lot, like, getting older. I feel like I need to be a leader." The concept of visibility mentioned in the first theme was also included by a participant: "Most of us are upperclassmen, right? I feel like, I mean in general, you're seen as leaders, like juniors, seniors are more visible on campus since we've been here." Another shared that during her first two years at school, she "just went with the flow" because she was still figuring out how to navigate college life. Other comments included the following three:

First comment: I think that it takes time to become a good leader. I know that, like, when I was a freshman and when I was a sophomore I wasn't really involved in a lot of different organizations because I had to, like, get myself together and get on a schedule and learn how to manage my time.

Second comment: I'm a sophomore and, like, I've figured out how to manage my time but at the same time I don't know how to. Like, leadership is a lot of responsibility and you have to be dedicated to that and doing your school work. I mean you can't half-way do it; people won't respect you.

Third comment: I think that is a reason I don't pay attention to a lot of it because I am a freshman and I'm, like, not used to college life and, like, managing my time myself and not like having to go to class and stuff. I feel like I don't pay attention to it because it would just be another thing on my plate.

Elements of the Campus Environment that Affect Experiences

A large number of topics that emerged across all focus groups involved the campus environment at the institution of study. Overwhelmingly, participants voiced the opinion that the campus encouraged extracurricular involvement. One participant simply stated, "I think the organization thing here is really important." Another participant noted the ease with which a student can join an organization: "Everyone's just so nice. You don't feel intimidated. You can just go up and say, 'Hey! I hear you're in this. Can I join you?'" While undergraduate student government arose in each focus group, participants noted other elements on campus that added to the campus environment of involvement, including participation in athletics, internships, and class-based curriculum and events that involve leadership.

This environment of organizational involvement connects to the ways participants identified student leaders (such organizational titles as presidents, vice presidents, and members of executive boards), as noted earlier in this chapter. However, this coded topic goes further than just involvement into the role of peer pressure to get involved. Other participants voiced a desire "to do more because there were so many people doing things," the "competitiveness" of involvement, and a fear of appearing "lame if you're not really in anything at all." Another participant noted, "You see all these people doing

these things and you want to get involved. You don't want to miss out." This peer pressure was viewed as a positive factor on students. One participant concluded, "If you surround yourself with people who are motivated, then probably they'll motivate you, too."

Comments related to the impact of Greek life on campus were copious. The role of sorority involvement was mentioned in each focus group, by both members and non-members of the Greek community. During data analysis, it was not just the identification of related significant statements but the vast number of comments that included words and terms like *sorority*, *Greek life*, *sisters*, and *Panhellenic* that indicated the importance of the Greek community on participants' perceptions of leadership on campus. As explained in chapter three, the affiliation with national Greek organizations began at this institution in 1970. Today, 23% of undergraduates are members of one of 40 national Greek organizations. Within the College Panhellenic Council, there are 10 chapters, and within the National Pan-Hellenic Council, there are four chapters for women of color.

One participant stated a thought common across groups: "We do have a pretty active Greek life that also provides a lot of opportunities for women to develop leadership skills and to have experiences." Another participant noted how involvement pushed her to be involved, stating, "I don't have a leader personality but having a position in the sorority makes you be a leader; you don't really have a choice." One focus group discussed the requirements for sorority members to be leaders in some manner, through requirements to be active in other campus organizations and to participate in a certain

number of activities each semester, including attending speakers and fulfilling service hours.

Participants commented on the specific ways in which sorority life encouraged leadership. One way occurred through required service hours supporting their and other chapters' philanthropic service projects, which, as one sorority member noted, "reflects well on all of us." Another way occurred through being a role model to younger sisters: "It can be as simple as like mentoring someone, or like in the sorority the big sister thing, even to like one other person." One more way involved accepting a leadership position: "You don't necessarily have to be president but you could be on the exec board of a sorority or something, and you could lead by that goal." This involvement also supported individual educational goals, as noted in the next section as benefits of leadership; for example, a participant mentioned a future career as a school teacher, so she took an executive position on her sorority educating new members, noting her choice to become "a leader in college in something that will be able to teach me a skill set for the future."

Two participants mentioned connecting their academic internship experiences to their sororities, which allowed them to become leaders. One mentioned learning about the planning of a golf tournament while interning at the local city Chamber of Commerce that was to support the Susan G. Komen Foundation. She went to the organizers and said: "I was like, 'you know, that's my sorority's philanthropy,' so like, I got my sorority involved in it, so you know, I kind of like took the initiative to do that." The other mentioned learning through her internship about a university program to teach of the dangers of texting and driving. She said:

Lots of college students do it, and it's, like, illegal now in [the city] and it's still like in the works. Like I'm really good about like not texting and driving. I've talked to all my friends about it. But my sorority is going to work with [the university]. They're trying to come up with voice technology and they're gonna try to make it available to all students, and in that sort of thing I again acted as sort of a liaison and got some girls in my sorority um, like, thinking about it, so kind of like being a delegator and letting my president know and all of that, so. It's just kinda cool.

The possible negative side of such a large Greek community on the campus is the exclusion of students who are not members. One non-Greek participant, who recognized being in the minority of the focus group, noted that she ignores the university's promotions of leadership activities and events: "A lot of it is about Greek stuff and I'm not in a sorority, so, um, I'll glance through it but I don't usually go to anything." Another possible negative is how the membership requirements lead to students feeling overlooked and overwhelmed. As another participant added, "I've witnessed that, not only in myself but in other people as well. I have very many friends that are completely overlooked, always running around and, you know, in this, and in a fraternity or sorority, and in this organization ..."

Costs and Benefits of Leadership

Participant comments illustrated themes of both costs of leadership and benefits of leadership. Overwhelmingly, students commented on the pressures involved in accepting leadership positions (which, as noted previously in this chapter, was largely

how they defined leadership). They often used the word “pressure,” building on that with related words such as “responsibility,” “accountability,” and “burden.” Participants also voiced the pressure they feel to accept tasks assigned to them in an effort to be agreeable. One student said she felt “obligated” to accept her current role in her sorority. Another said “I find it hard to say no. I feel like I’m letting you down.” Participants also voiced the stress they feel should they accept a task and fail, ultimately disappointing others, including: “There’s a level of, like, responsibility, like you’re the person that’s accountable. If there’s like a mistake made or something, you’re the one that’s responsible for it.” Comments included the following two:

First comment: There’s pressure. Like say you’re president of the student body, that’s like so much pressure on yourself like, I don’t know. I wouldn’t be able to do it because I would be afraid that I would, like, let people down and like not do a good job.

Second comment: I feel like you’re just the one person to blame because you are the leader and so let’s say you’re working on a group project. The whole group is coming together, you’re all putting together ideas and you’re all deciding what to do, but at the end if you fail, the group doesn’t fail. You fail because you’re the leader, so you’re the one everyone looks to even though everybody came together.

Another element within the theme of costs of leadership was the time investment required to be a leader. Connected to the theme of transitions, some discussed the surprise they experienced when accepting a leadership role: “I also think people don’t realize how much work goes into being a leader on a college campus. It’s so much, it’s

so much more work than people think.” Participants collectively cited other priorities for their time such as classes and homework; a few also cited priorities such as part-time jobs and their “social life.” The time demands of leadership activities were viewed as so intense that “it’s almost like an extra-curricular in itself.” One participant elaborated on her time demands:

It’s just like I work, and doing the mentoring, and I’m a double major, so I’m like, it’s just very hard ... there are so many things like in the emails that I’m like, ‘ah, I’d like to do that or be involved in that,’ but it’s impossible.

Even given the costs, students also recognized the benefits of leadership while in college, largely in building resumes and gaining experiences related to future careers. For example, one participant noted that the treasurer of her sorority is usually a finance major because it looks good on her resume and because it gives her hands-on experience dealing with money. Connected to the element of time constraints, one participant noted that if she were to invest her time in accepting a leadership position, she wanted to make sure it benefited her in the future and that she would “somehow be able to use it on my resume.” Another participant noted the benefit of accepting multiple tasks in teaching time management: “I mean, if you’re busy, it kind of keeps you on track for what you need to do.”

Role of Gender

Though the questions were posed in such a way as to not sway discussions toward gender differences, the participants touched on how men and women are perceived and/or treated differently, a concept repeatedly addressed by both leadership and communication

researchers (Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie, & Reichard, 2008; Yukl, 2006). In one focus group, two of the five women mentioned an issue relevant to a larger societal phenomenon of how parents designate chores to children differently based on their sex, including assigning domestic chores to daughters and yard chores to sons. Students mentioned feeling expectations to do more for their families than they perceived their brothers did. When asked who put such expectations on them, all five women joined in the discussion, voicing the origins of the pressure largely coming from themselves and alluding to the larger society beyond family and their college campus. Their comments include the following two:

First comment: A lot of times it's just, like, social stigma because society will just look at you [as a woman] as incompetent, or just like, 'they can't bounce back' or 'they don't know what they're doing at anything,' and they just, like, fail.

Second comment: And if you're in a club position, you're kind of looked at being, like, challenged, because they think, 'she might not, like, be able to handle what she's doing.' And if she fails that's even worse cuz she's a woman.

Gender arose in certain comments within focus groups in regard to perceptions of inherent gender-based differences, as illustrated by these two quotations:

First comment: I think males kind of go with the flow. Females want, like, to plan everything out to the T. It has to be perfect, but males are just like 'if it happens it happens, if it doesn't it doesn't.' They don't feel that pressure that females do.

Second comment: Maybe it's because women are involved in more organizations, like we can balance it all, like to be involved in a lot more organizations. Guys tend to do just one or two and really get involved, maybe that's what it is. And we like to be multi-taskers and have a lot of responsibilities in different areas. I know for me I'm involved in a lot of organizations and I know a lot of my friends are, too, that are girls. And then the guys tend to have like one or two and stick to, and I'm like floating around.

One participant, who identified herself as president of her sorority, noted a difference between men and women members in Greek life. First, she noted the tendency of women leaders to try to make everyone happy with a desire "to hear all their opinions" and the challenge that women leaders "tend to kind of like be a follower even though they're a leader of their chapter." She added that fraternity men are "more vocal about what they believe in" without needing to ask each member for his opinion. She went on to add:

It's just my experiences, but especially with like all the sororities and all the fraternities, but I think that normally the girls tend to respect the leaders a little bit more. And I tend to think that they, like, tend to take them a little more seriously, so I guess that's kinda an advantage for me.

The closing question of "*Is there anything I didn't ask that you would like to add?*" prompted a very interesting discussion in one focus group about a lack of woman-to-woman support inciting strong agreement from the others. One participant even referenced the "evilness of women" to hold each other back from success. Another told a

story of not voting for a very qualified woman in her sorority's elections because the candidate made her mad over an unrelated personal matter days before the election. They mused that women are evil toward each other because "women hold more grudges" than men and "women can't let things go." Even with the recognitions of this problem, no one was able to offer a recommendation as to how to eliminate such contention. This gap in what women say they seek but do not receive (woman-to-woman support) warrants further attention, and is addressed in chapter five.

Portrait of an Undergraduate Woman

Through these focus groups, a portrait of today's undergraduate woman at this institution emerged. She is smart and conscientious, very involved, and highly driven to succeed. At the same time, she is overbooked, stressed, faced with the anxiety of transitions during this time of life, and constantly comparing herself to others. It was the impression of an overwhelming sense of pressure that stood out to the researcher during this process, as noted in her research notes kept during the process:

These women spoke about such major pressure and stress in their lives—and they are only in college. If this is what they feel NOW, what will they feel when they graduate and are responsible for all their bills? When they have demanding bosses and full schedules? Families? Cars that break down? Roofs that need replacing? This is a huge epidemic. I'm so glad I am looking into this issue and allowing these women to share their thoughts. It appears therapeutic for them to share their concerns and to realize that they aren't the only ones who feel pressure. I can relate, of course, but as the researcher I can't show them this. It is ironic, though,

that now that I see how big an issue ‘pressure’ is for our women, I feel massive pressure to do them justice with my research and to use this research to make positive changes on our campus on their behalf. (See Appendix E for full researcher notes.)

While communication patterns and observable behaviors were not part of the formal research process, the researcher notes hinted at the presence of feminine communication traits identified in gender and communication literature such as hedging, using verbal ticks such as *um* and *like*, and adding qualifiers to their comments (Tannen, 1990). Participants used phrases like, “Well, I don’t know, but ...” which made the researcher wonder how the campus community could instill more confidence in its young women when voicing their thoughts and opinions. Because participation was voluntary, the researcher noted an assumption that “the participants were there because of their personal interest in leadership and their desire to positively impact their campus; therefore, given those assumptions, their passive non-verbal expressions did not fit my expectations.”

Discussion of Social Construction in Data Creation

Had the participants in this study been interviewed individually, consequently removing the social element of the data collection process, the data results would likely have been different (Glesne, 2006). With individual interviews, the participants would not have had the ability to engage in back-and-forth discussions and to build upon the voices of others when discussing their experiences. Because the participants in each group used language to establish commonalities of experiences and to negotiate shared

understanding of these experiences, the use of focus groups proved to be an effective method of collecting data for this study (Glesne, 2006; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Patton, 1990).

Using this “socially oriented” group environment for data collection allowed participants to freely and naturally express themselves (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 115). Providing open-ended prompts also allowed the participants to explore their personal perceptions and to take control in guiding the discussion as they desired (Kreugher, 1988; Patton, 1990). When analyzing the data for emergent themes, it became clear that social construction played a role in the collective experience of creating shared understanding from their experiences, thus illustrating the role of social construction as the theoretical framework for this study.

In the previous section, the portrait of today’s undergraduate woman became clear only after the women came together as a group, began to build rapport, and opened their true voices to each other regarding their challenges with leadership. The social element enabled a perceived safety in sharing initial thoughts to test how they would be received, and once they saw that their thoughts were received without negative consequences, the discussions built. For example, in one group, a woman tentatively stated, “I wish I was a leader, but I’m working on it. Maybe next year,” followed by tentative laughter at her vulnerable admission. To ease her obvious apprehension of how her statement would be received, another woman jumped in with, “I mean, it’s hard to find time!” Then another: “There’s a level of, like, responsibility, like you’re the person that’s accountable.” This back-and-forth led to a longer discussion on challenges to becoming a leader, which

might not have been realized without the acceptance and the social construction of knowledge that the focus group atmosphere allowed.

In a separate focus group, another sequence of comments illustrated the social construction of knowledge with back-and-forth discussion. One woman began a discussion with: “When everybody’s involved in so much, you feel, like, lame if you’re not really in anything at all. It’s like ... ‘I’m involved in like eight things!’ And you have to answer, ‘Oh, I’m like in nothing.’” This was followed by: “Yeah, like, ‘I go to class!’” The next woman stated: “Yeah, it’s weird. It feels like everyone’s involved in something, like Greek life, or just anything, student government and all this stuff.” A fourth woman added: “For me, it’s, like, especially with all the emails we get, like it’s almost like an extra-curricular in itself ... Whenever I see something like that I think, oh, do I have enough time for that?” The participants gave verbal and nonverbal agreement to her question, and they continued on to construct a shared understanding of the peer pressure they perceive on their campus to become involved.

In another example, a woman simply stated: “I feel bad when I say no.” The use of the word *bad* was not very descriptive, but after receiving two verbal agreements, she continued by elaborating: “I feel like I’m letting you down.” The next woman added: “Then people, like, guilt trip you. They don’t mean to. But they do.” This was followed by more verbal agreement and then: “And you’ll let others down too.” And next: “I think we all want to look good in everyone’s eyes.” By expressing agreement and encouragement toward their peers, the women were able to work together to express their

individual perceptions of their experiences with a phenomenon and then together create a shared reality of what it means to be an undergraduate woman.

While social construction illustrated the ability of the groups to use language to negotiate shared understanding of common experiences, it cannot be ignored that other elements could have affecting the social interactions. Individuals entering into a focus group at a predominantly White institution who identify as a minority might feel on the outside of the group and its process. Black students on PWIs often report feeling isolated, alienated, and excluded from their college environment (Lett & Wright, 2003). This feeling of isolation leads students to struggle academically and socially, often earning lower grade point averages and dropping out of school at higher rates than their White peers (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010). A recent qualitative study that explored experiences of Black undergraduate women identified the complicated feelings these students feel on a PWI; one student's thoughts are shared: "When you're around people who aren't like you, me being a black woman at college, and then being in a predominantly white school, I feel like . . . you have to prove yourself" (James & Marrero, 2010, p. 13).

Such feelings of isolation coupled with a need to prove oneself could affect how a Black student would interact in a setting such as a focus group. Because the majority of the students in each focus group were White, any Black student could view the group as an extension of the overall environment of the PWI and therefore not be as authentic as the researcher intended. The very goal of replicating the population, which exists as a PWI that has only been integrated since 1965, could unintentionally replicate an

environment that mutes the voices of the minority. This study does not analyze the role of race in how participants responded beyond recognition of demographics and institutional history; yet to fully understand the experiences of each participant, future research should be planned in such a way to take pre-existing descriptors like race into the study design and analysis.

Using this “socially oriented” group environment for data collection appeared to allow participants to freely and naturally express themselves (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 115). Providing open-ended prompts also allowed the participants to explore their personal perceptions and to take control in guiding the discussion as they desired (Kreugher, 1988; Patton, 1990). Though researchers can never be fully confident that each participant shares as freely as intended in the research design, it appeared during data analysis that social construction played a role in the collective experience of creating shared understanding from their experiences, thus illustrating the role of social construction as the theoretical framework for this study.

Summary

The pilot study outlined in the previous chapter identified two large themes: the definition of a student leader as one who held a leadership position and the societal pressures felt when accepting leadership responsibilities. The study outlined in this chapter with 35 participants supported and added to these two themes. Comments voiced in response to the two research questions, “How do you view student leadership on your college campus?” and “Please talk about your experiences with leadership since becoming a student on this campus” led to the emergence of five overall themes. These

themes included the following: definitions of leadership, including traits of leaders and identification of leaders by their leadership roles and their visibility on campus; elements of the campus environment that affect experiences, including the role of student involvement on campus, peer pressure to become involved, and Greek life; challenges of college-related transitions, including transitions from high school to college and from a student's first year to her later years of school; costs of leadership, including pressures and time commitments; and benefits of leadership, including creation of job skills.

Though the questions were posed in such a way as to not sway discussions toward gender differences, the participants voiced their perceptions that men and women are treated differently. They alluded to a larger societal phenomenon regarding how families raise their children and how daughters perceive feeling higher expectations for offering domestic support, which was interesting but beyond the scope of this study. This did, however, lead to a discussion of how they understand that much of the pressure they feel is self-placed. Today's undergraduate woman appears to be smart, conscientious, very involved, and highly driven to succeed. She is, at the same time, overbooked and stressed. Throughout the focus groups, participants shared the importance of peer mentors and role models, yet they also noted a lack of woman-to-woman support. This lack of such support is addressed in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

“Leadership is finding something you’re interested in and trying to take charge of it and wanting it to succeed.”

~ *Study Participant*

Leadership development is critical in a person’s life, and the leadership experiences gained during a person’s college years create a foundation for life-long development (Astin & Astin, 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998). A growing number of universities have recognized the importance of the college years on personal and leadership development and have thus expanded college-sponsored leadership experiences for students (Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005). This study documented participants’ recognition of university-sponsored leadership experiences at their institution, yet their comments indicated that offering campus programs does not ensure that students will see these programs as relevant to their lives. It would behoove institutions to regularly engage in research asking students about their experiences to gauge perceptions of how the campus environment supports or hinders student leadership.

Nationally, only six out of ten college students graduate within six years (National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education, 2005). The current six-year graduation rate for students pursuing bachelor’s degrees at this institution is above the national average at 77.4%, yet this still shows room for improvement (Commission on Higher Education, 2010). In this age of increased attention on college retention, the concept of student success is paramount (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). If

students view themselves as successful, they are more likely to persist and graduate. If students feel connected to their institution, they are also more likely to persist (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). The notion that a student's involvement in curricular and co-curricular activities positively impacts a student's success, and therefore retention, is not new (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). What might be new, however, is the idea of asking students their perceptions of the curricular and co-curricular opportunities on campus in order to engage them in the process of evaluating effectiveness. The hope is that the current study provides one step toward achieving this higher retention through a better understanding of student perceptions.

Role of Social Construction

The voices of participants brought light to the role of social construction of students' perceptions of experiences. A constructivist perspective is one that acknowledges that reality cannot exist without the individual acting as observer (Pitman & Maxwell, 1992). In inquiries guided by such a perspective, the researcher is concerned with understanding "the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). For these participants, that process involved voicing their thoughts, following a tradition of allowing communication to serve as a "primary, constitutive social process" (Craig, 1999, p. 126). In other words, "when people talk to each other, the world gets constructed" (Burr, 2003. p. 8).

Based on educational theorists Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget (1960), social interaction is pivotal in cognitive development. In short, when a person interacts with

others within a society and experiences the “internalization of social interaction,” learning occurs (Ben-Ari & Kedem-Friedrich, 2000, p. 154). We know what we know because of social interactions (Ng, 2008). The students in this study interact with others within their campus daily, thus leading to the role of that society in their knowledge creation (Burr, 2003). This is important because within that campus interaction, these students also engaged with and internalized gendered norms that constrain their perceptions of academic, and ultimately, career success (Kinze, Thomas, Palmer, Umbach, & Kuh, 2007).

Relational Leadership

The concept of social construction relates to leadership largely through the relational leadership model, as both highlight the role of human interaction. As identified in chapter two, leadership is by nature a relational concept (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006). Analysis of context is a critical element of relating to others when working toward a common goal, and this context is established by the values we place on relationships (Wheatley, 1992). Given the context of their campus, participants in this study appeared to value peer-to-peer relationships at a high level; however, their comments suggested that the context of their campus did not readily provide opportunities for such relationships. Relational leadership challenges a leader to be purposeful, inclusive, empowering, ethical, and process-oriented, a challenge that should be applied to college students, as its necessity to be “inclusive of people and diverse points of view” (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006, p. 74).

Discussion of Emerging Themes

The quilt of voices produced by the 35 participants in this study created a picture of the leadership experiences of undergraduate women at a four-year, public university in the Southeast. Five themes emerged across all focus groups: definitions of leadership; challenges of college-related transitions; elements of the campus environment that affect experiences; costs of leadership; and benefits of leadership. When evaluating the themes together, it appears that the university would benefit from a peer mentoring program to connect incoming undergraduate women to women who have established themselves at the university. This program is explained in detail in the next section. Each theme is discussed separately below in relation to its significance to previous research, to the overall campus and student population, and as it relates directly to the suggestion of a peer mentoring program.

Suggested Initiative: Peer Mentoring Program

The holistic view of the patchwork of voices inspired the suggestion of a university-wide peer mentoring program to connect incoming undergraduate women to women who have established themselves at the university. Woman-to-woman peer mentorships would also address participant comments from this study regarding a lack of woman-to-woman support, creating relationships to foster support and understanding among women and work toward breaking gender barriers. Such student-to-student interaction has been positively correlated to one's perceived growth in leadership abilities (Astin, 1993). Providing role models, as these mentors would be, has also been connected to

student success (Arminio et al., 2000). In particular, mentoring programs have been empirically shown to support student integration into their campus environments (Bean & Eaton, 2001).

Survey data and interviews conducted with students across 70 institutions to discover what made students “thrive” illustrated that students did not consider themselves to be thriving in college unless they were in positive relationships with others (Schreiner, 2010, p. 3). Dugan’s (2006) research with college women supported the implementation of woman-to-woman peer groups, arguing that undergraduate women as peer leadership educators not only develop personal leadership skills themselves but also serve as role models for others. Such peer-to-peer mentorship could also fill the “advising gap” that exists between what students need and what faculty advisers offer them (Rosenthal & Shinebarger, 2010, p. 24). Peer mentors can also address personal issues that either students do not want to broach with faculty or faculty do not feel comfortable discussing, thus serving other roles like advocate and “cultural guide” (p. 25).

To be successful, a mentor program would need to be available to each incoming undergraduate woman, and the program must begin from the beginning of the student’s first semester (Bean, 2005). The program would need some structure, such as agreement to a certain number of meetings a semester between mentor and mentee with special focus on a new student’s first month at school. Yet the goal would be for the relationship to eventually turn into a friendship, which is a necessary part of a student’s social integration into a campus (Bean, 2005). One perceived possible barrier to the formation of friendships between mentees and mentors might be the competitiveness that exists between women (Tanenbaum, 2002). However, this competition is “learned behavior”

and can therefore be unlearned (p. 40). A peer mentor program is an opportunity to help women unlearn it.

Several considerations must be reviewed before designing such a program. First, a campus program must encourage continuity in order to fully support student development (Chickering, 1993). Therefore, once the program is implemented, it must remain consistent in its offerings to students. Second, the balance of power must be considered when crafting a formal mentoring program's philosophy, as there is a relationship between "the very design of mentorship programs and their inherent reliance on power differences" (Bay-Cheng, Lewis, Stewart, & Malley, 2006, p. 87). This power difference could put one person in the role of expert over the other and possibly lead to greater power struggles when the ultimate goal is create a supportive network. Third, students should also be a part of the planning of the program. When participating in the creation of a program, people feel a sense of ownership over it, use it more, and are motivated to take better care of it (Patton, 1997).

Definitions of Leadership

Overwhelmingly, when asked to identify student leaders, participants mentioned not names of students but names of elected organizational titles: presidents, vice presidents, or executive board members. Students who identified themselves as leaders did so by citing elected positions they held on campus, while students who identified themselves as non-leaders did so by citing their lack of elected positions. Participants highlighted the importance of visibility among the student body when identifying leaders, a perception that has lasting implications. Adult women occupy corporate positions with

lower levels of visibility than men, which negatively impacts cultural perceptions of women's leadership abilities (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003).

Defining student leadership within an organizational context and in relation to elected titles is not uncommon for college students (Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005). However, while these identifications lean toward a positional definition of leadership, the traits participants used to describe student leaders suggested a collaborative, transformative leadership paradigm (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978). They described leaders as a person who is honest, strong, fair, confident, passionate, holds a clear vision, is a team player, serves as a role model, earns respect from others, listens to others, and keeps the lines of communication open. This suggests that perhaps any curricular efforts to teach a transformative leadership style to students has made progress in shaping their knowledge of leadership, yet the campus environment is still enforcing norms that equate elected organizational positions to leadership.

Put simply, there appears to be a disconnect between what is taught at the university regarding leadership and what is embodied by the students. Still, participants noted that simply holding a title does not ensure effective leadership; one must also possess an aptitude for serving as a role model. Participants noted finding role models in sororities in the form of the "big sister" and in groups formed in classes to complete an assignment. The desire for having role models in their lives, an idea voiced by several participants, holds promise for a more structured form of role modeling in the form of the peer mentoring program. This concept of role models would impact this participant

theme by encouraging a broader understanding of the definition of leadership that views all students as potential leaders (Higher Education Research Institute, 1996).

Previous researchers have called for greater efforts by university administrators in educating students about the various ways to be a leader, specifically the ways to lead without a position (Shertzer, Wall, Frandsen, Guo, Whalen, & Shelley, 2005). Part of the training process for mentors could follow this call by including a discussion on leadership, similar to the one held in these focus groups, yet concluding with a research-driven presentation on transformative leadership models. One model recommended for college students poses leadership as relationship-based, meaning it is not individually owned and is open to anyone regardless of elected position (Rogers, 2003). If the mentors in this program personify a model such as this, its values would likely be passed to their mentees, thus making an attempt at campus-wide impact on student perceptions of leadership.

Challenges of College-Related Transitions

Many participants voiced their personal challenges relating to the transition from high school to college and the transition from a first-year student to a sophomore, junior, or senior. Comments related to the transition from high school to college focused on the total adjustment to living on one's own and accepting new personal responsibilities, like fulfilling domestic needs of cleaning, laundry, and cooking. This supports previous research that even "mundane" tasks such as learning to wash one's clothes can be daunting for traditional-aged, first-year students (Bowman, 2010). Participant comments also illustrated the challenge of time management and the struggle of balancing school

work with the demands of extracurricular activities. Tinto (1998) highlighted the importance of the first year on a student's retention, and if these new students had peer guidance to model how to deal with these transitional challenges, they might be more likely to persist to graduation.

If this suggested peer mentor program began during a student's first semester in college, such an initiative would support this theme in several ways. First, establishing a connection to an older student would address participants' comments regarding how large this university feels after coming from a smaller high school by giving students automatic connections from the first day. Meeting a mentor and other program members before classes begin would benefit first-year students, who especially need to care for their social development for overall well-being (Leafgren, 1990). Involvement in this structured program could help even the most shy first-year student to gain confidence and make social connections with new people by forcing them to make connections and avoid isolation.

Second, having older students to look to as role models would provide new students examples of how to balance the demands of college and even, perhaps, to engage in leadership experiences. For first-year students of both sexes, feeling a connection to a person at their school who knows them well and who they believe genuinely cares for them is among the most important elements in navigating the transition to college (Levitz & Noel, 1990). Undergraduate women in particular report significant "connectiveness needs" to others in order to aspire to leadership, and peer mentor programs would be one way to provide such needed connections (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003).

Third, the mentors would gain leadership experience by guiding their mentees and would fulfill the internal need expressed by certain older participants to give back to their school. Quantitative assessment of leadership styles supports the argument that undergraduate women are well suited to serve as role models for peers because they favor social change values of leadership (Dugan, 2006). Once these mentors establish relationships and receive positive feedback from their leadership, they could feel increased self-confidence, which would positively impact their own educational goal attainment (Bean, 2005). Collectively, these reasons show benefit for both mentors and mentees.

Elements of the Campus Environment that Affect Experiences

An educational environment holds a powerful influence on student development (American College Personnel Association, 1996; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Participants in this study voiced perceptions of their campus environment as one that encouraged extra-curricular involvement (Astin, 1993). They went so far as to say there was peer pressure on campus to become involved in extra-curricular activities. Because participants viewed the holding of an organizational position as leadership, these opportunities for positions should not be removed; however, the campus should continue to educate students regarding the potential for all students to be leaders. One environment-based outcome to seek might be to conduct a campus-wide leadership education initiative to help all students identify their leadership abilities. This initiative should be consistent in its delivery to all students and work toward a non-gendered idea of leadership.

Comments related to the impact of Greek life on campus were overpowering. The role of sorority involvement was mentioned in each focus group, by both members and non-members of the Greek community. Participants commented on the specific ways in which sorority life encouraged leadership by providing opportunities to develop leadership skills, requiring members to be active in other campus organizations, and serving as role models to younger sisters. Due to its prevalence on this campus, the Greek system should be investigated further to learn practices that can be mimicked in a peer mentoring program and to establish partnerships with sororities so a university-wide peer mentoring program is not seen as irrelevant to sorority members who already have “big sisters.”

There exist possible risks of the large role of the Greek community on this campus that could be addressed by a mentor program. First, non-Greek participants voiced opinions that women on campus who are not affiliated with a sorority are excluded from many leadership opportunities. These non-Greek students would now have another supportive environment to seek leadership. Second, although not mentioned by these participants, student leadership research has identified risk factors associated with Greek students, largely related to alcohol use and abuse (Leichliter, Meilman, Presley, & Cashin, 1998; Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005). Part of the training process for mentors could include workshops teaching healthy ways to handle stress and how to seek help for substance abuse when needed. The bottom line is to use what already exists on campus (a strong Greek presence) and to build on its strengths while learning from its weaknesses.

Costs and Benefits of Leadership

Students overwhelmingly commented on the pressures related to leadership, both the pressure to accept leadership responsibilities and the pressure to not fail once engaged in a leadership role. College students, including those in this study, struggle with how to ask others for help when they feel overwhelmed by pressure, instead carrying their burdens alone (Loeb, 2010). In a 2003 study of 213 college women, students reported fear of being harshly evaluated by peers as negatively impacting their leadership aspirations (Boatwright & Edigio, 2003). Perhaps this fear is one reason women tend to seek informal leadership roles such as facilitator or organizer as opposed to elected leadership positions (Northouse, 2007).

Another element within the theme of costs of leadership was the time investment needed as a leader. Participants collectively cited other priorities on their time such as classes and homework, and a few also cited priorities such as part-time jobs and their “social life.” The perception of not having time to be a leader relates to research on adult women who also report a lack of time for leadership due to domestic responsibilities (Crawford & Unger, 2000). If the struggle to find time to seek leadership responsibilities starts in college and continues into adulthood, it would benefit students to learn time management skills in college for life-long results. While the participants cited time constraints as the reason they did not participate in many leadership courses, programs, or events, they did show awareness that they exist; therefore promotion of such opportunities does not appear to be problem.

Despite these costs, students still recognized the benefits of leadership while in college, largely the benefits of building resumes and gaining experiences related to their future careers. One participant addressed her challenge of finding time for leadership by noting that if she plans to invest time in a leadership position, she wants to make sure it gives her skills to be useful in her future. The comments regarding costs of leadership outnumbered the comments on the benefits of leadership, yet the fact that students were able to identify the personal advantages of leadership shows promise for future student interest in university leadership initiatives.

A plethora of educational research highlights the benefit of activities like community service and extracurricular involvement in student leadership development (Dugan, 2006; Montelongo, 2002). When students actively participate in activities on campus, they feel more connected to their campus (Noel, 1987). They also experience greater amounts of overall “student learning and personal development” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 36). The experiences of these women support this body of research and the continuation of involvement opportunities by universities. However, the majority of studies investigating out-of-the-classroom participation do not offer racial or gender breakdowns of samples and therefore do not tell us what differences lie between demographic lines (Montelongo, 2002). As research continues in fields related to women and their ability to speak their voices and embrace their leadership abilities, we need to incorporate these elements to gain a greater understanding of the college experience.

Future Research

This study only touched the tip of what needs to be explored regarding undergraduate women and their leadership experiences on college campuses. As campuses continue to devote resources to the objective of developing student leadership in its students, the interest in what practices are most beneficial will also continue to grow (Shertzer, et al., 2005). The suggestion of two main areas of future research resulted from this study. These areas include the continued examination of the increasingly diverse students who enter college and an understanding of the role of faculty in student leadership. Each is expanded upon below.

Understanding Diverse Student Bodies

The students who enter college today are more diverse than ever before (American College Professionals Association, 2007; Commes & DeBard, 2004). With the growing diversity of age, residency, sex, ethnicity, sexual identity, work status, and family status comes the growing need for research that recognizes the unique experiences that result from such diversity. The majority of studies investigating out-of-the-classroom participation do not offer racial or gender breakdowns of samples and therefore do not tell us what differences lie between demographic lines (Montelongo, 2002). We need further analysis of the conditional effects of college, or how different things affect different groups of people (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998). In the second volume of *How College Affects Students*, Pascarella and Terenzini admitted to their first edition as being “strongly biased toward ‘traditional’ White undergraduates, ages 18-22” (2005, p. 2). Even research focusing on girls and women has until recently been focused

only on those classified as White and middle class (Erkut, Fields, Sing, & Marx, 2002). The need exists to investigate how race and gender intersect in relation to leadership, including the concept of “two strikes” that women leaders of color experience due to perceptions of both their sex and their race (Arminio et al., 2000, p. 506).

There is an overabundance of research about leadership, in all facets: traits, characteristics, what works, what does not, who is successful, who is not. Yet this existing body of research largely centers on adults in the workplace, not students (Dugan, 2006). This gap should be addressed with future research, given that leadership education and development has historically been a core function of higher education in preparing students for their futures (Astin & Astin, 2000). In one of the few studies devoted to leadership and college students, Dugan (2006) illustrated the gap between leadership in business and leadership in college with the discovery that students relate more to the post-industrial leadership that focuses on social change rather than industrial leadership that focuses on management and control. In order to effectively investigate this gap, more student-based data collection instruments must be created, as today the instruments currently used on college campuses are principally built from the business and organizational sectors and therefore do not adequately address this population (Postner, 2004).

Faculty Interaction

Comments voiced by participants focused on the impact of their peers, with few comments voiced regarding adult interaction in their student leadership process. The role of academic advisers was discussed in only one focus group, and the perceptions were

mixed; one participant saw her relationship with her adviser as clearly negative while another (from a different college within the university) saw her relationship as clearly positive. The element of faculty involvement could not be generalized for this participant sample let alone the entire population and therefore was not addressed in chapter four. However, this element does appear to be worth future study because attention from faculty members has appeared lacking at larger, public institutions (Kuh, 1999; Pascarella, 1985). Traditionally, faculty responsibilities to students outside of class have been restricted to helping students understand academic rules (Baker & Griffin, 2010). We must learn how to engage faculty because, as Kuh (1999) noted, “given the importance of faculty-student interaction to many desired outcomes of college, it stands to reason that student effort will decline if faculty effort also declines” (p. 115).

A review of studies examining student-faculty interactions indicated positive outcomes for either sex, though university administrators should not assume that the outcomes for either sex regarding certain practices are equal (Sax, Bryant, & Harper, 2005). One difference is identification with faculty; men tend to report identifying with faculty at a greater rate than women, perhaps because more university faculty are men. In fact, one advantage cited for attending an all-women’s college is the positive interactions between students and faculty, with students reporting higher frequencies of interactions and higher levels of feeling appreciated than counterparts at co-educational institutions (Kinzie, Thomas, Palmer, Umbach, & Kuh, 2007). This is especially important to consider as women appear to use faculty interactions to seek validation in order to achieve personal well-being more than men (Sax, Bryant, & Harper, 2005).

With the understanding that undergraduate women benefit from strong role models, we need future research investigating the challenges women faculty experience in higher education. Women still suffer gender inequity in higher education (Curtis, 2004); this merits investigation not only for their benefit but for the impact they can have on the undergraduate women with whom they work. The struggles for women in higher education are numerous, with many showing parallel themes of pressure and struggles with gendered norms to those expressed by students (Halpern, 2008; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004; Williams, 2004). If we can help women faculty and staff understand how to balance work and life, they can in turn model balance for their students. One way to do this would be to employ the research methodology implemented in this study with faculty and staff members. This would allow for better understanding of the full picture of gendered experiences in this environment.

Summary

Experiences during a student's college years provide a foundation for life-long personal and leadership development essential for future success (Astin & Astin, 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998). Based on the definition of a student leader presented in chapter one, all participants in this study could be viewed as leaders: "any person who actively engages with others to accomplish change" (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2006, p. 19). Because each student is capable of being a leader, university leadership initiatives must be consistent in message and available to each student.

The constructivist perspective acknowledges that reality cannot exist without the individual acting as observer (Pitman & Maxwell, 1992). The quilt of voices produced by the 35 participants in this study shows an image of their socially constructed reality in the form of five common themes: definitions of leadership that focus on position held; challenges of college-related transitions; elements of the campus environment that affect experiences, particularly the encouragement of organizational involvement and the role of Greek life; costs of leadership, including stress and time constraints; and benefits of leadership, including application to their futures. When evaluating these themes together, it appears that the university would benefit from joining a growing number of universities that are expanding college-sponsored leadership experiences for students (Logue, Hutchens, & Hector, 2005).

The suggestion made here for a peer mentoring program would connect incoming undergraduate women to women who have already established themselves at the university. Such a program would allow older students to personify a leadership model that views leadership as relationship-based and open to anyone, moving students away from the perception of leadership as equating to an elected position (Rogers, 2003). It would give incoming students (as mentees) a support system for dealing with the challenges of transitions from high school to college and older students (as mentors) a way to build leadership skills by serving as role models. For all students, the mentor structure would support connectiveness to the institution and provide a means for being active in a campus environment that encourages involvement. Having mentors would

also allow models for maximizing the benefits of leadership and a sound adviser with whom to discuss costs of leadership.

From the research in education, communications, and psychology cited in previous chapters, we know that the environment does not always support men and women in the same fashion. After this investigation, we are better informed of how undergraduate women view leadership on their college campus and their personal experiences with student leadership. Though future research is needed regarding the increasingly diverse student body and the role of faculty in student leadership experiences, this study provides a better understanding of how undergraduate women perceive leadership on their college campus. By being given the opportunity to use their authentic voices to address this phenomenon, the participants in this study helped to begin filling the void of women's voices in educational research and to inform the university of ways to support their leadership development.

EPILOGUE

*“What would happen if one woman
told the truth about her life?
The world would split open.”
~ Muriel Rukeyser,
Kathe Kollwitz, 1968*

What a vivid conclusion to this complicated poem by visionary poet and activist Muriel Rukeyser: “... the world would split open (1968).” Certainly, it would. If each of us shared our truest story, the world as we have known it would split open, allowing a broader picture of who we are, collectively, to emerge. If women added their voices to the quilted history of our world, future generations of girls might no longer be regarded as “other.” The power of a woman's voice cannot be underestimated.

Yet speaking with complete authenticity is not easy, and to compound the problem, it is not always encouraged. This is a shame, because from what I saw through this research, once women feel comfortable sharing, their voices come alive. Through their voices, they learn about themselves, their peers, and their world. They return to their worlds more connected and self-aware than before they opened their mouths.

About those worlds ... what pressures they hold! Tangible or imagined, inflicted or self-imposed, these pressures are a part of our undergraduate women's lives. If they feel immense pressure as college students, what might their futures in the “real world” be like? If we do not teach them in college how to manage pressure, when will they learn? It has been said that education is both a mirror to see one's self and a window to see the world (Style, 1988). What better time than one's college years to learn to use authentic voice to understand yourself and your place in your world.

Generations before us fought for the rights we have today, and for me, the gratitude I feel toward them comes a burden to honor them with my actions. What a strange reaction to the courage of women who blazed the path for me: to feel indebtedness toward them while also feeling great responsibility to not let them down, to not thwart the forward progress of women in society that they set into motion.

I suppose each generation feels its own pressures, which in turn impact their experiences. We can only hope that with time, the work of each generation builds on that of the one before to help the world split open and reshape the way we see gender in all aspects of life. My mother, to whom I feel great gratitude toward for her courage and perseverance in education (and a duty to make her proud as I continue her legacy), did not find college the most welcoming place for women. Still, she pushed forward and can now reflect on how her tenacity benefited more than just herself:

I have no regrets, however, about my years at Clemson. Every movement has to start somewhere, and I like to think that my baby steps of becoming the first woman in my family to earn a college degree helped lead to my daughters becoming the successful professional women they are today. They are so much smarter than I was at their ages, and so much better at maneuvering in the world of men. And who knows? Maybe when my 2-year-old granddaughter reaches college, issues of gender equality will be so obsolete that she won't have to cope or maneuver. She'll simply have to be herself to succeed. We can only hope. (D. Priddy, personal communication, November 10, 2009)

Here is to the future. Here is to hope.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Recruitment Documents

To be read by Announcer:

I want to announce a study being completed by Professor James Satterfield and Carrie DuPre at Clemson University. They are seeking volunteers who identify as sophomores, juniors, or seniors, 18 years of age or older, to participate in a focus group study that is examining:

How Female College Students View Leadership and
their own Leadership Potential

Volunteers will be asked to participate in focus group interviews of approximately 6 participants to discuss the perceptions of female students regarding leadership. They are trying to get approximately 25-30 volunteers to participate in the study and each participant will get to choose their time and group of participation as well as whom the interviewer will be.

Any individual who is interested in participating in the study, please contact Dr. Satterfield or Carrie DuPre at:

James W. Satterfield
(864)656-5111
satter3@clemson.edu

Carrie DuPre
(864)360-0017
cpriddy@clemson.edu

Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter

Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study, Clemson University:
How Female College Students View Leadership and their own Leadership Potential

Description of the research and your participation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by James W. Satterfield and Carrie DuPre. The purpose of this research is to understand the perceptions of female students regarding leadership and reaching personal leadership potential.

Your participation will involve participation in a focus group interview in which you will participate with 4-5 other female students. During this interview, the group will be asked open-ended questions related to the purpose of the study. The interviewer will guide the interview by asking for clarification on statements made throughout the focus group interview process. The amount of time required for your participation will be approximately 90 minutes. The interviewer will audio-record the session for analysis purposes. All recorded materials will be kept in a locked file unless being used to transcribe the recording and will only be accessible by the investigators of the study. The tapes will only be transcribed by the investigators into a Microsoft word/PDF document to be used for thematic coding of information. During the transcription process, each individual will be assigned a separate and unidentifiable name to protect the participant's privacy. Federal regulations indicate that research data (in this case, the recordings or a transcription of them) be kept for a minimum of three years following completion of the research study until which all audio transcriptions will be destroyed. The members of the research team will not use the recordings for purposes other than those specified in the consenting process, unless additional consent is secured prior to any additional use. Please understand you may be contacted for a follow up interview.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. I hope this study will help university leaders strengthen the campus environment to support female student in reaching their leadership potential. If you have any further questions, please contact me at 864-360-0014 or you may email me at cpriddy@clemson.edu.

Risks and discomforts

There are no known risks associated with this research.

Potential benefits

There are no known benefits that would result from your participation in this research. This research may help ways to improve the campus environment for developing leadership potential and abilities in female students.

Protection of confidentiality

All information used and recorded for this study will be protected to ensure participant confidentiality. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. All records will be kept on a password-protected home computer of the investigator and coded to ensure the confidentiality of each participant. Your identity will not be revealed in any publication that might result from this study. Although the researchers will be responsible for the recorded and written material, we cannot guarantee that focus group participants (those with you in the interview) will maintain the confidentiality of other participants. Therefore, we request that all participants of the study to respect the confidentiality and privacy of others who take part in the groups.

In rare cases, a research study will be evaluated by an oversight agency, such as the Clemson University Institutional Review Board or the federal Office for Human Research Protections that would require that we share the information we collect from you. If this happens, the information would only be used to determine if we conducted this study properly and adequately protected your rights as a participant.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact James W. Satterfield at Clemson University at 864-656-5111. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Clemson University Institutional Review Board at 864.656.6460.

Consent

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study and agree to the audio-recording of my interview.

Participant’s signature: _____ Date: _____

A copy of this consent form should be given to you.

Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

Welcoming Comments:

Review consent forms, thank participants for their attendance, mention of confidentiality, and explain the format of the focus group. Explain that individuals might be contacted individually after the focus group for an interview to clarify comments.

General Questions:

1. How do you view student leadership on your college campus?
2. Please talk about your experiences with leadership since becoming a student on this campus.

Supplemental Questions:

Questions about leadership:

1. What words would you use to define leadership?
2. Who do you see as being the most-visible student leaders on our campus? Names aren't necessary; you can identify them by any other means?
3. What are the characteristics of student leaders you view as "effective?"
4. What are the characteristics of student leaders you view as "ineffective?"
5. Can a student NOT be a leader, and if so, than what is he/she?

Questions about perceptions of personal leadership:

1. Are you involved in any leadership on campus?
2. Describe any *in-the-classroom* experiences you have had that *taught* leadership.
3. Describe any *out-of-the-classroom* experiences you have had that *taught* leadership.
4. Describe any *in-the-classroom* experiences that have *helped you grow* your leadership abilities.
5. Describe any *out-of-the-classroom* experiences that have *helped you grow* your leadership abilities.
6. Tell me about any non-student (or adult) leaders on campus you look to for support? You don't need to use names.
7. What situations or places on campus help you as students feel comfortable sharing your thoughts and ideas?

Concluding comments:

Have I missed anything that you want to address?

Remind participants of confidentiality and thank them again for their time.

Appendix D

Focus Group Demographic Survey

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this voluntary focus group, How Female College Students View Leadership and their own Leadership Potential. Your identity will be confidential in any research associated with this focus group; however, I do ask for your voluntary response to several demographic categories to better explain the group of participants as a whole.

Thank you for your consideration!

Ethnicity: I classify myself as a:

- White/Caucasian
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic
- Asian-American
- Other _____

Class year: I classify myself as a:

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Age: _____

College in which I am majoring:

- Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences
- Architecture, Arts and Humanities
- Business and Behavioral Science
- Engineering and Science
- Health, Education and Human Development
- Undeclared

My “home” is:

- In-state (in South Carolina)
- Out-of state (outside of South Carolina)

Appendix E

Researcher Notes

Pilot Study

Initial Thoughts

The pilot study went really well! I was nervous before it started, making sure I had the room set up in a way that would let the women feel comfortable, eat, spread out and relax to some degree but still be close enough to catch their voices on the recorder. I did a test-run on the recorder to make sure it worked but I was anxious about the idea of it not working when I really needed it and losing all my data. I decided to jot down notes as the women spoke so at least I'd have something to fall back on in case technology failed. I didn't know if the women would want to talk openly, but I was pleasantly surprised at how well the focus group flowed. I haven't transcribed yet, but I just know that I have good data.

I knew going into the group that I needed to watch my non-verbals. I made sure not to nod my head too much to inadvertently imply that a woman was giving me correct answers—I certainly did not want anyone to perceive that there were right or wrong answers. I also made sure to make eye contact with each woman to show my interest in what they had to say. I noticed that when the women spoke, they mostly looked at me unless it was a “you know what I mean” type of comment. I'm not sure if this is good or bad or irrelevant. I originally liked the idea of focus groups in that the knowledge is created socially, though perhaps with this gender/age group, sharing personal thoughts also requires gaining approval from others—so when I didn't give the “right/wrong”

feedback, they looked to each other. I was pleased that there was a time when one woman disagreed with another woman; that showed me that the focus group setting could yield real thoughts and not just feed groupthink.

After Transcription

I was so relieved the recorder worked. I used a digital recorder I already had so I was able to upload the file into iTunes and that worked really well. (For my master's thesis interviews, I had a hand-held cassette recorder, which seems so old-school now.) After listening to the recording I realized that next time I need to offer less-crunchy foods! I had soda and cookies, which weren't a problem. (The cookies were a big hit.) But I also had a snack mix, and I could hear it in the recordings! It didn't interfere with the process but I could see how it could make for a really weird problem to have to write in my dissertation. They don't tell you this stuff in Creswell's books!

Transcription took such a long time. I expected it to take hours, but it was a slower process than I anticipated. I'm glad I will be entering into the main data collection with real expectations so I can allow for enough time to get it all done. I'm not sure yet if I'll do the transcription myself or if it will be worth the money to pay someone to do it for me. I actually really liked doing it myself this time because I felt like I really knew the data. When trying to figure out themes, the data was very "real" to me and I felt the themes popped off the page. I'm not done yet, but so far it looks like the idea of positional/non-positional leadership will be a major theme, as will the intense fear of failure/pressure the women feel.

These women spoke about such major pressure and stress in their lives—and they are only in college. If this is what they feel NOW, what will they feel when they graduate and are responsible for all their bills? When they have demanding bosses and full schedules? Families? Cars that break down? Roofs that need replacing? This is a huge epidemic. I'm so glad I am looking into this issue and allowing these women to share their thoughts. It appears therapeutic for them to share their concerns and to realize that they aren't the only ones who feel pressure. I can relate, of course, but as the researcher I can't show them this. It is ironic though that now that I see how big an issue "pressure" is for our women, I feel massive pressure to do them justice with my research and to use this research to make positive changes on our campus on their behalf.

Fall Data Collection

Initial Thoughts

I decided to not hire someone to transcribe the recordings, partially due to financial constraints but mostly because the recordings were difficult to understand. I found myself having to repeat a track over and over to get several voices. If I had not been there for the groups, I don't think I could have understood all the words. One Clemson faculty member told me that research was sounder when someone independent of the research transcribed, but after hearing how inaudible some of the tracks were, reading more on methods, and talking to Pam, it seems like there are benefits to both ways. I'll just be sure to clearly tell my readers how I proceed through analysis. Plus, I actually enjoyed it before, the whole process of getting closer to my data. Now it's just up to me to find the time!

During the focus groups, I noticed the stereotypical feminine communication traits such as hedging, using verbal ticks such as *um* and *like*, and adding qualifiers to their comments. Often, I found myself listening to phrases like, “Well, I don’t know, but ...” and wondering how we as a community can instill more confidence in our young women when expressing their thoughts and opinions. I also noticed non-verbal characteristics such as looking around at peers before offering comments and speaking softly, even in a small group. By volunteering to attend these focus groups, and by the comments made regarding their own experiences on campus, I assumed the participants were there because of their personal interest in leadership and their desire to positively impact their campus; therefore, given those assumptions, their passive non-verbal expressions did not fit my expectations.

After the first couple groups, I’m seeing that the idea of pressure is a constant. As a researcher, I find myself excited that I have a large theme emerging, yet conflicted because this theme is not something positive in the lives of these women. How can I be excited about discovering how overwhelmed our students are? These students are spread so thin. I hear my students in class competing over who got less sleep, who hasn’t had time to eat ... very “whoa is me” stuff. The women weren’t competing in the focus groups, but I see the same stress. I was surprised to see high school coming out in these women’s’ stories, how they weren’t prepared for the new demands placed on them. Do we do enough to help our first-year students transition into college life?

Also related to the high school thing, the women see a connection between their high school activities and their college applications but not between their college

activities and their future jobs. This looks like a larger problem than just gender roles or higher education. Does K-12 and higher education present leadership as a means to an end (like admittance to a school) rather than a means to growth? Are we helping our students translate their activities into resumes and talking points in job interviews?

After Transcription

Again, I was so relieved the recorder worked. I used the same digital recorder but I did notice more difficulty understanding all the comments. However, I only had a few comments I had to note “inaudible” for some words in the comments. I view this as a huge success! I had to tell myself as I was transcribing to just type what I heard and to WAIT to put them into groups for themes; I found myself getting excited about what I was seeing emerge on my computer screen. The last day, I spent seven hours straight finishing the transcription because I was so pumped about finishing this phase so I could move on to the next.

I have begun grouping comments into six different documents based on like comments. The things that struck me initially were still there: pressure, stress, transitions. I also grouped comments that defined leadership and described traits/characteristics. I also noticed an expansion on the theme of positional leadership; participants identified visibility as an element of leadership—often on the part of positional leadership but also on the part of more servant leaders like mentors. I find that a positive outcome from the women, something we can grow on at Clemson.

A couple other things struck. First was the huge role of sororities in the lives of women—both the women in them and the women not in them. It looks like sororities

and Greek life have a huge impact on the campus culture. (I include an overview of the institutional setting in the early chapters, but I plan to expand upon the impact of culture in the final chapters.) Second was the frequent use of the word responsibility with a negative connotation. It is like a bad word for these women, one that implies stress, possible failure, crowded schedules, and isolation. Third was that the women see lots of communication of what's happening but feel they have no time to even read the email let alone do the thing it's promoting.

I feel proud of the data I've collected, of the work I've done for this research. I feel a huge relief that my data is collected so no matter what happens next in my personal/career life, I can feel freer to leave Clemson. I know that the analysis and writing phases will take dedicated time, but I know I can do it—I'm excited to do it. At the same time, I feel anxiety that my work will not be as widely received as I hope. I know my committee will scour the work and help me make it great, and I know they will be open to learning from it to better their experiences with students. Beyond that, I hope that others (student affairs, academic affairs) will be open to learning from these voices and incorporating new practices to better serve this population. I have to tell myself that not everyone is as excited about my research, but man, these students are telling us things they need! If we would only shift our culture to LISTEN more, we could make huge, positive impacts on today's students and tomorrow's leaders.

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