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Women in Positions of Influence: Exploring the Journeys of Female Community Leaders

Mary Pflanz

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, mlpflanz@yahoo.com

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By

Mary L. Pflanz

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Exploring the Journeys of Female Community Leaders

Mary L. Pflanz, Ph.D.

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Adviser: Marilyn Grady

Although the leadership norm continues to be male-oriented, more women are occupying positions of leadership in our society. The prevalent question has shifted from whether or not women can lead to how effectively they lead. To better understand the effectiveness of female community leaders, this qualitative research study explores the common features in the paths of women who have attained leadership positions. The stories of these women were derived by conducting ten interviews with women who are in positions of leadership within their communities. The interviews used open-ended questions to elicit personal responses from the interviewees, and phenomenological methods were used as a guide for analysis. Six core themes emerged from the statements collected in the interviews. The experience of female leadership includes issues of: power vs. influence, inciting change, role models, challenges and obstacles, self-efficacy and identity, and effectual styles. The journeys of these women are explored in concert with existing literature in the area of female leadership. Implications for career advancement, gender stereotyping, and role models for women in leadership capacities are highlighted in this study. The approach is one of constructivism, thereby making sense of the perspectives of female leaders through a feminist lens.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

Research Issue

Since more women are occupying positions of leadership in our society, the prevalent question has shifted from whether or not women can lead, to how effectively they lead (Northouse, 2007). The leadership norm continues to be male-oriented, which may lead to gender stereotypes among female leaders and keep women from attaining high-level positions (Coleman, 2003).

This phenomenon has long been referred to as a "glass ceiling," implying a barrier that is impenetrable to women. In her book, *Through the Labyrinth*, Alice Eagly challenged the nature of this metaphor. She argued that the implications associated with the glass ceiling are no longer prevalent in our society. Rather, the concrete wall and the glass ceiling have been replaced by the labyrinth—a navigable, yet still potentially challenging route to leadership (Eagly, 2007).

Eagly offers seven reasons why the glass ceiling metaphor is misleading:

> 1. It erroneously suggests that women have equal access to entry-level positions.
> 2. It erroneously assumes the presence of an absolute barrier at a specific high level in organizations.
> 3. It erroneously suggests that all barriers to women are difficult to detect and therefore unforeseen.
> 4. It erroneously assumes the existence of a single, homogeneous barrier and thereby ignores the complexity and variety of obstacles that women leaders can face.
> 5. It fails to recognize the diverse strategies that women devise to become leaders.
> 6. It precludes the possibility that women can overcome barriers and become leaders.
> 7. It fails to suggest that thoughtful problem solving can facilitate women's paths to leadership. (p. 7)

Within this construct of the labyrinth, we can more effectively study the nature of the paths

women take in their pursuit of leadership positions.

The reasons women choose to be leaders, the ways in which they approach leadership, and the barriers women encounter on their leadership journeys are interrelated concepts within the broad topic of female leadership. Also to be considered are the reasons why women choose to remain in leadership positions. How do their roles as leaders affect them as well as those whom they lead?

Previous researchers have examined the experiences of women involved in community leadership. The backgrounds of these women as well as their challenges in community involvement have been addressed (Bond, Holmes, Byrne, Babchuck, & Kirton-Robbins, 2008). Other researchers have studied the existence and effects of stereotyped roles in society when it comes to female leadership. The results of studies show that leadership is still associated with stereotypical male characteristics such as aggression and independence. These characteristics, however, may or may not result in effective leadership.

The results of this study support the interconnected nature among reasons, effectiveness, and definition of success concerning female leadership. Characteristics of women who lead were examined to discover both how and why women lead. Further, in examining these issues, barriers or challenges to the leaders' effectiveness surfaced. This connection with societal attitudes has added to the stories of leadership told by the women involved in this study.

The paths of female leaders are better understood by examining: (a) the reasons why women choose to become leaders, (b) their personal leadership styles, and (c) society's attitudes concerning female leaders. This broadened understanding enhances recognition of leadership characteristics, encourages young women to pursue positions of leadership, and moves the world toward elimination of gender biases and stereotypes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to: (a) explore the reasons why women lead, (b) examine the characteristics these women possess, (c) discover ensuing challenges and barriers, and (d) describe successful leadership, as defined by the participants. Women in management or upper level positions in the community were represented in this study.

Research Questions

The above issues led to the central question of this study: *What are common features in the paths of women who have attained leadership positions?* Sub-questions of this study included: *1) How do women decide to take positions of leadership? 2) What are the barriers that women must navigate in their positions of leadership? 3) What are some transformational moments in the lives of these women? 4) How do women in positions of leadership define success?*

These sub-questions framed a worldview that is constructivist in nature. The participants shared their responses to open-ended questions thus guiding the path of the research. Although this study was not necessarily one of advocacy, it did promote a feminist lens through which to view the experiences of female leaders.

Definition of Terms

A *community leader* refers to a person (for this study—woman) who takes responsibility for the well-being and improvement of the community through her job or involvement within the community.

The *constructivist worldview* implies that the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of the participants. In this study, the journeys of female leaders, as well as the definition of success, will be described and determined by the participants.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Research on gender and leadership has focused primarily on the concept of the glass

ceiling. Women face the challenge of responding to stereotyped expectations of male leadership

characteristics. Many of the current studies focus on leadership styles, the context of leadership,

and career progression.

Leadership Styles

In her study on the orthodoxies of leadership, Coleman (2003) stated that "gender may

not be a determinant of style, but it has an influence on the self-perceptions of men and women

as leaders and on their own professional and social experience" (p. 337). Although style may be

defined by individual differences rather than gender, many studies reveal the influence of gender

on methods of leading others.

Defining leadership styles can be difficult since there are as many leadership styles as

there are people who see themselves as leaders (Addy, 2001). The motivations of women

determine their methods of leading. As Kezar (2000) pointed out in her study on pluralistic

leadership, "women's leadership is associated with a more participatory, relational, and

interpersonal style as well as with different types of power and influence strategies that

emphasize reciprocity and collectivity" (p. 7). Many other factors also need to be considered

when analyzing the styles of female leaders; issues of race, ethnicity, ability, status, and sexual

orientation make issues of leadership more complex (Chin, 2004).

Kezar (2000), in her study of pluralistic leadership, focused on diverse voices within

college and university settings. She held that "women and people of color tend to have

nonhierarchical views of leadership, whereas those of white men tend to be hierarchical" (p. 8).

Research on how and why women become involved in leadership indicates that women who remain engaged in leadership positions reap various rewards (Bond, Holmes, Byrne, Babchuck, & Kirton-Robbins, 2008). The authors noted that community leadership often results in increasing interpersonal relations, experiencing personal growth, and becoming an agent of change.

In a study involving women in leadership roles in community colleges, the majority of women surveyed believed their biggest obstacle to advancement was the college board's mindset, that was perceived as favoring candidates that fit in a male-dominated environment. Stereotypical male images still persist about leaders and effective leadership (Ebbers, 2000). This perception concerning preferred leadership styles also emerged in a qualitative study involving female department chairs. Issac (2010) found that implicit biases toward masculine leadership behaviors remain strong despite a growing number of women occupying these positions.

Perspectives on leadership styles tended to focus on a collaborative, shared decision-making leadership style versus a more traditional, top-down approach to leadership (Sherman, 2005). How women are viewed as leaders often depends upon the perception of the style of leadership presented.

Context of Leadership

Eagly (2007) examined the complexities of female leadership from the perspective of situational theorists. They contend "features such as societal values, the culture of the organization, the nature of the task, and the characteristics of the followers determine the context of the situation and therefore the appropriateness of particular types of leaders" (p. 2).

The field of medicine was a particular context occasionally researched. Females in

positions of leadership were actually beneficial to women's health concerns. In a study of women in the field of academic medicine, Carnes, Morrissey, and Geller (2008) observed an interconnectedness between women leaders in academic medicine and improvement in women's health issues. "Research on women's issues was in the forefront, which it may not have otherwise been, save having women in positions of leadership" (p. 1454).

Another application of context included the identification of characteristics that were deemed strengths. Skrla (2000), in research on school superintendents, showed study participants used forms of reverse discourse. Socialized feminine characteristics that had typically been labeled as weaknesses were renamed as strengths.

Often in talking with the general public, the word *leadership* is synonymous with the word *power.* An interesting distinction would be whether being a leader means that one has power, or having power means that one is a leader. When gender is applied to the concept of leadership, this adds another layer to the concept of power. In her presidential initiative, Chin (2004) discussed what leadership as empowerment from a feminist perspective means: promoting feminist principles and policies, changing organizational cultures to be more gender equitable, and empowering women as feminist leaders. She also asserted "women emphasize planning and organizing work and an empathic approach, while placing less emphasis on the need to win at all costs" (p. 7).

Research on women who self-select leadership roles focused on one specific factor that may influence a woman's decision to take on a leadership role: the presence of a leader model (Carbonell & Castro, 2008). Northouse (2007) referenced the idea that leaders become role models to their followers. This is explained through the concept of transformational leadership. "Transformational leadership creates a culture in which employees feel empowered and

encouraged to freely discuss and try new things" (p. 190). Becoming a role model oneself may likely have a basis in the role models with which one identifies. In a study encouraging women to tell their stories, one participant observed that as the leader works to create the future, she must consistently help followers understand how they fit into that future (Grady, Curley, & LaCost, 2008).

This idea of cooperation in the context of leadership was also found in a study conducted by Drago-Severson (2009) in which she connected collaboration and leadership. Utilizing discourse was further examined by the work of Wilkinson and Blackmore (2008) who declared that "it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together" (p. 130). These approaches help us to construct women's positions as leaders.

Career Progression

Healthcare administration and education were two areas that the research identified as needing strong leadership and increased diversity. In an article on the progress and challenges in healthcare administration, Lantz (2008) noted, "subtle yet challenging aspects of social, gender, and family roles exist that influence women's career progression" (p. 297). Women make up the majority of students enrolled in colleges and universities, yet careers in higher education have not been a strong area for women in leadership positions (Leatherwood & Williams, 2008). They emphasized in their article on gender and career paths that, "characteristics such as flexibility, work ethic, integrity, and good communication skills are all factors leading to successful career advancement. Women must be committed to seeking out opportunities to strengthen these areas of their work style" (p. 270).

Skrla (2000) looked at the field of education, primarily superintendents. Although more females are taking on this role, it is still a male-dominated position. In Nebraska, for example,

only 10% of school superintendents are women (according to the Nebraska Department of

Education website). She asserted however, that this role is evolving toward more of a woman's

role. Strengths typically seen as female—instruction and human relations—are becoming the

new superintendent's role. This compatibility is being brought about by societal factors (307).

In her narrative survey, Fine (2009) described the desire to make a difference in the world

as being consistent with the career choices of highly motivated women. They tend to favor

careers such as teaching, social work, medicine, and human services. Grady, Curley, and LaCost

(2008) found in a study focused on identifying female leaders at their best, that "complacency is

the enemy of innovation. Leaders recognize that organizations thrive when they are able to adapt

to new environments and demands" (p. 286).

Although current research indicates women are able to lead effectively, stereotypes and

challenges exist that may impede the success of female leaders. Gender discrimination is alive

and continues to hinder women's advancement (Hopewell, McNeely, Kuiler, and Hahm, 2009).

In a study examining theories of prejudice toward women, (Eagly & Karau 2002) found that

women emerge less commonly than men as leaders because women have to meet a higher

standard than men do in order to be considered highly competent. Competence is not only the

ability to perform one's job, but also the number of hours one is willing to work on that job.

Women, for instance, often reported the need to work additional hours to prove their

competence.

In a study that focused on female principals, the participants indicated that by addressing

and responding to the needs, requests, and demands of others, they were serving the common

good (Jones, Ovando, & High, 2009). Their research shows that female leaders tend to look

beyond their own interests to the good of the group and develop individualized relationships.

Women are likely to base their career choice on a desire to help others and are more likely to engage in caring personal communication (Fine, 2009). In a study by Wrushen and Sherman (2008), women "spoke of leading with compassion and emotion because of a desire to maintain relationships" (p. 465). This style created a hierarchy based on gender which proved to be a barrier in advancement for women as illustrated in a study conducted by Conrad (2010).

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Chapter 3

Methodology

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Research Design

Qualitative research emphasizes individual meanings, context, and self-reflexivity. From the information gathered from the participants through open-ended questions, the researcher then analyzes the data, looking for patterns to emerge, and compares these to existing theories (Creswell, 2009).

This study discovered common features in the paths of women who have attained leadership positions. Its purpose was to: (a) explore the reasons why women lead, (b) examine the characteristics these women possess, (c) discover ensuing challenges and barriers, and (d) describe successful leadership, as defined by the participants. The central question of the study was supported by several sub-questions: How do women decide to take positions of leadership? What are barriers that women must navigate in their positions of leadership? What are some transformational moments in the lives of these women? How do women in positions of leadership define success?

Using a qualitative approach designed to understand participants' experiences within the context of an issue was the most advantageous way to achieve this purpose. Within the qualitative approach, the researcher incorporated narrative inquiry techniques. The three

dimensions of narrative inquiry include temporality, personal and social, and place. Moving within these dimensions enables the researcher to travel in four directions: inward (internal conditions), outward (the environment), forward, and situated within place (past, present, and future). Another important theme is that of relationships—those between the researcher and the participant(s) as well as those between the researcher and her study. "There is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 71).

These stories can best be discovered though the interview process. According to Seidman (2006), "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). This is the essence of the proposed research study: to tell the stories of female leaders, as they perceive their experiences, and identify common attributes in their individual journeys.

The research conducted reflected a predominantly constructivist as well as advocacy/participatory worldview. The use of open-ended questions allowed the meaning ascribed to leadership to be obtained through descriptions of the experiences of the participants. As the women told their own stories, their views on leadership became interwoven with their experiences. They essentially made sense of their roles as leaders through the interpretation of their own experiences. According to Creswell (2009), constructivist researchers focus on the interaction among individuals as well as the context in which people live and work.

Further the intent is to make sense of the world, or establish a worldview, through the interpretation of the participants' experiences. Meaning, in this case, was derived inductively, rather than deductively. The perceptions of the participants guided the development of themes within female leadership, thus creating interpretations based upon their views of significant

experiences.

This study also takes on some qualities inherent in those supporting an advocacy worldview. According to Creswell (2009), this philosophical worldview speaks to the needs of groups whose voices are not often heard, or not heard clearly enough. This may include the voices of groups who are marginalized by society. Women, as a group, are often in this category. Since parts of this study discussed implications for career advancement, values deemed significant by female leaders, and the encouragement of young women to attain positions of leadership, there is a certain advocacy/participatory worldview present within this study.

Participants

In qualitative research, the sampling is generally purposeful so that the participants chosen have experience with the central phenomenon being studied. This study followed these guidelines and used purposeful sampling. Creswell (2009) recommended selecting participants that will best help the researcher understand the questions associated with the research study. Each participant in this study was selected because of her role as a community leader.

A total of ten women were chosen to participate in this study. A cross-section of women was selected for this study, with wide-ranging affiliations in politics, education, business, and social services. The participants were diverse in terms of age and ethnic background. The ages of the participants ranged from 47 to 73; two of the participants were African-American and eight of the participants were White. Levels of education attained by the participants ranged from some college to Juris Doctorate degrees.

I made contact with the selected participants and invited them to be a part of my research study. I contacted them by e-mail and they were given a description of the nature and purpose of

the research study. All of the women I contacted agreed to participate in the study and were given an informed consent letter at the time of the interview outlining information related to the study, including Institutional Review Board protocol. These items are included in the Appendix to this dissertation.

Participants were guaranteed anonymity throughout the research study. During the interview process and throughout reporting the study's findings, the interviewees were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. All study data, including interview tapes and transcripts, were kept in a locked location in my home and destroyed upon completion of the study. Interviews were transcribed by a transcriptionist who signed a confidentiality form.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I assumed many responsibilities within the parameters of this study. First, I needed to possess knowledge of the qualitative approach as an advanced methodology. I have taken several classes in qualitative research and have conducted two research projects within the scope of those courses. The skills I acquired through these experiences were: the ability to identify the central phenomenon of the study; the ability to pose research questions that are meaningful and reflective of the phenomenon; the ability to conduct interviews in which the participants are allowed to guide the content to an extent; and the ability to collect and analyze data, including coding text and developing related themes. I also acknowledge that qualitative research is time consuming and may be costly as well; I was prepared to assume these challenges.

Ethical issues were addressed during each phase of the study. I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) and am familiar with the ethical principles associated with research. Permissions for this research study were solicited from appropriate

entities. Protocol also dictates that research information be submitted to the Institutional Review Board for approval. The Request for Review Form was filed, providing investigator information, title and project information, description of participants, research methodology, data sources, and a project description.

An informed consent letter was developed and can be found in the appendix of this dissertation. The form states the procedures of the study, stresses that the participant can expect confidentiality, provides the opportunity to ask questions, and ensures the freedom to withdraw at any time. Contact information for the researcher, her adviser, and the Institutional Review Board are included in the letter.

Information Collection

Since this was a narrative research study, the method of data collection was primarily personal interviews. This was also a qualitative research study; therefore, emphasis was placed on open-ended questions and the emergence of themes that were guided by the responses of the participants. Creswell (2009) suggested that qualitative research is interpretative research. With this in mind, I ensured the questions asked during the interview did not lend themselves to being affected by biases or any other ethical issues.

An appropriate protocol was used throughout the interview process. Questions and possible probes were generated with the purpose of gaining the maximum amount of information about the participants' leadership journeys. The interview utilized open-ended questions pertaining to the participants' experiences with leadership in terms of career path, reasons for leading, perceived traits, challenges, influential individuals, and transformational experiences. The following questions or prompts were used for all participants:

Tell me about your career path and how you attained this position.

How do you define successful leadership?

What made you want to be in a leadership position?

What characteristics do you possess that make you an effective leader?

What challenges have you faced in your position as a leader?

Who are some individuals who inspired you in your journey?

What biases or stereotypes have you encountered in your position?

What are some experiences that have transformed or changed you as a leader?

Information Analysis

Recording and analyzing the data in a systematic way is crucial to successful research. The interviews were audio taped with the permission of the participant. I then had the interviews transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber. Transcripts were printed with space allowed for notes, including coding and identification of themes.

As I read through the data, I took notes on what message the participant was trying to convey. With this information, I assigned codes to particular sections of text. I focused on using *In Vivo* codes, while also identifying surprising or unusual themes to accompany the codes I expected to find. Organizing the information early in the process of data analysis facilitated a deeper understanding of the relationships among the responses in the later stages of discussion.

I used the method of inter-coder agreement to ensure my coding was consistent. Another researcher was asked to read through my coded material and give me feedback. After finding codes that repeated themselves in several transcripts, I developed these codes into several themes, which were then expanded upon in my findings section.

Once these themes were determined, a discussion of the findings was presented. This

discussion provides evidence showing how the themes emerged from the data collected. It focuses on the participants' stories, while illustrating the interrelated nature of the themes and the connectedness central to the research findings. Excerpts from literature relevant to themes or specific data points were interwoven into the stories told by each woman to emphasize this connection.

Several strategies were used to strengthen my study's findings: inter-coder agreement (member checking), rich description, and clarification of biases (Creswell, 2009). Inter-coder agreement, or member checking, is when two or more coders agree on codes used for the same passages in the text. The results were presented in descriptive, narrative form; therefore rich description was used to communicate a picture of the participants' experiences. I also acknowledge a potential bias in this study as a woman researching women's views on leadership.

A fellow researcher, who has experience with qualitative research, assisted me with the analysis of my data. She was able to use her breadth of experience to crosscheck my codes and look for consistency. After completing the interviews, reviewing the transcripts, assigning codes, and developing themes, I checked the accuracy of participants' statements. In my findings section, the themes reflect the participants' experiences though descriptive language and examples.

Collecting and analyzing qualitative data required personal involvement with the participants and was subjective in nature. In-depth interviews were conducted with the participants to ensure accuracy of the study. Additionally, I was acquainted with several participants based on the use of purposeful sampling. Strategies such as inter-coder agreement were used to limit bias that could occur.

Chapter 4

Findings

The participants in this study were all leaders within their community and therefore shared many similarities within their chosen fields. Each participant's background and ensuing path toward this leadership position, however, represented individual qualities and experiences, making each story unique within the common bond they possessed.

Several of the participants currently work in the area of human services. Kate, Barbara, and Nicole work as directors of human services agencies within their community. Other participants serve as members of boards. Beth, Maggie, Kelly, and Donna have been and/or continue to be representatives in state government, while Amy has experience in the local government arena. Jennifer and Janet both have backgrounds in the field of education, and have each expanded into other areas of community service.

An analysis of the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews revealed six themes: *Power vs. Influence, Inciting Change, Significant Role Models, Challenges and Obstacles, Self-Efficacy and Identity, and Effectual Styles*. These themes reflect the experiences and narratives of the participants in their roles as community leaders.

Power vs. Influence

Need for female presence. In order for women to make a difference in leadership positions, women first need to be present in influential positions. The number of women leaders is increasing and this trend needs to continue. Many of the participants in this study identified the need for women to be visible in their roles and take ownership of them. Kelly, a lawyer, claims that women often tend to downplay their roles as leaders. She encourages them to let people know that they have positions of authority rather than worry about potentially negative

reactions.

As a former member of a state legislature, Donna thought it was important for women within the legislature to be able to assume leadership positions. "That was my chief motivation, but it was a factor in why I ran for office, because I thought there needed to be more representation of women." Maggie also commented on the need for a female presence in the political arena. She expressed disappointment and dismay at the demise of the Commission on the Status of Women. Its budget was first cut, and then the Commission disappeared. Although she tried to get some of the women in the commission involved, the interest was just not there. This lack of presence has an effect on the potential influence of women in this area.

"Don't be afraid to jump in and do something that might lead you into yet another place where a door opens." This is the advice Nicole gives women starting out in leadership positions. As a builder, she found herself in a professional area dominated by men. The presence of women in the field was important to her, but when she went to gather women together, she could find only two or three women with any experience. For these reasons, she started training sessions that ran for six months, three times a week. She held seminars until women became familiar with the tools and competent as builders. Encouraging a female presence in under-represented areas is paramount to developing future leaders.

Concern for community. Many women assume leadership positions in order to have an influence within their communities. As a member of the Nebraska legislature, Beth expressed her concern for the conditions in the community in which she has lived nearly her entire life. As she contemplated her work with constituents, she stated, "I look at the issues and arrive at a decision that is based upon what is in the best interest of the people to be served or benefit by a particular measure."

Considering the needs of one's constituents elicited a similar response from Amy, a city representative. Her motivation was to "look out for the little person" and influence the system accordingly. In her opinion, everyone needs to be represented, and certain entities make many decisions that affect our lives every day. Working with urban development gave her a chance to work with the community as a specialist and affect change. Her involvement in community projects made her more convinced about what she was doing. "It's not just my personal opinion," Amy stated. "It was never about what I personally thought. It was what was best for the community and you learn to take out your personal bias." She further emphasized that it should not be about race or gender, but that it should be about making decisions based on the needs of the community. "You are deciding things that you won't see the results of until down the road."

This is also true within the field of human services. Kate works as a director and feels that human services are critically important to the fabric of a community. When you have the involvement of the community, you can create a system and then it is a matter of "getting the players to play." Barbara echoes this sentiment. As a director of a non-profit organization, she also wishes to serve the community as well as help it to help itself. In the early stages of her career, she lacked community connections. As a result, she went to those who had the power and asked for their assistance. Therefore, she could influence others and affect the necessary change.

Janet brings a unique perspective to community involvement though her role as a director in the performing arts. Early in her career, she became aware of the theater and the social impact it can have, especially in changing people's minds or otherwise influencing them. Her role as a leader was an extension of personal fulfillment as well as her concern for the needs of the community.

Influencing and helping others. Along with a need for a female leadership presence and a concern for one's community, the idea of being an influence and a help to others was of great importance in these women's desire to take on their positions as leaders. Kelly describes her role as a mentor for others pursuing positions that require the ability to lead. She likes to help and influence young women, reaching out with her thoughts and encouragement to other women in her position. She references abilities she has acquired such as being able to get more done in a less confrontational manner.

The ability to influence others is vital for success. Kelly explains this: "A successful leader is someone whom people want to follow. I know many people in positions of authority, or positions of leadership who people don't want to follow. Maybe they're coerced to follow; maybe they're required to follow. But I think that the best types of leaders are ones that people rally around and say, 'Oh, I really want to follow them, I really want to be with them, I agree with them, this is something I'd like to do.'"

Maggie also expressed her interest in helping people succeed and helping them be happy in their positions. As a former politician, she emphasized the need that people have to feel like they are contributing to something, as opposed to just coming to work every day and going through the motions. She shared an example involving one of her employees who was struggling in his job. "We sat down and had a conversation and I told him if you really want to go far in journalism or other fields, you really need to get yourself to college and get that degree. To this day, he credits me with having put him on the right path."

Amy also related her experiences in mentoring youth when she volunteered to be a job coach for a girl who later received the job. She was so happy to have helped the girl find this success and talked about her realization that as a leader, she did indeed influence people through

encouragement. She felt immense satisfaction in having a hand in projects and decisions that help people. Amy also emphasized the importance of teamwork as a way to get things done and influence others. Every team needs to have someone at the top willing to take responsibility for the mission.

Donna defined the nature of a leader's influence as having a say in public policy and the ability to be involved in important decisions that affect society. Barbara echoed this opinion; she gets more say over what gets done if she is in a leadership position. A position of influence also means having an impact on peoples' behavior. Barbara noted, "I have to be able to convince other people that what I want them to do is what they want to do." In order to do this, knowledge of people and their motivations is helpful. Many of the women spoke, therefore, about the importance of truly listening to others.

Nicole shared a leadership strategy she learned early on concerning the importance of listening more than speaking. "I just kept my mouth shut and listened. And I didn't say anything and just nodded. And I found that when I got in my own business, I should just keep my mouth shut and I'd learn a lot. When you have your mouth shut, it appears that you know more than you do. And of course I never learned anything new when I was talking." She found listening could also change an entire situation. People are unhappy about something when they come into her office, but after she listens, they generally calm down.

According to Kate, a good leader is all about listening and appreciating other people and their opinions. "A true leader respects everyone for who they are and what they bring to the table. A leader has to have an open mind, needs to use what people bring to the table, and does not write them off when there is disagreement."

Janet views her leadership position as an opportunity to help people achieve their ideas

and dreams. Similarly, Nicole uses her influence as a way to connect people for their mutual benefit. She shares the example of knowing builders within the community and being able to connect framing crews with these builders. Ultimately, the influence of an effective leader can bring about positive results for the followers.

Choosing to be a leader. Research studies on leadership such as Kezar (2000) indicate that the leadership of women tends to emphasize reciprocity. This was exemplified in the stories of the participants in this study. In terms of their political experiences, both Donna and Beth identified their decision to become leaders rested heavily on having something to contribute to their communities. Donna emphasized her interest in public policy and how her skills could be suited to a seat in the legislature. Beth also made a conscious decision to accomplish the objective of having a say in policy-making. "When I decided to accomplish that objective, that's when I decided to pursue this path."

At the same time, several women said being in a position of leadership was something that they never really considered. Jennifer, who has served in many roles within her community, said that she tended to shy away from the spotlight until she took on a role that accentuated her leadership skills. Nicole also talked about being shy and not feeling comfortable speaking in front of others. Amy commented that she really did not see herself as a leader until it was pointed out to her that this was indeed her role.

When Barbara talked about her career path leading to her role as a director, she explicitly stated, "I never wanted to be a leader—never thought about it." At the same time, she and other women acknowledged that they took on their roles because nobody else was bothering to do the job in question. In a study conducted by Fine (2009), the author refers to highly motivated women having the desire to make a difference in the world. This would seem consistent with the

stories provided by the women in this study as they described their various reasons for becoming community leaders. The predominant factors seem to be the concern for community and a desire to help others.

Inciting Change

    Contributing influences. The basis for many women's interest in being in positions of influence is dissatisfaction with the status quo. The historical contributions of women in the past were cited by several participants in this study as influential on their own careers. Janet grew up in the late 60s, a time of change when you talked about your opinions publicly. Women's rights were among the revolutions of the time. All of these changes and issues influenced her career choice and brought her into the performing arts.

Maggie compared the transformative qualities in today's women to those in the 1910s and 1920s. "Women often talk the same way as their predecessors would about being able to be a part of all the incredible things that happened leading up to the women's right to vote." History represents the importance of the contributions of women as leaders and this significance continues in 2011.

Often the status quo is most visible in the political arena. Donna's experiences in the legislature support this assertion. "I believe we need more women candidates for office. Women are just as likely to get elected as their male counterparts, if they're running for an open seat, but we don't have enough women running. That's the problem. And so I think it's important that we find women to run." Women need to continue to assert themselves as leaders in this forum.

Lack of diversity is one of the influences Amy noted in her choice to be a community leader. The decision-makers in her community were a homogeneous group that lacked diversity

in terms of age, color, and gender. She thought there needed to be equal representation for all

groups of people and was concerned about people's rights being defended. "We have to give

people a voice, people who don't generally have a voice. As I got into a leadership position and

got used to what we had to deal with, I found that there are a lot of people who felt

disenfranchised and left behind." These are the people who had the greatest influence on Amy

as a leader.

   Change through innovation. Many studies on transformational leadership indicate that

this type of leadership positively influences innovation. As Kate talked about her role with

human services, she articulated not only the need for a vision, but the need for thinking of new,

innovative ways to make it work. Having new ideas is what Janet says it's all about in her field.

She described theater as a vehicle for discussion and it is by having discussions that we will

change the world.

   Proposing new ideas in terms of policy is one reason that Beth wanted to be a proponent

for change. "I always wanted to take action that would improve the quality of life of the

residents in the community. Being in a position to make policy could accomplish that."

Innovation that affects the lives of people is consistent with many women's style of leadership.

Seeing a need for change and then acting upon this need is a characteristic found throughout the

interviews conducted.

   Since the construction field is male-dominated, Nicole cited the need for new ideas to

make herself visible in the area. She looked for women who had experience in the construction

field, but could not find many. Her idea was to hold training seminars and by the time the

training was done, she had 400 women signed up who wanted to be notified to volunteer and

build. Nicole was also cognizant of the unpopularity associated with building in certain parts of

town considered undesirable. With her influence, she worked to change this perception.

Taking charge. In her research, Eagly (2007) describes the leadership styles of women in relation with particular situations. Many of the women interviewed found themselves at some point in their careers faced with situations in which no one else was choosing to act. It was in these cases that the women felt what they described as a desire, an obligation, or even a challenge to take charge of the situation and make a required change.

Kate reflected on this occurrence in her own experiences. If a need for change is observed, and the change does not happen because no one steps up to do anything, then she steps up. Her definition of effective leadership referenced this concept of taking charge to incite change. "Leadership happens when you want to change the status quo and then you have two choices: you can sit around and complain about it or you get into the process of changing it."

This sort of take-action approach was echoed by Barbara as she discussed the development of her career over the years. As a politician, she cares about the issues and wants things to get done. She recalled several experiences that were her "eye-openers" in life. People saw a problem, but they would not question it. As she recalls, "I was taking the initiative because someone needed to do something." This does not always result in popularity, but all of the women agreed that was a sacrifice they were willing to make. Being well-liked did not outweigh the need to take action when it was warranted.

Not only was this type of popularity unimportant to Nicole, she encouraged the women around her to avoid being influenced by such attitudes. Instead, she advises them to take action in situations that may be outside their comfort zones. She commented, "I just feel like women don't take advantage of situations that arise for them." She told stories of her own challenges with insecurity and described how she moved past these issues in order to take her own advice,

to take advantage of situations that arose for *her*.

Having a vision. In their research on transformational leadership, Kouzes and Posner (1995) emphasize the importance of a leader's vision in influencing followers and influencing the leader-follower relationship. Many of the women interviewed expressed similar ideas about their own leadership as well as that of leaders they would want to follow.

Kelly described an effective leader as "someone who is capable of making change and allowing, or perhaps encouraging, the organization to follow through on that change. The vision needs to be carried out or it becomes worthless."

Kate also emphasized the importance of having a vision and added that this vision may need to be changed or adapted. "It is vital", she said, "to be able to defend one's vision, and if you cannot, then you need to admit it, adapt it, and move on." Discovering this vision and then carrying it out may best be accomplished through a cooperative effort. This type of collaboration is something Kate advocated in her position.

The concept of collaboration was present in the interview with Jennifer. In fact, it is a style that she tried to initiate when she was in the education field. In her experiences with equity programs, she claims talking together and sharing ideas was extremely beneficial. "We rewrote the whole educational equity program collaboratively for a more inclusive and equitable system."

Collaborating and working with others is Maggie's favorite part of her job. She works closely with the people who will most directly feel the results of the programs she helps to develop. "I want to go look at a project that I was involved in and helped bring to fruition. I get to visit with the people and find out how it's going to affect their lives." This connection as a leader is what worked for many of the participants according to their shared experiences.

Significant Role Models

Parents and teachers. The women in the study all identified people from whom they could learn and eventually emulate as an important aspect in their journey as leaders. For several women leaders, it was the guidance, encouragement, and lessons from their parents and teachers they recalled as being critical in forming their identities. Beth recalled her mother's compassion for others as a quality that later guided her as a political leader. Being able to empathize with her constituents helped her to understand how she could better serve the population.

The importance of education was stressed throughout Beth's formative years. "My father and my mother put a tremendous emphasis and focus on education and the importance of education…I followed my father's guidance and I placed tremendous significance on obtaining the highest quality and as much education as I could." Her parents took it upon themselves to expose her to many different experiences as well as different kinds of people. In essence, Beth reflected, she was raised by a community. The mentors in her life exposed her to as much culture and history as possible. Teachers and counselors served as role models as well as many political leaders she hoped to emulate. Her commitment to leadership was shaped by many individuals along the way.

Education and teachers in particular were an inspiration to Maggie as she made choices early in her professional life. She mentioned her high school English teacher as someone who inspired her. Eventually majoring in journalism, Maggie credits her teacher with helping to prepare her and being her advisor throughout her pre-college years.

Parents played a significant role in Jennifer's personal and professional journey. "They told me two things: 'You may question authority' and 'You can be anything.' I have continued to carry these ideas with me and they have shaped who I am and what I have done." Jennifer

mentioned her father's death when she was 13 as an additional influential event. Her journey of leadership was in some ways a quest for her father, and she believes she has found him along the way.

Mentors and colleagues. As these women progressed through their careers, they identified many people with whom they worked as role models. Some of these individuals were colleagues and others served in the role of boss or supervisor. From these men and women, the participants gleaned knowledge, advice, and insights. Learning from the experiences of other leaders was a common theme within the stories of the participants. Often they could identify with aspects of their role model's experiences.

For instance, Kelly had referred to her own choice to raise a family while pursuing her career. She described one of the role models with whom she identified as incredibly bright and incredibly capable. She also noted that she has five children and worked full time. Kelly finds role models in leaders who emulate what she strives to do and be in her position of leadership. "I've watched leaders to learn how to be not so offensive, and ask people how you do that, because often times I would be a little too aggressive or abrasive."

Within the political arena, Maggie claimed what worked for her is to watch other people who have been successful in similar leadership roles and learn from them. "I got lucky enough to get hooked up with the women who were leading a lot of the equality issues on the floor of the convention. Incredible, strong, influential women…" It was from these experiences that she honed her leadership skills and applied the knowledge she gained.

Strong female role models are especially recognized in fields that are viewed as traditionally male. Nicole works in such an area and as she described a woman whom she admired, she acknowledged the concept of reciprocity in effective leaders. "She is a very strong

woman leader in the banking business. She helped women get started in business. She was a strong successful woman and she was giving back because she was teaching some of the rest of us what to do." Nicole then recognized that as a community leader, she served as a role model and described ways in which she mentors other women as her way of "giving back."

Strength in the face of challenges and opposition is what made Kate's colleague her role model. She quoted what she referred to as the best advice she ever received in terms of being a leader: "If you don't upset somebody once a day, you're probably not doing your job." Women tend to be viewed as compliant, accommodating, and docile and it may be assumed that as leaders, they will sacrifice the goal in favor of agreeability. As Kate pointed out, confrontation is often necessary in order to address the issues at hand and make appropriate decisions.

Although women demonstrate strength and determination, much of the research bears out the fact that they still tend to lead in a more interpersonal and relational manner. It is these relationships built with co-workers and subordinates that often result in successful leadership. Amy talked about a former supervisor who, despite budget cuts, managed to retain her position as a consultant. She was impressed that someone would put herself on the line like that for her and viewed this leader with esteem and respect.

Building relationships with followers is another technique used in transformational leadership. Kelly described a colleague's ability to be successful by using this method with her employees. "She is an incredible boss. I've watched her with her people…she praises them, she gives them kudos and encouragement. She will praise each one, telling them the wonderful things they do for the company and how valuable they are." This approach brings out the best in her employees while encouraging loyalty and trust.

Employees need to trust their leaders; at the same time, effective leaders must show trust

in their followers. Jennifer spoke of her supervisor as a person who trusted her thoroughly, opening the way for her to do the kind of outreach ministry to the homeless she knew was needed within the community. Her friends also influenced her by helping her see the gifts of compassion and intellect that she had previously discounted within herself.

Characteristics of role models. Research by Carbonell and Castro (2008) indicates identification with a role model as a leading contributor to female leadership. The characteristics of their chosen mentors described by the participants in this study help to shape a definition of successful leadership. Barbara described her early role models as bold and willing to take on leadership when women were not supposed to be in these positions. She referred to political leaders specifically as excellent mentors, including those whom she met in person as well as others that she wished she could meet. One aspect that she emphasized in particular was their ethical behavior; this was a characteristic she wanted to emulate.

As a fellow politician, Donna expressed similar views toward those she identified as mentors during her career. Women who were successful in running for public office were individuals whom she respected and admired. In addition to finding success in their own right, they encouraged other women to become involved and run for office. These examples of women succeeding in a role that was still traditionally male made a difference in the lives of many women who may not have otherwise considered the possibilities a political career had to offer.

"I admire any woman who puts herself out there…who takes risks to stand for something," said Janet regarding the individuals who have been role models throughout her life. Kate also believed that being a risk taker was a characteristic of an effective leader. She described one of her mentors as someone "who is out in the community, taking risks, speaking her mind, and fighting for the underdog."

Determination and commitment were among the attributes mentioned by several participants in the study. Amy described her primary role model as someone who was very determined to accomplish what she thought was right for the community. Doing what is right as a leader is reflective of earlier statements about the importance of ethics in one's actions. Maggie also observed the importance of ethical behavior as she described one of her role model's lifelong commitment to bettering her community. "She had such empathy for the poor and minorities and people who were discriminated against." Leaders gain the respect of others when they demonstrate caring and concern for the lives of those whom they influence.

This can readily be seen through Kelly's description of a colleague whom she identified as a role model for her: "She manages with a wonderful sense of humor and an incredible mind. People think the world of her because she's candid, forthright, and says what she thinks. You always know where you stand with her." It is apparent that an honest, intelligent approach can be an effective style and result in the admiration of others.

Lessons learned. Research shows that female leaders tend to look beyond their own interests to the good of the group and develop individualized relationships. In discussing the lessons the participants felt they learned from their role models, this behavior was apparent. Maggie commented that when she realized one individual could make such a difference to others, it completely changed her focus. Kate reflected similarly as she described the insights she gained from her role models. She learned it was her responsibility to have others lead and learn as well. Giving up control was not always easy, but she found it necessary to grow and develop as a leader.

Amy learned the importance of tenacity from one of her role models. She described this woman's strength, courage, and tenacity in the face of significant obstacles. "I admired her

because she took a lot of criticism and never let it get to her." The ability to be firm and resolute in one's beliefs and actions seemed to be balanced with the ability to be empathetic and listen to the concerns of others.

This balance was also portrayed in the stories Jennifer told of one of her mentors. She admired not only her willingness to lead, but also the manner in which she could listen with a "great mind and same-sized heart." Janet also appreciated the ability of her role model to be a good listener. She reflected on the ability to see the big picture and not get overwhelmed by details. Even though emotion plays a role in being an effective leader, she observed that this woman's ability to keep her emotions in check was a strength, and one that she relied upon as she developed as a leader.

Finding this balance between strength and compassion is a lesson that Kelly learned from her role model. She thought about her own style of leadership as she reflected: "Because I have this tendency to be very strong, I admire somebody who can be not too strong, but isn't a pushover either." Another interesting point she raised concerned the lack of role models for women at the time she was beginning her career. She compared her experience to that of women today and observed that there seem to be far more mentors than there were fifteen or twenty years ago. However, as Kelly observed, "These young women are in wonderful shape; they need far less mentoring than we needed."

Although role models still play an important part in the development of women as community leaders, it is apparent that as times change and women attain more positions of influence, the need for role models may not be as strong as it once was. It could also be that the type of role model and her function changes with the times. As reflected by the experiences of the participants, however, the need for a visible female presence will likely always be significant.

Challenges and Obstacles

      Gender roles. Studies involving women in leadership roles indicate the majority of women believe their biggest obstacle to advancement is a mindset favoring candidates that fit in a male-dominated environment. Stereotypical male images still persist about gender roles and effective leadership. Many women in this study referred to expected roles that existed as they began their career journeys. Nicole remembers a time when it was not generally acceptable for a woman to work outside the home. She convinced her husband that nothing would change at home if she were permitted to go to work on a part-time basis.

      As a woman working in the construction field, she noted that she got quite a bit of attention since she was perceived as different. Speaking about many of the men with whom she worked, Nicole recalled "they were kind of uncomfortable with a woman watching them on the job site." At first, she herself was fearful of being in front of people. As she became more comfortable with her role as a leader, this fear subsided. At the same time, she was able to portray a confidence that affected the perception of her subordinates. Her persona became one of an expert in her field, notwithstanding gender.

      Although women have occupied positions in the workforce for a number of years, and this has become more socially acceptable, Kelly described comments she would occasionally receive, sometimes from complete strangers. She would be chastised about having children and not being home with them. She recalls being scolded for being a working mom and told that her children would be neglected. Her response to this criticism was that "my children are wonderful adults, and they turned out just fine, despite all the angst society has given us."

      The early years of Donna's career as a politician reflected similar expectations in terms of gender roles. She observed that some people just did not think of women as elected officials; old

habits and ways of thinking were hard to break. "The women were so outnumbered in the legislature that you didn't have the advantage of having the women being excited that you were a candidate and balancing some of the male staff. There have been some successful women in the legislature, developing leadership roles for themselves." Maggie also referred to running for office as a significant challenge in her career. Kelly attributes the situation to a form of societal conditioning concerning women in leadership. A bit of a barrier may have been broken, she asserted, had we had a female president. This is still a hurdle that has not been surmounted and for women in politics, it may be perceived as the ultimate obstacle.

More experiences in male-dominated fields were referenced through the stories of other participants. Janet's comments as she described an attempt to raise money illustrate her frustration with assumed gender roles: "I was the only woman at the table, and the only artist, and I wasn't taken seriously at all. They kept deferring to the man in our department and it was just awful." Amy's service to the community proved to have similar challenges. She felt that it was difficult to gain peoples' respect and to convince them that as a woman, she was capable of handling technical aspects of the issues that were consistently turned over to her male counterparts.

As she considered her career path leading to her current position as a director, Barbara remarked that she did not feel she had experienced the obstacles or blocks one may expect. She did note, however, that she found some gender bias when it came to her position with donors. In her experience, donors would rather give to a man rather than a woman, and this has posed challenges within the context of this part of her job.

Kelly's theory related to societal conditioning would seem to apply considering these examples. As she described her own experiences with this phenomenon, she hypothesized that

perhaps there is a particular language within the male community that she, and other women, do not understand. "I'm trying to observe whether or not it's the manner in which I say it…if I don't use the right words." She explained that based on her observations, this male behavior is likely unintentional.

Male and female roles in leadership are identified and described in many research studies and often the males appear more dominant. Interestingly, Kelly provided an explanation of an experiment that indicates women may give away the leadership role rather than have it taken from them.

> "In many situations, it is the men who will take the risks and the women will not. An experiment was done in a group and they would ask men and women to have somebody become a leader of the group. More often than not, a man became the leader. But in many instances, women would say, 'Why don't you be the leader?' So they would give the title away. And some people might say they took the title by giving it away. But it's very interesting that women often times do not take those roles, because they may perceive them as being either inappropriate, or it's more appropriate that the man do it."

Within this scenario, women may have similar gender role expectations as men, resulting in behaviors that may become obstacles to effective female leadership.

Gender stereotypes. Isaac (2010) reported that implicit biases toward masculine leadership behaviors remain strong despite a growing number of women occupying positions of leadership. According to Janet, there is often a perception that women are soft, and that they do not understand the reality of business. She illustrated this point as she described a meeting in which she was involved trying to raise money for her organization. "The truth was not that I did not understand business, it was that I did not know how to ask for money in the way that is was expected to be done."

In her committee assignments, Amy expressed frustration with the assumptions surrounding the type of committee on which she would choose to serve. "It was challenging to

command respect and I'd get to teach people that lesson—that just because I'm a woman doesn't mean I would want to serve on certain committees, like Human Services." Research conducted by Kezar (2000) supports the fact that women may be more likely to serve in these capacities based on leadership styles; however, this research does not validate the assumption that all women are most comfortable in these positions exclusively.

Several women participating in this study indicated the stereotyping they may have experienced was not across the board, but rather situational. Maggie described an instance when she was the only woman in her delegation and did feel there was discrimination present. "In one of my trips overseas, the role of women was simply to act as interpreters; they were not considered serious politicians at all." In other situations, however, being the only woman did not result in feelings of discrimination. Maggie attributed part of this difference to her own attitude. "I simply wasn't going to let it bother me…I would just continue on my way and doing my business." She took control in the ways she felt she could within the given situation.

Similarly, Barbara described how her career path did not involve negotiating "men blocking you as you go up the corporate ladder." Her journey was relatively smooth and she did not have to fight biases in the same sense that many women do. As she described her path, she noted that "challenges exist and I am aware of them." Not all women are presented with situations containing obstacles they must overcome. Eagly (2007) supported this notion when she refuted the glass ceiling metaphor. She stressed that women may be able to devise diverse strategies to become leaders and thereby avoid obstacles.

Several study participants noted that although challenges and obstacles existed, the stereotypes they observed could often be used as a way of learning and growing as leaders. Jennifer recalled experiences that illustrated such growth: "While the male leaders I worked

with could drive me bananas with some of their sexist ways, I never felt hesitant to name it. We all grew in this journey, especially in dealing with our sexism." When she and her co-workers owned their biases, issues of leadership were dealt with effectively.

Although naming and owning the bias can make it less powerful, this is not always the case, and stereotypical attitudes may still affect a woman's ability to move forward at the same pace as men. When Nicole was starting out in the construction field, people questioned whether she knew what she was doing. Since she was a woman in a male-dominated field, there was reluctance to accept that she knew what was going on around her. One female banker advised her to be prepared that she was going to have to work harder than the men. She said she had seen women come into the bank wanting to start their own business, and she had given them all the same advice—be prepared.

Research conducted by Eagly (2002) bears out this fact as well—women often have to work harder to be viewed as competent as men. Nicole referred to another banker, this one male, with whom she negotiated her first loan. "He asked about my boys, wanted to talk about football. Then after listening to my plan, he said, 'Hon, I think you're going to make it!' Yes, he actually called me hon." At the same time, she acknowledged that women sometimes expect to be stereotyped and let this defeat them before attempting to be successful. For example, she advised a woman trying to start her own company, telling the woman she needed to sell herself. Nicole observed that the woman was not marketing herself as well as she could have. "She could have had all the business she wanted if she didn't have the idea that she was going to be put down because she was a woman." Allowing biases to affect one's attitudes creates a second level of potential damage.

Although stereotypes are observed less frequently in 2011, Donna acknowledged that

they played a role in her career path. She commented that although it was not like it was in generations before, there were still obstacles because she was a woman. One incident of stereotypical behavior that stood out for her was the reference to male and female senators. "While the men were addressed as Senator ____, the women were addressed as Mrs. ____." As Donna observed, "you were getting respect because you were a married woman, not because you were a senator…and heaven help the poor woman who wasn't married." In addition to this discrepancy, introductions were made by saying, "and now we are going to introduce the senators and their wives." The implication that all senators must be male is an important one in light of gender stereotypes.

Several participants identified a general attitude toward women leaders, specifically that women are not capable. Kelly recalled an incident illustrating this point in which her client's husband gave her information that damaged his own case. She was shocked until she realized that "he thought I was such an idiot that I didn't understand the process." Men may be perceived as more capable because it is more socially acceptable for them to be aggressive. The latitude for an aggressive male is also much wider than the latitude for an aggressive female. Kelly reflected on being called somewhat aggressive and learning early to temper what she did.

This characteristic may be apparent in how women present themselves and their roles. "Women will say, 'I work in government,' rather than saying 'I'm the director of the Department of whatever.' I think it's because they don't want to embarrass anybody. And so if they're willing to stand up there, no harm done on division of labor, people will see a woman in a position of power more often. We are getting past those hurdles, but I think it's very slow." In addition to this theory, Kelly observed what she referred to as "that wonderful old wives tale, but one that must be true"…a woman will say something and no one will nod or say anything,

and a man next to her will say the exact same thing, and everyone responds to his great idea. Kate noted the same occurrence in meetings she has attended, observing that her ideas were dismissed, presumably because she was a woman. "I think if a man had said that, it would have been different."

Age. Generally ageism takes the form of bias or stereotypes toward older individuals. Although a few participants described experiences with this type of discrimination, several of the women conversely identified with ageism based on youth. Janet did describe encountering stereotypes because her hair was white. Just the way she looked caused people to make judgments about her attitudes and abilities. Nicole also referred to comments about her age, but noted that almost immediately it got turned around into an advantage. "If people wanted to perceive me as grandmotherly, I thought, well that's fine. After all, who is going to be rude to their grandmother?"

Assumptions based on youth proved to be a more challenging obstacle in many cases. Maggie remembers being in a leadership position in her early twenties and trying to manage people who were twenty and thirty years her senior. It was sometimes difficult to gain their trust and respect. "Times have changed though," she reflected. For instance, the response she received universally was that the Commission on the Status of Women was not needed anymore. "Younger women would say that they're not discriminated against, that they've had all kinds of opportunities and education, and the work world is different now within the last couple of years."

Based on her experiences when she was just beginning her career journey, Kelly argued that being young did influence peoples' perceptions of her abilities. Her capabilities were questioned not only as a woman, but as a young woman. She recalls hearing the questions: Is she capable? Does she have the capacity? Is she too nice? Is she too young? "Everywhere I went

I was too young. There are young people, a young man running for office today, and I've never heard of that comment being made of him."

Racial bias. In her study on pluralistic leadership, Kezar (2000) contended that women and people of color tend to have nonhierarchical views of leadership, whereas those of white men tend to be hierarchical. Amy observed this hierarchy when she attended committee meetings as a representative of the community. "I would sometimes walk into a room, and I'd be the only African American there. It was a good old boys club, and people didn't think that I knew what I was talking about."

In some cases, Amy attributed this behavior to the desire for people to attach labels. They could assign the labels *African American* and *woman*; then assumptions would be made based on these characteristics. She felt that within her community, the racism she encountered was more covert in general. Her stories reflected an attitude that is much less public and usually hidden within the society. She stated, "The discrimination I encounter is more subconscious than outwardly hostile."

Suppressed attitudes of racial bias also proved to be a challenge for Beth at various points in her career journey. "There was an unspoken belief that the railroad labor leaders wouldn't be accepting of an African American female. So they recruited and hired a white male for whom I did much of the work." Creation of a hierarchy and assumptions based on both gender and race affected her career progression.

Bias based on race and ethnicity presented a challenge for Jennifer when she was given a position as director for cultural awareness. She recalled people expressing their concern about her capabilities as a white woman in this position. "I knew I would be challenged, but I dealt with the issues as they came." Stereotypes may impede the success of female leaders and in

some cases, hinder women's career advancement, but women may also circumvent the obstacles presented.

     Trust and ethics. Being an effective leader requires trust; subordinates need to believe the leader has their best interests at heart. Leaders build this trust by making decisions that reflect ethical consideration. Maintaining trust and defending an ethical perspective were identified as leadership challenges for several participants in this study.

     There was a challenge in making tough decisions, Amy reflected, but she knew the right thing to do. There were nights she could not sleep, dreading the potential fallout from some of her decisions, but she was guided by her ethical compass and had to trust she was doing the best she could for the community. Janet expressed a similar feeling as she discussed her challenges. "Being in a position of leadership here does not have appreciation attached to it." Her decision to relocate stemmed from this observation concerning her situation.

     Working with others can result in a certain amount of conflict, and how the leader responds to this speaks to her capabilities. Beth identified one of her biggest challenges as "getting people to look at issues objectively, without clouding the issues with partisan politics, or religious and/or economic differences." Her ability to listen and present issues without bias helped her to effectively guide her constituents. Barbara's experiences with her board members are positive for similar reasons. "I've always had one or two board members once in a while who didn't agree with my vision, but not very often. Trust makes a difference. Once you break their trust, you're in deep trouble." Gaining and then maintaining the trust of those she leads is crucial to Barbara's success as a director.

     An effective leader not only needs to illicit trust from her followers, but also needs to trust herself and her leadership abilities. Maggie expressed this was hard to do at times

throughout her political career. "It's hard when you have the feeling that you have let your supporters down." The need to inspire confidence is predominant in highly successful women leaders. She also shared the challenge of learning how to help people succeed. This was sometimes a painful experience as she worked to build their trust in her.

It is also common for very successful women to have high expectations of themselves. As Jennifer reflected upon her greatest challenges, she determined that most of her challenges are self-made. A constant need to evaluate her work in terms of its ethical grounding was bred into her. "My parents were opinionated people in terms of ethics and this was an attitude I maintained as well," Jennifer stated.

Female leaders, especially those at the top, may be without many peers. Janet alluded to this situation and commented that staying optimistic can be a challenge. "When you have no peers, you have no people to go talk to about things, to help with the decision-making." Since women leaders tend to be more relational and interpersonal, it would make sense that this could be a challenge for women in that situation (Kezar 2000).

Self-Efficacy and Identity

Influence of others. Previous studies examining the backgrounds of women involved in community leadership have found that influential people in the lives of these women help shape their identities as future leaders. The individual experiences described by the women in this study may explain their desires and abilities to influence others.

Kelly recalled how her childhood experiences contributed to her personality as a future leader. "Growing up, I was often responsible for what was happening at the house. My parents said, 'You're in charge.' And so I've always been the type of person who took charge. And I remember just at a young age being in a meeting and just taking over. I learned how to do that

without offending people."

Parental influences were also important in Jennifer's development as a leader. She felt she always knew that accepting a role to lead was bred into her even when she would try to shy away from it. "My father's death when I was a teenager shaped my life. The shock of not knowing, not being sure of what might be, eventually caused me to look and listen with much less surety." As a result, she became much more receptive to life's lessons as complex and ambiguous. "After my divorce, after the powerful 60s civil rights, women's rights, disabilities rights, lesbian and gay rights decade, I began to claim the leadership role which others recognized in me," Jennifer intimated.

Whereas parents were an influence for Kelly and Jennifer, *becoming* a parent was an experience that Janet described as instrumental in her development as a leader. "Parenting taught me effectively that I was a leader and transformed me in many significant ways. It changed my outlook on life as well as my approach to leadership in general."

The confidence to succeed. Efficacy is the ability to produce a desired result; a leader needs to believe in her own competence in order to be effective. Barbara exuded this air of confidence as she described her current role as executive director: "I don't have to wait for everybody else to figure out what needs to get done. I can do what I want to do, so that's nice." As she continued describing her goals, however, it was obvious that this statement was not meant to imply a need for power. As she described how she started the center and became the director, she referred to having great boards that always did what she wanted them to do. This was not about personal gain but rather what was best for the community to whom she provided services.

Confidence in one's abilities is often strengthened through experiences that test the resolve of the individual. Donna identified such experiences of her own that gave her confidence

as a member of the legislature. Successfully overriding a governor's veto, for instance, gave her the willingness to work harder, be more persistent, and step out front. "I think I realized that I did have the ability to do those kinds of things. I just didn't give up. Not that you're always going to be successful on everything, but maybe on the things that really mattered."

Taking risks is a way that one of the participants illustrated confidence in her leadership abilities. Nicole recalled how she has had to convince many people of her vision along the way, starting with her husband. "When I began earning extra money and putting it into home improvements, he became convinced that I did indeed know what I was doing." When she first got started in the construction business, she was taking phone calls, handling the business, and setting up lumber deals. She was told by a colleague that she did not need any help, she just needed the confidence, and that was a turning point for her. Her role as a leader developed from this experience.

As she described her business philosophy, Nicole stated, "I did my homework and knew what I was going to do and how much it was going to cost and what the profit would be. I had the money, I had the plan, and I had the facts." It was this confidence that encouraged others to seek out her expertise and guidance. When she was approached by her current company, she told them she would run it for two months, just to get things going. After twelve years, she is still there as the director.

Impacting society. Bond et al. (2008) indicated that women who remain engaged in leadership positions reap various rewards. Often the reward is intrinsic in nature, such as having a positive impact on society, rather than extrinsic. Maggie discussed how much she enjoyed seeing how the programs she helped to establish have made a difference. "I just thoroughly enjoy seeing people succeed. I like helping people learn how to communicate effectively. I

remember helping an employee, telling him I would like to edit his products, so he could see how he might improve. He told me later that was the best training he ever had. That's the kind of reward that I've gotten."

Starting as a volunteer, Barbara exemplified work for the common good. She pulled people together to try to find food, housing, clothing, and shelter for those in need. Through her position in the legislature, Donna could also see the impact of her work in the community. She stressed, "When a situation called for it, you had to be willing to stand up and be counted." Both of these women made a tangible impact on the lives of people within the community.

Identifying with those whom one leads as well as serves was an important factor in Amy's leadership identity. "We have a lot of diversity among our constituents, and I just felt like I was one of them." I feel that I am making an impact on the community, both as a woman and an African American." Ultimately, she said, she was here to do a job. The tough decisions associated with her position, those that really affected the community, were what transformed her as a leader and as a person.

Personal characteristics. Leatherwood and Williams (2008) found characteristics such as flexibility, work ethic, integrity, and good communication skills are factors in effective leadership. The participants in this study identified similar characteristics in their own experiences as leaders within the community. Her own adaptability is what Janet identified as the key reason she was able to keep her company alive. "I could stay in the theater by teaching, costuming, acting, producing, or directing. That became my skill set." Flexibility within her chosen field produced successful results.

A similar ability to adapt to challenging situations was also essential to Beth's success in the political arena. Some had expressed doubt that she would be accepted; they were surprised

to find that she could not only do the work, but that she had developed relationships with people whom they thought would be unaccepting. "I attribute a great deal of my achievement to studying the issues and being prepared," Beth stated.

Patience is traditionally a characteristic that women identify as helpful within their leadership roles. Kate, however, identified her *lack* of patience as her motivation for becoming a leader. If no one steps up, she always steps in and gets something done. This is not always accomplished without fear or trepidation. She recalled experiences that made her consider her fears. "I knew I had to do it, so I overcame the fear. And now when I meet something that just scares the heck out of me, I say to myself, 'Look, you have no choice. You have to do it, so find a way.'"

Having a tough skin is a characteristic Amy mentioned as being crucial to her success as a leader. In the years she served the community, she recalls receiving some e-mails and voicemails that would make her cringe. "I learned to grit my teeth and move forward." Kelly agreed that determination and drive are essential to her success. "Being aggressive is a personality trait with me. It is just who I am." Recognizing one's traits and applying them to a given situation is the foundation for the success of many women in leadership.

Physical characteristics may also have significance in how women are perceived as leaders. Nicole portrayed this impact through her personal experience. "When I was first in the business, I always wore heels. I'm already tall, I'm certainly large, and there's something about that. I think if I had been petite, blonde, and cute, that it would not have worked. It's the way you carry yourself, too. If you are giggly and giddy, I think you would not be taken seriously." She indicated that representing herself in this manner showed that she was in control of the situation; her subordinates could tell what she wanted and what she expected from them.

Effectual Styles

In her study on leadership, Coleman (2003) determined that gender has an influence on the self-perceptions of leaders. There are as many leadership styles as there are people who see themselves as leaders (Addy, 2001). The motivations of women often determine their methods of leading. "As many studies have shown, some leaders have a relatively *task-oriented* style— emphasizing behavior that accomplishes assigned tasks—and others have a more *interpersonally oriented* style—emphasizing behavior that maintains positive interpersonal relationships" (Eagly, 2007, p. 7).

Additional research cited by Eagly (2007) indicated gender norms tend to direct male leaders toward a task-oriented style, and female leaders toward an interpersonally oriented style. The participants in this study have their own definitions of successful leadership; they shared in their own words their personal leadership styles and what they believe makes a leader effective.

Kate focused on facilitation and working toward a common goal as key attributes of a successful leader.

> Successful leadership is the ability to get the job done. You can have lots of personality and lots of money, but if you don't get the job done, then you are not a very good leader. You have to have the ability to convene people and facilitate people with different ideas toward a common goal. You have to have the vision and an understanding of the steps to get there. You have to have the ability to let others lead. In a group, you have to be willing to be open-minded.

Barbara believed that leadership styles were situational and a delicate balance was necessary, given the nature of each situation.

> Leadership depends upon the situation and what you are trying to accomplish. It is being able to pull all the pieces together to see and idea. It is being persistent, not taking no for an answer. It's trying to figure out the climate, how far you can push people…how far you can push people before you make enemies.

The inclusive style that Beth used took into account the opinions of her followers. The ability to be a good listener played a key role in her success as a leader.

> My style of leadership is participatory leadership. That is, I try to involve all stakeholders in the decision-making process. And then I exercise my faith, my best judgment, after reviewing and synthesizing input from others. I listen. It is more than hearing people; it is listening to what they are saying. One thing that makes me effective is that I do my homework. I never accept statements as facts unless I have done the research to confirm those reasons. Listening to the advice and counsel of leaders who had similar experiences in their community has helped me learn from their successes and failures.

As Jennifer described her leadership style, she emphasized her role as a collaborative educator.

> Supportive leadership gives the sense of having power to make decisions, to ask for support, and to succeed both in the classroom and with each other. I have learned to be an excellent listener as a leader.

Janet's creative personality and open mind were the driving forces behind her success as a leader.

> I am an idea person; I will listen to anybody's idea if they take the time to formulate it. I believe in nurturing people. Empathy is important…I have a tremendous amount of empathy for social service organizations and that's why I like to partner with them.

Amy exemplified the leader who carefully weighs the situation and then acts intuitively based on the facts before her.

> I think I am very caring. I will listen to both sides of an issue before making a decision. You have to be willing to listen and do some research. I don't mind digging into the details. It is effective to work in teams to accomplish small portions of the larger goal. I just go with my own intuition, my own gut, despite the pressure.

Maggie's ability to help people help themselves was pivotal to her success as a leader. Her followers were able to discover their own paths as she shared with them her guidance and experience.

The most important thing was learning how to ask questions and how to listen. Ask probing questions so that you get to the heart of the matter. Also important is the ability to communicate, both written and spoken word. That was absolutely essential in my career path. For example, I once had an employee with whom I sat down and had a conversation about what she wanted to do. She came to the same conclusion as I did, that she wasn't in the right position. That was a really good learning experience as to how to work with people in those kinds of situations. That's my style of management and leadership. I have my leadership team analyze productivity, where the needs for employment are, so that as employees leave, we know which positions need to be filled that may not be the positions that the employees left. My husband says I am patient with people. I am slow to anger, but when I do get angry, I am very pointed with people so they understand the seriousness of what I believe has happened and how they need to change their ways or make adjustments.

A calm exterior and consideration for others were Nicole's primary keys to effective leadership. It is as important to nurture leadership in others as it is in oneself.

Successful leadership has so much to do with getting good people around you and letting them do what they do best. One of my biggest strengths would be connecting people. I got a call from a man who was just furious with how my company was doing things. Before the call was over, he had agreed to come in that afternoon. He sat down and visited with me and we figured out how he could volunteer and help solve the issue. Turn the situation around—that's what works for me. A leader has to be aware of the things that are around you and the opportunities and try to take advantage of them. Also, find people to fit into the appropriate slots. I try to eliminate negative people in my life. I am cool and collected and in control of the situation. I knew that I wasn't going to be successful managing the way a man managed. I decided I could not manage a business like that, which is yelling at a subcontractor or that type of thing. It wasn't comfortable for me. We laugh, we tease each other…it's just a fun way to manage people. You go out there and grin, do something that gets people with you. And let other people talk. Ask them questions and make them feel important. It doesn't take but a few moments if you're in a little group before you are the focus.

The ability to use intuition has served Kelly well in her journey as a community leader. An awareness of not only the issues, but those involved in the issues, helps her lead effectively.

A good leader is somebody who engenders confidence, who is strategic and looks at the big picture, and has a vision for the organization, company, or entity. It is one who is able to see out to the future and have a strategic plan for the future. I am very good at diagnosing an issue, so if there is an issue,

a problem, or something that needs attention, I am very good at plotting it. I am very intuitive with people and I can tell when people are feeling or not feeling good or how they're reacting to a situation. So I'm very cognizant of my co-workers' attitudes and feelings. I am a hard worker, and I put in many more hours than most people. I'm a perfectionist, so I like things to be done well and done right. That takes extra time. I didn't realize that I can come across very intense. So I've learned how to tone that down and maybe temper it somewhat. For example, we had a meeting scheduled because someone had a complaint against me. The first thing I did as I walked into the meeting was say, 'You're right, I screwed up.' And he had nothing to say. My supervisor just smiled and said that was the right thing to do.

Donna relied on trust and interpersonal relationships in her role as a leader. These skills helped her be a successful leader in both victory and defeat.

What worked for me was being persistent and committed and definitely having values that led to opinions, hopefully informed opinions, on issues. And I had an ability to work with others, at the same time not being afraid to step out of the pack sometimes. Leadership has a lot to do with trust that you develop with other people. Some of that actually has to do with your personality too. I know some people who have been really bright, intelligent, fully capable of leadership positions, but there's that little indefinable factor in their personality that keeps them from being successful. There has to be a lot of balance. Leadership is also about being prepared. You've got to be able to roll with the punches, to be able not to take things personally, and to be able to shake hands afterwards. You have to be able to work with people and accept losses, no matter how much it hurts.

Transformational leadership. The leadership styles and characteristics described by the participants exemplify the concept of transformational leadership. This style involves using oneself as a role model by gaining followers' trust and confidence. The leader communicates future goals, develops plans to achieve them, and then relies on innovation to put the plans into action.

In *Through the Labyrinth*, Eagly (2007) describes how women specifically incorporate transformational leadership.

Idealized influence	• Demonstrates qualities that motivate respect and pride from association with him or her
Idealized influence	• Communicates values, purposes, and importance or organization's mission
Inspirational motivation	• Exhibits optimism and excitement about goals and future states
Intellectual stimulation	• Examines new perspectives for solving problems and completing tasks
Individualized consideration	• Focuses on development and mentoring of followers and attends to their individual needs

(p. 129)

These characteristics are well-represented within the stories told by the study participants. The majority of the women interviewed reflected the need to communicate with others as paramount to promoting the mission of their organizations. They also emphasized the importance of novel problem-solving strategies and an enthusiasm toward achieving established goals. Finally, the participants identified the needs of their followers as a vital part of their journeys as leaders. Their stories reflect a focus on the well-being of their communities, as well as demonstrating the characteristics found in transformational leaders.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Research Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the characteristics of women leaders including their reasons for maintaining leadership positions. It also addressed challenges these women faced on their journeys and described their definitions of successful leadership based on the experiences they shared. The qualitative nature of the research project made it possible to tell the stories of the participants' journeys in order to understand their career progression and how it pertained to the concept of leadership.

The ten participants recruited for the study were women in positions of influence within their community including managers, directors, and politicians. Purposeful sampling was used so that the chosen participants would have experience with the central phenomenon being studied. All of the women contacted to participate in this study readily agreed to share their experiences with community leadership. There was some level of diversity regarding the age, ethnic backgrounds, and education level of the participants. Semi-structured personal interviews were conducted to collect data. Open-ended questions were used so the responses of the participants could guide the development of themes and the direction of the study.

Once the data were collected through audio-taped interviews, codes were assigned to sections of the text to help identify themes. A coding table was developed to illustrate how the themes for the discussion emerged from data obtained during the interviews. The stories of the participants were interwoven based on the themes and also analyzed in terms of the existing research. A discussion of the findings incorporated the literature and provided evidence of connected concepts. Strategies including inter-coder agreement, rich description, and

clarification of biases were used to strengthen the study's findings.

Ethical issues were addressed throughout each phase of the study. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form that outlined the procedures of the study. The identity of the participants was kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board to complete the study and a confidentiality form was signed by the individual who transcribed the interviews.

Implications of Findings

The findings of the study centered on six major themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews with the participants. *Power versus influence* revealed a concern for the community and the need for female presence in leadership positions within that community. Stories centered on reasons for becoming a leader and how women in leadership can influence others. Within the theme of *inciting change*, the importance of innovation and vision emerged as key factors in effective leadership.

The theme of *role models* supported the existing literature citing mentors as a crucial component for women in leadership. Participants described the characteristics of their role models and acknowledged the part they played in their success. The women in the study each faced unique *challenges and obstacles* throughout their journeys yet there was commonality in their stories. Many experienced challenges based on gender roles and stereotypes although not all found these issues to be significant in their career journeys.

Self-efficacy played a role in the success of the participants as leaders. Many women described their capability for leadership as well as experiences that built confidence. One of the main goals of the study was to elicit definitions of successful leadership from the participants. The theme of *effectual styles* developed as participants reflected on their own styles of leadership

as well as the styles of those they respect as leaders within the community. Similarities between the two were noted and explained within this thematic context.

The journeys of women in community leadership are worthy of research because stories of success with women as the central character are not prevalent within the existing literature. The barriers and obstacles faced by women are generally in the forefront, while their accomplishments get lost in the background. As more and more women successfully lead schools, companies, and corporations, the existing male-oriented leadership model needs to be scrutinized. The untold tales of women in leadership positions can illuminate attitudes that are dated and potentially inaccurate.

Strengths and Limitations

The purpose of the study was to describe the experiences of women in positions of leadership. The stories told by the participants reflected the tremendous positive impact that their personal journeys have had on the communities in which they live and work. Conducting interviews with ten influential women created plentiful and rich data from which to develop significant themes.

Despite the extensive data and findings, the research study may have been limited by several factors. All the participants live and work in the same Midwestern community so the viewpoint on leadership could be limited. There was also not a great amount of diversity among the participants which could restrict the parameters of the results. Finally, since only women were interviewed for this study, it did not include a male perspective on leadership.

Future Research Studies

Several of the themes identified in this study could be expanded upon through additional research. As mentioned in the limitations above, comparison studies between the leadership

styles of men and women could be conducted. In order for this research to be conducted, the field of participants would need to include community leaders who are male. The resulting research could be qualitative in nature and examine the journeys of these participants in additional to their female counterparts. It could also be a quantitative or mixed methods study that would allow the researcher to conduct a comparative analysis of the research questions rather than focus on the stories that define the experiences of the participants.

Another aspect that merits further research is the inclusion of women with more diverse cultural or ethnic backgrounds. The question of how race in addition to gender affects leadership would be worth investigating. This study could remain qualitative in nature as it explored the journeys of a more diverse population. Themes could be derived and explained in a similar fashion. As in the previous example, however, this study could also be a quantitative or mixed methods study that provided a comparative analysis of the participants' experiences.

Additional research in this area could expand the worldview of advocacy and explore more fully the barriers and stereotypes present in today's society. The intent of this study would narrow the themes identified in the present study and focus on one aspect in particular. Further studies in this area would also expand upon the influences women leaders have on teens and young girls as potential future leaders. Educational opportunities and policies could be topics of research within this scope of study.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Request for Participation

As a community leader, you are being invited to participate in a research study that will attempt to understand and describe the experiences of women in leadership positions. Often the stories of influential women are ignored or the focus is on obstacles that prevent successful leadership. The goal of the study is to tell the stories of female leaders in the light of positive experiences and successes.

Participation in this study will require an interview that will not exceed one hour of your time. Your responses will be kept confidential and your name will not be mentioned in the study. By participating, you will have the satisfaction of contributing to a study focused on leadership journeys.

Thank you for considering being a part of this research project.

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant:
You have been invited to participate in a research study that will attempt to understand and describe the experiences of females in leadership positions. The following information is provided to you in order to describe the nature of your involvement.

Project: Women in Positions of Influence: Exploring the Journeys of Female Leaders

Purpose of the Project: This study will explore the stories of women who are in leadership positions within the community.

Procedures: You will be asked to participate in an interview that will take no more than one hour of your time. The interview will be audio-recorded and take place in a location mutually agreeable to the participant and the researcher.

Risks and/or Discomforts: There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Benefits: You will have the satisfaction of contributing to a study focused on leadership.

Confidentiality: Your name will not be used in the research study. All audiotapes will be kept in a locked location. Once the interviewer has transcribed the tapes, they will also be kept in a secured location as well.

Opportunity to Ask Questions: You may ask questions about this research study and have those questions answered during the study. You may contact Mary Pflanz at (402) 580-2397 or e-mail at mlpflanz@yahoo.com. You may also contact Dr. Marilyn Grady at (402) 472-0974 or e-mail at mgrady@unlserve.unl.edu. If you have any questions about participating or want to express any concerns about the research, you should contact the UNL Institutional Review Board at 402-472-6965.

Freedom to Withdraw: You are free to decide not to participate in this study. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

You are voluntarily making a decision to participate in this study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Women in Positions of Influence: Exploring the Journeys of Female Leaders

Tell me about your career path and how you attained this position.

How do you define successful leadership?

What made you want to be in a leadership position?

What characteristics do you possess that make you an effective leader?

What challenges have you faced in your position as a leader?

Who are some individuals who inspired you in your journey?

What biases or stereotypes have you encountered in your position?

What are some experiences that have transformed or changed you as a leader?

Appendix D: Transcriptionist Confidentiality Statement

I _____ (name of transcriptionist) agree to hold all information
contained on audio recorded tapes/and in interviews received from _____
(Name of PI), primary investigator for _____, (Name of the project)
in confidence with regard to the individual and institutions involved in the research study.
I understand that to violate this agreement would constitute a serious and unethical
infringement on the informant's right to privacy.

I also certify that I have completed the CITI Limited Research Worker training in Human
Research Protections.

_____   _____
Signature of Transcriptionist   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Principle Investigator   Date

Appendix E: Coding Table

POWER VS. INFLUENCE	INCITING CHANGE	ROLE MODELS
Definition: Motivational factors influencing the desire to lead	Definition: Ways in which the desire for change has been an influence	Definition: People who have guided the participants in their journeys.

POWER VS. INFLUENCE	INCITING CHANGE	ROLE MODELS
"If you have a vision, then you know how to create the system, and you have to get the players to play." (P1)	"If somthing needs to be changed, and I agree that it needs to be changed, and then it doesn't happen, because nobody steps up, I do it" (P1)	"They were bold and took leadership when women weren't supposed to and...they were ethical." (P2)
"...arrive at a decision that's based upon what's in the best interest of the people to be served or benefit by a particular measure." (P3)	"I care about the issues. I want something done. I get more say over what gets done if I'm in a leadership position." (P2)	"My father...my mother...put tremendous emphasis and focus on...the importance of education. I was raised by a community...we were exposed to as much culture and history as possible." (P3)
"I will listen to anybody's idea if they take the time to formulate it...an dI will help them achieve it." (P5)	"[I wanted] to give people a voice, that, generally, don't have a voice...there are a lot of people that felt disenfranchised and left behind." (P6)	"Personal friends...helped me to see the gifts of compassion and intellect I often discounted during this period." (P4)
Successful leadership is the ability to influence others...to get things done via teamwork." (P6)	"I want to go look at a project that I was involved in and helped, you know, bring to fruition...visit with the people an dfind out how it's going to affect their lives." (P7)	"She was very strong, and she taught me, you never give up tenacity. Very determined to get what she thought was right for downtown...she took a lot of criticism...and never let it get to her." (P6)
"Don't be afraid to jump in and do something that might lead you into yet another place where a door opens." (P8)	"Women don't take advantage of situations that arise." (P8)	"...watching other people who have been successful in leadership roles and learn from them. I have had a number of fabulous mentors over the year." (P7)
"The best type of leaders are ones that people rally around and say, oh I really want to follow them, I readlly want to be with them..." (P9)	"In the end, I believe we need more women candidates for office...women are just as likely to get elected as their male counterparts, if they're running for an open seat." (P10)	"I saw some women who were successful in running for public office...[they were] real role models for us...she encouraged them to be involved and run." (P10)

Appendix E: Coding Table (continued)

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

Definition: Difficulties and barriers identified by the participants

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"One of the biggest challenges is getting people to look at issues objectively and to not cloud the issue with partisan politics or religious differences or economic differences." (P3)

"While both of these male leaders could drive me bananas with some of their sexist ways, I never ever felt hesitant to name it. We all grew in this journey, especially in dealing with our sexism." (P4)

"I would sometimes walk into a room and I'd be the only African American there...[it was a] good old boy's club...and I'd get to teach people a lesson. That was a challenge at times." (P6)

"Being the only woman, [I] never felt any discrimination in that situation. And then I think maybe part of it was my attitude. I simply wasn't going to let it bother me. I would just continue on the way..." (P7)

"'Be prepared that you're going to work harder than some fellows,' she told me. Since I was a woman in a male dominated field it was reluctance to accept that I knew what was going on." (P8)

"And she was mortified that I would be away from my children, and scolded me for being a working mom and that my children would not be well taken care of." (P9)

SELF-EFFICACY AND IDENTITY

Definition: Expressions of confidence in the ability to lead

"I don't have to wait for everybody else to figure out what needs to be done...I can do what I want to do." (P2)

"I also knew that accepting a role to lead was 'bred in the bone' even when I would try to shy away from it...I began to claim the leadership role which others recognized in me." (P4)

"We have a lot of diversity of constituents...I just felt like I'm one of them. Whether I'm a woman, African American...I'm here to do a job." (P6)

"I thoroughly enjoy seeing people succeed...helping people how to communicate effectively. I have enjoyed looking at how the programs I helped establish have made an impact." (P7)

"I was pretty much in control of this. You could tell what I wanted and what I expected and they loved it." (P8)

"I think I realized that I did have the ability to do those kind of things. I just didn't give up. Not that you're always successful on everything...but the things that really mattered." (P10)

EFFECTUAL STYLES

Definition: Individual approaches to leading effectively

"You've got to have a vision and an understanding of the steps to get there...have the ability to have others lead." (P1)

"...being able to pull all the pieces together to see an idea...being persistent, not taking no for an answer...trying to figure out how far you can push people..." (P2)

"My style of leadership is participatory leadership. I try to involve all stakeholders in the decision making process." (P3)

"I'm an idea person. I will listen to anybody's idea if they take the time to formulate it. I have a tremendous amount of empathy for social service organizations." (P5)

"The most important thing was learning how to ask questions and how to listen. And then ask probling questions so that you get to the heart of the matter." (P7)

"A good leader is somebody who engenders confidence, somebody who's strategic that looks at the big picture...and is able to see out to the future and have a strategic plan..." (P9)

Appendix F: Institutional Review Board Project Approval Letter

Nebraska
UNIVERSITY OF
Lincoln

April 27, 2011

Mary Pflanz
Department of Educational Administration
635 S 44th St Lincoln, NE 68510

Marilyn Grady
Department of Educational Administration
128 TEAC, UNL, 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20110411758 EX
Project ID: 11758
Project Title: Women in Positions of Influence: Exploring the Journeys of Female Community
Leaders

Dear Mary:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review
Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have
provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on
the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide
Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR
46) and has been classified as Exempt Category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 04/27/2011.

1. The approved informed consent form has been uploaded to NUgrant (file with Approved.pdf
in the file name). Please use this form to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes
to the informed consent form, please submit the revised form to the IRB for review and approval
prior to using it.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board
any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:
* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths,
or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk
to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk
or has the potential to recur;
* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that

indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB