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The Stained Glass Ceiling: Women College Presidents in a Catholic Higher Education Context

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Abstract

Women are underrepresented in executive leadership positions across different industries, including higher education. The literature suggests that there are many gender-based barriers making it difficult for women to achieve executive-level leadership within higher education. Further, gendered organizations that promote the authority of one gender over another present additional barriers for women to access leadership roles. Catholic organizations are inherently gendered organizations given the Church's exclusive male leadership. This creates a "stained glass ceiling" making it difficult and, in some cases, impossible for women to rise to the top of Catholic higher education leadership. This interpretive phenomenological study explores the experiences of 16 current and former women presidents of Catholic colleges and universities. Using Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations and the Women's Leadership Development Model, an emerging theory from Dahlvig and Longman (2014), as a theoretical framework, the participants were interviewed regarding their path to the presidency and their experiences within the role. Findings suggest that women presidents of Catholic institutions face barriers rooted in cultural and social gender norms that reflect the five processes of a gendered organization. The findings also suggest that mentorship, professional development, and a personal alignment with the institutional mission are critical for women to be motivated to pursue the presidency and succeed within the role.

Keywords: Catholic, higher education, women, president, gendered organizations, leadership

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For my grandmother, Soledad Esposito,

who would have been so proud to call me, *Doctora.*

Que Dios, te bendiga.

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Chapter I

Historically, American higher education has been less than welcoming to women. Created to educate wealthy colonial men, early colleges were, for the most part, founded and operated by male administrators (Thelin, 2019). Access to higher education for women increased through the co-education movement of the 1960s and 70s, and women now outnumber men in the classroom and as college graduates (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). However, women leaders in higher education are still largely underrepresented compared to men, particularly in the role of president (Gagliardi et al., 2017). The literature suggests that there are many challenges rooted in gender stereotypes that impede the success of women obtaining leadership roles and their perceived effectiveness within those positions (Cook & Glass, 2014; Diehl, 2014; Eagly, 2007). These obstacles create a glass ceiling, an invisible barrier, preventing women from succeeding regardless of their talent, experience, and achievements (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986).

Further, women within male-centric gendered organizations face increased barriers throughout their leadership journeys (Acker, 1990; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Ecklund, 2006; Longman & Lanfreniere, 2012). Women leaders in higher education face an uphill battle in gaining parity as presidents of colleges and universities as the role has been a male-dominated position since the early history of American higher education (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Additionally, women in Christian higher education settings experience increased gender-related barriers to leadership (Longman & Lanfreniere, 2012). Through a theoretical lens of women's leadership development and gendered organizational culture, this study explores the experiences of women presidents in a Catholic higher education context.

Background

American higher education began during the colonial era and was created to educate a small group of wealthy men for careers as ministers and lawyers (Thelin, 2019). The trustees of these institutions appointed a president, in most cases a clergyman, to serve as the primary leader. The president was responsible for day-to-day operations including class instruction, faculty management, and student discipline (Kauffman, 1982). The presidency continued to evolve throughout the next two centuries as colleges and universities experienced larger enrollments, increased staffing personnel, and the professionalization of the professoriate (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Though the most recognized leader of the university, the president was no longer intimately involved with the day-to-day operations of the classroom or student life. Presidential attention took a turn toward budget and fiscal needs and working with external stakeholders such as lawmakers and donors.

Today, the American college president still serves as the primary public-facing leader of an institution (Bess & Dee, 2012). Internally, the president is responsible for oversight of strategic planning and the management of administration, finances, and enrollment (Selingo et al., 2017). Externally, the president is a liaison with local policy and lawmakers, donors, and alumni. In recent years, federal accountability for higher education has increased, creating more pressure on colleges and universities, and subsequently, their leaders, to deliver a high-quality educational experience while keeping student costs low (Bess & Dee, 2012).

While there is no formal pathway or preparation for the role of college and university president today, many come to the position with prior experiences primarily in higher education (Gagliardi et al., 2017). The literature on the college presidency indicates that presidential

success, or failure, is often attributed to leadership styles, personality, and perceived leadership competence (Birnbaum, 1989; Bornstein, 2014; Guskin & Marcy, 2002). Much of the existing research on the higher education presidency was conducted by and focused primarily on men (Dunn et al., 2104). Therefore, the standard set for leadership is done so by utilizing characteristics and behaviors often associated with masculinity.

Women in higher education experience individual, organizational, and societal barriers, rooted in gender stereotypes, that impeded their access to and success in leadership roles (Diehl, 2014). The college presidency, once almost exclusively male, has not achieved a diverse representation of leaders both in gender and racial representation. As of 2017, 70% of college presidents are men and just 30% are women (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Further, 83% of all college presidents identify as white. Emerging research regarding the barriers that contribute to the lack of diversity within academic leadership is critical to ensure equity at the highest levels of leadership in higher education.

While higher education continues to gain parity for women in the presidency role, Catholic higher education has had a unique history of women's representation in the presidency. Beginning in the late 1900s, when many colleges and universities, particularly Catholic colleges, were only open to men, Catholic women were seeking higher education (Poulson & Higgins, 2003). Further, Catholic sisters were seeking formal post-secondary education to prepare themselves to serve as educators. To meet their needs, Catholic sisters founded and operated over 200 all-women Catholic colleges and universities (Coburn & Smith, 1999; Goldin & Katz, 2011). The rise of all-women Catholic colleges in the late 1800s and early 1900s resulted in 66% of all Catholic college presidents being women, a majority that has not been matched since

(Morey & Holtschneider, 2003). However, most of these all-women Catholic colleges were absorbed or closed when the all-male Catholic colleges opened their doors to a fully co-educational experience in the 1960s and 70s (Poulson & Higgins, 2003).

In 2018, 38% of Catholic college presidents were women (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2018). Despite the significant decline in women presidents at Catholic colleges and universities since the early 1900s, there is still a higher representation of women presidents at Catholic colleges and universities compared to other institution types (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2018). However, there is limited research available on the experiences of women presidents at Catholic colleges and universities.

Problem Statement

Women are underrepresented in executive leadership positions across different industries, including higher education. In the 1980s, the term *glass ceiling* was used to illustrate an invisible barrier faced by women for top leadership positions (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). The glass ceiling is formed by the presence of widely accepted gender stereotypes that suggest women do not have the necessary skills, personality, or leadership traits to make them effective managers compared to men (Eagly, 2007; Heilman, 1983; Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). However, once in positions of power, evidence supports women leaders are as effective as men and, in many cases, more successful collaborators, communicators, and ethical decision-makers (Cann & Siegfried, 1990; Eagly et al., 2020; Rosser, 2003).

Mock (2005) indicated the glass ceiling is further hardened in a Christian religious context creating a *stained glass ceiling* (Longman & Lafreniere 2012; Seliger & Shames, 2009). The stained glass ceiling expands the metaphor of the glass ceiling with evidence that barriers to

leadership roles for women are heightened by the culture and structure of Christian religious organizations and their exclusion of women from formal leadership roles (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Ecklund, 2006; Longman & Lafreniere, 2012; Mock, 2005). When an organization actively operates in a way that excludes one gender from leadership positions, it is considered a gendered organization (Acker, 1990). While there are many different sects of Christianity, this study will focus on women leaders of Roman Catholic colleges and universities. Roman Catholic Church law only allows men to be priests which in turn excludes women from formal leadership roles within the Church (Pope Paul VI, 1976). Though many Catholic colleges and universities permit women to hold leadership roles, the culture of the sponsoring patriarchal Catholic Church may create a similar stained glass ceiling for women to achieve those positions. While the representation of women presidents at Catholic institutions is higher than at non-Catholic institutions, the literature suggests the stained glass ceiling is far from being shattered.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of women who have served as presidents of Catholic institutions. Specifically, this study focused on the participants' motivation on their path to the presidency, their leadership experiences on their path and within the role, and in what ways, if at all, the culture of a Catholic institution influenced their leadership experiences. The data collected was then analyzed to identify themes relevant to leadership, organizational culture, and gender identity. The voice of women presidents at Catholic colleges and universities is largely undocumented in the literature on American college presidents. Giving voice to the voiceless through a qualitative study allows for the amplification

of an important perspective for women's leadership in the context of faith-based colleges and universities.

While there have been studies on the college presidency and barriers to women's leadership, there are very few studies on the leadership experiences of women presidents at Catholic colleges and universities. Given the Catholic Church's status as a patriarchal institution, it is surprising that Catholic institutions have had a history of significant representation of women leaders (Ecklund, 2006; Pope Paul VI, 1976). However, the shrinking representation of women in the Catholic college presidency indicates that a stained glass ceiling is still present. Further investigation into the experiences of women who have held the presidency at Catholic institutions provides a deeper understanding of the barriers and success factors that contribute to women's leadership in higher education.

Research Questions

Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study provides an in-depth review of several themes relevant to success factors and barriers that the participants faced during their journey to the presidency as well as while in the role. The following research questions were used to frame this study:

1) What motivates women on their pathway to becoming a Catholic college president?
2) In what ways, if at all, do women experience challenges on their path to the presidency and within the role?
3) In what ways, if at all, does the organizational culture of a Catholic institution impact the leadership experiences of women presidents?

Overview of Theoretical Framework

This study utilized a theoretical framework from Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations and the Women's Leadership Development Model (WLDM) (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations provides consideration for women's leadership experiences within male-centric organizations. The five processes of a gendered organization contribute to the various struggles that a woman might have on her path to and within her leadership roles. This theory provided context for the analysis of women leaders' experiences within the organizational culture of Catholic higher education. Further, Dahlvig and Longman (2014) provided a model for women's leadership development that considers how motivation, resistance, organizational culture, and self-identity contribute to women's leadership development. Together, these theories assisted in a deeper understanding of the motivation, challenges, and influence of organizational culture on the experiences of women Catholic college presidents.

Methodology

A phenomenological approach was used to inform the design of this study. Phenomenology allows for the understanding and exploration of the narratives provided by participants who have all experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this case, the phenomenon studied is the experience of being a woman Catholic college president. Consistent with a phenomenological study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 current and former women presidents of Catholic colleges to garner rich contextual data to analyze and interpret their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews were transcribed, coded using deductive and inductive coding, and the data were then analyzed for themes. I provide an in-depth overview of the data collection and analysis process in Chapter IV.

Significance of the Study

Despite the significant gains that women have made in the last century in representing more than half of all current college students and degree holders in the United States, women have still not been able to ascend to the top ranks of higher education leadership (Howard & Gagliardi, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The number of challenges women must face daily to close the gender gap in virtually every field and industry is extensive and overwhelming (Diehl, 2014; Northouse, 2019). There are significant barriers rooted in gender stereotypes that form a glass ceiling impeding women's parity in higher education leadership (Ballenger, 2010; Diehl, 2014; Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). However, when women do gain top leadership positions across industries, their leadership is transformational, democratic, and collaborative (Eagly, 2007; Northouse, 2019). For higher education, having more women in power means greater representation for the student body. For higher education, having more women in power means more ethical, productive, and efficiently run organizations (Eagly, 2007; Northouse, 2019). For higher education, having more women in power is necessary.

This study, while focused on the experiences of women in Catholic higher education leadership, also provides important data for women's leadership across higher education. Understanding the path women have taken to ascend to the presidency provides strategies to ensure more women who are qualified and prepared can take on these roles. Additionally, an analysis of the experiences of women in the presidency at Catholic colleges can provide insight into the personal, organizational, and societal factors that support or create barriers to the success of women leaders at these institutions. All of this information, in the context of institutions

affiliated with the Catholic Church, a gendered organization, provides data relevant to how the glass ceiling is shaped within a religious higher education setting.

Conclusion

The first chapter of this study provided the necessary background, context, and the problem that this study planned to address. Further, the significance of this study was also discussed. I also shared that I utilized a phenomenological qualitative approach to address the three research questions guiding this study. Chapter II will provide an in-depth literature review to provide additional context and data on what is known about the American college presidency, women's leadership, and Catholic higher education. Chapter III provides details of the methods used to design and execute this study. In Chapter IV, I provide the themes and subthemes that emerged from the collected data. Finally, Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings and recommendations for future practice and research.

Glossary of Terms

A list of definitions, provided by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (n.d.a), for commonly used terminology within Catholic higher education that appeared within this study:

Bishop - leadership title among ordained priests. The bishop typically oversees a local diocese.

Cardinal - highest ranking clergy member before the rank of pope.

Charism - a spiritual gift from God given to individuals. When used in the context of Catholic higher education, a charism can also be used to describe the spirit of a community, usually associated with the founding congregation.

Diocese - a geographical territory in which a bishop has authority over local Catholic Church parishes. A diocese may also have founded a Catholic college or university, usually resulting in the Bishop having more governing control over that institution. Dioceses are also grouped under a larger territory called the archdiocese overseen by an archbishop.

Laity/Lay - any individual who is not an ordained member of the Church or member of a religious order. Throughout this study, I also refer to lay individuals as a layperson, layman/laymen, and laywoman/laywomen.

Pope - highest ranking member of the Roman Catholic Church.

Secular – indicates that the object or entity being referred to has no religious affiliation.

Sponsoring Congregation/Religious Order – organizations of men or women within the Catholic Church that live in community under shared vows, values, and/or a charism established by the founder of the order. Typically, the organization is founded in the spirit of a Catholic saint. Examples include the Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans, and Benedictines. Religious orders and congregations were the founders of many Catholic institutions in the United States.

Women Religious – any woman who has taken vows within a religious order. All women religious take on the title of **sister**. Women religious who have taken solemn vows are considered **nuns**. In some cases, within participant narratives, nun and sister are used interchangeably.

Chapter II

The following literature review explores three major areas concerning women's leadership in Catholic higher education. First, a review of the literature surrounding the American college presidency is provided including historical context, today's American college president, and what is known about women presidents. Next, an overview of Catholic higher education offers the history of the presence of women within Catholic higher education, a summary of Catholic higher education today, the role of mission at these institutions, and an overview of the Catholic university presidency. Third, a summary of the literature regarding women's leadership barriers and success factors is provided. Attention is given to the glass ceiling phenomenon as well as the stained glass ceiling which suggests there are additional barriers for women in religiously affiliated organizations. Finally, I will provide an overview of Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations and Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) Women's Leadership Development Model as a theoretical framework for this study.

The American College Presidency

Colleges and universities in the United States have long served as places where knowledge and culture are gained, shared, and used to inform a better society (Bess & Dee, 2012). Since their creation in the colonial era, colleges and universities have sought to develop leaders and promote social advancement. What were once elitist institutions serving only the wealthiest of men, colleges and universities have been expanded and challenged to increase access to education for social mobility, change, and growth (Thelin, 2019). Colleges and universities have been vital for advancements in our society in all industries and aspects of human life. To ensure that higher education continues to be a public good that benefits all, it is

important to look at the leadership of these institutions. Organizational structure and governance are critical to ensuring the efficient and effective use of human and capital resources (Bess & Dee, 2012). The success of a college or university depends largely on institutional leadership (Ramsden, 1998).

For colleges and universities, in most cases, the president serves as the top senior administrator and is typically identified as the leader of an institution (Eckel & Kezar, 2016). The president is appointed by and reports to a board of trustees or a similar board of governors. Additionally, the president is often charged with making leadership decisions to ensure the survival, stability, and success of an institution (Bess & Dee, 2012). Since the success of an institution depends on its leadership, a continued and deeper understanding of the role, responsibilities, and credentials of college presidents is necessary.

The college presidency has long been a topic of research given the significance of the role. Much of the available literature centers on studies conducted in the 1970s through the 1990s reflecting the experiences of the white men who held almost all of the college president positions at the time (Birnbaum, 1992; Cohen & March, 1974; Smerek, 2013). Additionally, research on the college presidency is limited in that it was conducted primarily by men and centered on male experiences (Dunn et al., 2014). Continued and current research on the college presidency is necessary as the role of president has shifted over the years.

Historical Context

As colonial colleges developed in America, governance was established by instituting a board of trustees that would directly oversee a president (Thelin, 2019). This style of governance has continued to be the standard for American colleges and universities today, however, the role

of the college president has shifted greatly. Founded as private institutions by the Puritans to educate wealthy white men to become ministers and lawyers, colonial colleges were often led by clergymen who were appointed as presidents and served as chief academic officers (Thelin, 2019). The president was the most prominent member of the institution and served as a father figure to students in many ways. He often taught courses on morals and ethics and was responsible for student discipline (Kauffman, 1982). He was also responsible for organizational oversight, fundraising, and community relations to bolster the college's reputation (Kauffman, 1982; Thelin, 2019). Presidents of these early institutions were well-respected figures in the local community.

After the American Revolution, the expansion of colleges in the United States continued with the creation of public colleges. The curriculum shifted to meet the needs of an evolving country with a focus on agriculture and science (Rudolph, 1990). Presidential leadership of colleges and universities became increasingly important as the presidents lobbied with new state and federal lawmakers for funding and resources as the dust from the American Revolution settled (Rudolph, 1990). Over the next century, the country would see continued growth in higher education. The development of a more robust curriculum, beyond the early college curriculum for future ministers and lawyers, increased degree offerings, and growing enrollment meant more responsibility for college leaders. By the late 1800s, colleges began to move away from clergymen presidents and trustee boards sought out men who were experienced in politics, business, law, and even former Civil War generals (Rudolph, 1990). Presidents became less involved with students and more focused on the financial success of their institutions. This era of presidents was known for an increased focus on building, both of physical campus buildings and

a broader liberal arts curriculum (Selingo et al., 2017). The stature of college presidents grew throughout the 1800s and they were viewed as a small club of very powerful men.

The president remained the most recognized leader of an institution, however, the role no longer resembled that of the first college presidents. With the expansion of colleges and universities came a larger student body. The increasing complexity and needs of colleges and universities gave way to the emergence of faculty as the academic authority on campuses and the creation of the college student personnel profession (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). The president, who was once responsible for serving as a father figure to students, spent a great deal of his time away from the campus meeting with lawmakers and donors seeking additional financial support for the institution in the early 1900s (Rudolph, 1990). Student needs such as discipline, counseling, and engagement, by the 1930s and 40s were addressed by dedicated non-academic staff known as college student personnel (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Similarly, presidents who were once responsible for overseeing the curriculum and faculty hiring were challenged by a growing and more qualified faculty (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). The professionalization of the professoriate created a demand from professors for oversight of the curriculum, academic standards, and faculty hiring. The first half of the 1900s saw faculty organization through national associations such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), unions, and the creation of faculty administration positions including provost and departmental deans (Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). This led way to the creation of a shared governance model where the faculty gained significant control of academic decisions (Kerr & Gade, 1987; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006).

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the presidency came with increasingly complex dynamics involving internal and external college stakeholders (Kerr & Gade, 1987). A more developed academic staff meant the president was less hands-on with curriculum development and faculty leadership than early college presidents. Students, faculty and staff, boards of trustees, and alumni alike had expectations of the president to prioritize their own needs first. At the same time there continued to be increased pressure to meet with and appease government policymakers to garner and maintain their support and financial resources (Birnbaum & Eckel, 2005). The focus on fiscal needs and managing a complex organization led to the president serving as a fundraiser, politician, and entrepreneur (Selingo et al., 2017). Presidents were no longer just father figures to a small group of students, but rather they became leaders that were expected to be all things to all people.

The Presidency Today

In recent years, federal attention toward higher education accountability has continued to contribute to heightened pressure on university leaders (Bess & Dee, 2012). Increased competition for funding and students has created an environment where strong leadership is necessary for an institution's success. The modern college presidency requires a skill set in strategic planning and decision-making, the ability to work with internal and external stakeholders, and a leadership style that meets often contradicting expectations of all constituents (Eckel & Kezar, 2016). More than that though, as former president of Cornell University, Frank Rhodes (1998) stated, the university president is responsible for overseeing the education of future leaders and therefore is the most influential of all positions. As the landscape of higher education continues to change in the face of a shifting population, decreased public support for

higher education, and, most recently, a global pandemic, college and university presidents have been called upon to be innovative and adaptable leaders (Soares et al., 2018).

First and foremost, today, presidents work alongside their boards of trustees to ensure financial success for their universities while also serving as the public face of institutional leadership (Bess & Dee, 2012). As public support for higher education weakens amidst the student loan debt crisis, ensuring a successful financial future for an institution continues to require more creativity and difficult decision-making for college presidents. When asked what makes a good president, presidents themselves suggest that one must be strategic, a storyteller, an intellectual, a fundraiser, a collaborator, and financially savvy (Selingo et al., 2017). A president spends the majority of their time overseeing the institution's budget and financial management, fundraising, managing the senior administration team, trustee relations, and enrollment management (Gagliardi et al., 2017). While a president may not be directly overseeing the day-to-day operations of their institutions, they are responsible for responding to major campus concerns regarding diversity, equity and inclusion, campus safety, and student well-being and belonging (Bass et al., 2021). In an environment where student activism is on the rise, preparedness to address student needs is a growing priority among college presidents (Bass et al., 2021). Today's college presidents are under immense pressure to balance internal and external constituent relationships and expectations while often making difficult decisions to solve complex problems.

Remarkably, despite the great amount of responsibility and leadership required of a college president, there is no formal education or training curriculum to prepare individuals who aspire to be college presidents (Selingo et al., 2017). While Harvard University does offer a

seminar for new presidents, the program is designed for first-time, newly-appointed presidents and does not offer a framework for appropriate training before a presidential appointment (Harvard University, n.d.). The most recent American College President study, which looked at the presidency across institution types, revealed that before assuming the presidency, 43% of college presidents were chief academic officers, in most cases serving as a provost, making it the most common pathway to the presidency (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Following chief academic officer, the next most common immediate prior position to the presidency was another presidency position including interim president at the same institution. Roughly 16% of college presidents were higher education senior executives within either student affairs or business affairs and 15% of presidents came from a previous role outside of higher education (Gagliardi et al., 2017). These data points indicate that institutions value presidents with prior higher education experience, particularly in academics as opposed to another administrative role or non-higher education type role. Additionally, 80% of college presidents have earned a doctorate, suggesting that a terminal degree is almost a necessary qualification for a president (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

Presidential Leadership Qualities

Outside of educational qualifications and prior work experiences, there are also a set of traits, qualities, and leadership skills desired in a college president. Most of the time, successes or failures are often attributed to the leadership qualities of a president rather than a lack of training or credentials (Guskin & Marcy, 2002). In a qualitative study of college presidents, participants reported that to accomplish their goals they needed to leverage social power and influence to garner buy-in and motivation from their internal and external constituents

(Birnbaum, 1989). Further, Bornstein (2014) offered three keys to a successful presidency: leadership legitimacy, managing authenticity, and emotional intelligence. She added that these themes for successful leadership are related to personality, leadership style, and perceived competence. Strong leadership is necessary to gain trust and a willingness to adapt and achieve a shared vision of followers. To influence behavior and change in their followers, a president must rely on their leadership style, not their academic or professional qualifications (Bess & Dee, 2012).

There are many types of leadership methods and styles, and each organization may require something different from a leader depending on the crux of the institution's greatest areas of need. This makes pinpointing the qualities of a perfect president difficult, as what works at one institution or for one president might not work for another (Birnbaum, 1992). There are, however, factors that might influence leadership style and effectiveness. One study suggests that constituents were more supportive of new presidents between their appointment through year three of their tenure (Birnbaum, 1992). During this “honeymoon” phase, a president often seeks more insights from constituents as they learn the institutional culture and assess needs and areas for change. As a president becomes more familiar with the campus culture and the institution's areas of need, they tend to do less listening (Birnbaum, 1992). Strong leadership qualities and behaviors are important for college presidents in managing their interpersonal relationships with internal and external community members, however, there is no one-size-fits-all or prescription for which leadership styles should be adopted by a college president. Further, the literature also supports that the gender identity of leaders adds a complex layer to how followers may perceive and respond to men and women as leaders (Birnbaum, 1992; Bolman & Deal, 2017; Northouse, 2019).

Women as Presidents

The role of a college president today is unlike any other profession and requires great skill, experience, and leadership. As an important and influential role, not only for the institution a president oversees but also for the future of higher education in general, one must question who gets to be a college president. Men continue to hold most of all college presidencies with 70%, while women hold just 30% (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Further, a majority of college presidents are white, representing 83%. The college presidency is far behind in reflecting the demographics of the current student body in the United States. During the 2017-2018 academic school year, 57% of all students identified as female (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Additionally, in 2016, just 52% of college students identified as white (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). A growing amount of research has been focused on women presidents and Presidents of Color to better understand the success factors and barriers that contribute to their ascension to the presidency.

The first documented woman college president was Frances Elizabeth Willard. She was president of the Evanston College for Ladies in 1871 (Pew Research Center, 2018). It would take an entire century before a woman led a major research university in 1975, and another two decades before a woman became the first president of an Ivy League university in 1994 at the University of Pennsylvania (Pew Research Center, 2018). When the American Council on Education conducted its first study on the American college president in 1986, women made up only 9.5% of the presidency (Gagliardi et al., 2017). That number doubled by 1998 but has only increased roughly 10% since. Women have continued to gain more presidency representation

over the years, though they have done so at a slow rate, having held just 21% of the presidency in 2001. As of 2017, only 30.1% of college presidents are women (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

In looking at where women serve as presidents, 35.8% of women presidents serve associate degree-granting institutions, where the student population typically consists of underrepresented and non-traditional students (Howard & Gagliardi, 2018). Doctoral-granting institutions are least likely to have a woman as president. Only 8% of women presidents serve at a doctoral-granting institution (Howard & Gagliardi, 2018). Women who were appointed to the presidency across institution types were more likely than men to both have served as a provost before the presidency and hold a doctorate, indicating that women tend to take a more traditional path to the presidency than men (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Another point of distinction is that women in the study were more likely to be serving in their first presidential role compared to men who had often served as a president at a different institution. Women presidents tend to spend more time as faculty and as a provost before ascending to the presidency (Gagliardi et al., 2017). This is significant in that women presidents are more often navigating a presidency for the first time while men are more likely to have had experience leading an institution.

Recent research has sought to explore the representation and experiences of women in the college presidency to gain parity in the role. Though women outnumber men as college graduates and earn an equal number of doctorates, they are largely absent from leadership roles in academia, particularly in the role of president (Seliger & Shames, 2009). The dearth of representation of women as presidents indicates there are barriers along the way that influence access to leadership.

One reason for the lack of women in the presidency is the inequities experienced by women faculty (Caton, 2007). Women struggle to find parity in academic leadership roles. More than half of entry-level teaching positions are held by women, however, these roles are often non-tenure track positions (Seliger & Shames, 2009). As faculty rank increases, the number of women decreases from 54% of instructors to just 26% of full professors (Seliger & Shames, 2009). Factors that contribute to women being underrepresented as full professors include being more negatively evaluated by students compared to male colleagues, lower research productivity due to underrepresentation, and a struggle to be seen as successful based on their talents and merit (Winkler, 2000). Women state that low research productivity is born out of social isolation due to being one of a few women, resulting in a disconnect to the field as well as to important networks of colleagues. Poor evaluations and lack of recognition of talent come from antiquated, but still very present, gender stereotypes of women being less competent than men (Winkler, 2000). The lack of representation of women faculty perpetuates issues in male-dominated cultures that inhibit women from accessing mentors as well as important professional development opportunities that help women gain leadership roles within the faculty (Brown, 2005). Issues of parity within faculty leadership hold women back from roles that lead to the provost position, ultimately cutting off a significant pathway to the presidency.

Societal expectations of women's responsibility for the home and family have been a consistent trend across the research regarding women college presidents. For women presidents, 32% altered their career plans due to family obligations, double the number of men who did the same (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Changing career plans for family could be one reason why women are more likely than men to be serving in the role of president for the first time. Most college presidents are in their early 60s, suggesting that many are not actively raising young children.

However, for women, childbearing years occur during formative career development years (Diehl, 2014; Gagliardi et al., 2017). Women who have successfully achieved the rank of president were less likely to be married or have children, again suggesting that family obligations delay or impede leadership opportunities for women (Bornstein, 2007; Gagliardi et al., 2017). Women tend to take more time away from their professional lives to focus on their family needs compared to men, making it difficult for them to keep pace with men on the journey to leadership roles.

Finally, women presidents tend to experience additional scrutiny of their leadership due to gender stereotyping and discrimination. In one study, 53% of college women presidents felt that perceptions of their leadership ability were influenced by their gender (Caton, 2007). Another qualitative study of women college presidents revealed that most participants felt discriminated against because of their gender both on their journey to the presidency as well as while in the role of president (Mahady, 2018). Examples of gender bias experienced by these presidents included: faculty only listening to men in committee meetings, not being offered certain job opportunities early in their careers, and being held to a different, often higher, standard than men though their leadership behavior was similar. Further, research indicates that workplace discrimination is often compounded for racially minoritized presidents, specifically Women of Color, who make up the smallest portion of college presidents (Oikelome, 2017). There is a large disparity in the racial breakdown for both men and women presidents. According to the American College President study, in 2017 women presidents were 83% white or Caucasian, 9% African American, 3% Hispanic, 2% Asian American, 1% American Indian, 1.8% multiple races, and .2% Middle Eastern (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Research regarding women

college presidents continues to be an area of focus, in particular, understanding the experiences of Presidents of Color.

Catholic Higher Education

While women college presidents continue to gain increased representation, it is important to consider that Catholic higher education has had an interesting history of women college presidents. By the early 1900s, there were roughly 200 all-women Catholic post-secondary institutions founded and operated entirely by Catholic sisters. During this time, two-thirds of all Catholic college presidents were women (Landy, 2002; Morey & Holtschneider, 2003). These early all-women Catholic institutions afforded women, primarily Catholic sisters, the opportunity to access major higher education leadership positions that few women held at non-Catholic colleges and universities. To understand the circumstances that led to the significant number of women leaders at Catholic institutions, an overview of the historical context of Catholic higher education will be provided. Further, a summary of Catholic post-secondary education today, the role of institutional mission, and an overview of Catholic institution presidents provide additional context for understanding the setting for today's women leaders of Catholic higher education.

Historical Context

Catholic colleges were founded in the latter half of the 1800s to provide education to the urban population of Catholic immigrant men who otherwise were not admitted into colleges at the time (Thelin, 2019). Typically founded by religious orders of priests, these colleges were meant to serve working-class Catholic men. Catholic institutions prided themselves on their accessibility to the sons of immigrants, a stark contrast to the elitist colleges and universities of

the colonial and post-American Revolution era (Thelin, 2019). Concurrently, women were gaining more access to a college education both in single-sex and co-educational settings.

Several non-Catholic all-women institutions were founded to serve young women who desired higher education in the 1860s and 1870s (Horowitz, 1993). Simultaneously, more public institutions were founded as the country continued its westward expansion through the Morrill Act of 1862 which provided federal funding for public universities (Goldin & Katz, 2011). While the Morrill Act did not require new institutions to be co-educational, there was a need to admit women in large part due to the lack of population and resources in the new states. Additionally, many of the already well-established colleges and universities began to find creative ways to educate women without giving way to a fully co-educational experience, though co-education was desired by both men and women students (Poulson & Higgins, 2003; Thelin, 2019).

As more colleges and universities opened, there was an increased competition between institutions for both students and funding. Admitting women meant admitting more students to pay tuition dollars. This led to the creation of educational programs, at both non-Catholic and Catholic institutions, for women to increase revenue and entice male student recruitment (Thelin, 2019). For wealthier institutions with sufficient resources, women were accepted into a newly formed sister school or branch campus. Less wealthy institutions admitted a small number of women directly into their mainstream classrooms as it was more affordable than hiring new faculty and finding more real estate to operate gender-segregated schools (Goldin & Katz, 2011).

Women attending college was still a radical idea and a source of contention within the leadership of the Catholic Church in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Co-education was seen as a threat to the Catholic Church's teaching of cultural roles and behaviors

for men and women (Poulson & Higgins, 2003). Many Catholic leaders felt that women should be kept out of school so that they could focus on their role in the home. However, they were also concerned that, with no alternative, Catholic women would seek education at radical, secular, institutions. Likewise, the retention of men at Catholic universities became a concern with a growing preference among male students to study alongside women in a co-educational setting (Poulson & Higgins, 2003).

As non-Catholic, secular, institutions gradually turned to co-education, a flame of urgency was ignited in Catholic higher education (Coburn & Smith, 1999). Catholic sisters seized this opportunity to open their own colleges. The late 1800s and early 1900s saw the founding of all-women Catholic Colleges with the mission of providing Catholic women a comparable, if not better, education than both single-sex and co-educational non-Catholic institutions (Oates, 1988). These Catholic, all-women, colleges provided access to women who wanted a college education while appeasing Church leadership with a Catholic-centered curriculum.

The founding of all-women Catholic colleges provided access to education for women and a pathway for women's leadership in Catholic higher education. Though some of these early institutions shared faculty with local male-only Catholic colleges, many relied heavily on women religious to serve as faculty and administrators (Poulson & Higgins, 2003). Due to a lack of societal support for educating women, many of the Catholic sisters were not prepared to take on teaching roles and sought their own undergraduate and graduate education to staff their institutions (Oates, 1988). Sisters would travel to Europe to study at Oxford and Cambridge or seek enrollment at a local state college in the United States. Catholic Church leadership became

concerned about the financial burden of the sisters studying abroad and worried that studying at secular institutions in the United States would expose them to too many radical and feminist influences (Coburn & Smith, 1999). To ease financial burden for the Church and to eliminate the risk of radical teaching, sisters were permitted to attend undergraduate and graduate programs at the all-male Catholic universities, which in many cases was the first-time women were permitted to attend these institutions at all (Coburn & Smith, 1999). Despite the effort to keep women out of non-Catholic institutions, that the Church saw as dangerously radical and feminist, the founding congregations of all-women Catholic colleges were actually both quite radical and feminist. The ambition, grit, and independence displayed by these pioneering sisters defied gender norms not only for women but more so for vowed women religious who were expected to be obedient and submissive in the male-dominated system that is the Catholic Church (Scolforo, 2012).

By the 1910s, the education of women at single-sex Catholic colleges run by Catholic sisters was accepted and even somewhat encouraged by Catholic Church leadership (Landy, 2002). The sisters made up the administration from president to deans, the faculty, and the board of trustee members, with the occasional exception of laymen to assist with legal or business needs. These colleges continued their growth and by the 1960s, there were roughly 200 all-women Catholic colleges in the United States founded, operated, and governed by vowed women religious (Landy, 2002). The sheer number of women in leadership roles at all-women Catholic colleges was unparalleled to any other sector of higher education of that time and even today (Morey & Holtschneider, 2003).

While women's Catholic colleges saw success over the first half of the twentieth century, they typically managed shoestring budgets to stay open (Oates, 2002). With sisters holding most administrative and faculty positions at the colleges, the institutions were able to keep payroll costs down to a minimum and make the most of the revenue generated by tuition dollars and financial support from the sponsoring religious order. However, after a shift in Church philosophy following the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), which increased lay leadership and participation in the Church, the sisterhood began to see a sharp decline in the number of women choosing a vocation of religious life (Morey & Holtschneider, 2003; Vatican Council, 1964). Therefore, it became more and more difficult to sustain this model of employment and funding (Oates, 2002). The decline in human resources would also be compounded by the catalyst of a full co-educational movement in the 1960s and 1970s leading to the eventual dwindling of all-women Catholic institutions (Oates, 2002).

As more prestigious non-Catholic universities continued to adopt a co-educational model post World War II, the all-men Catholic colleges began to see a decline in enrollment as men desired a co-educational experience (Poulson & Higgins, 2003). The shift to co-education at secular institutions pushed the major all-men Catholic colleges, such as Notre Dame, Boston College, and Georgetown, to adopt co-education in the late 1960s as a means of survival (Poulson & Higgins, 2003). To continue the retention of high-quality students and increase the recruitment of new students without lowering their standards of admissions, all-men Catholic colleges fully opened their doors to women (Goldin & Katz, 2011). Consequently, women were more likely to apply to and attend the once all-male institutions due to their stronger reputations and prestige compared to the all-women Catholic colleges (Poulson & Higgins, 2003).

The social and financial pressures that led to a Catholic co-educational experience had an unintended consequence for women administrators. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the all-women Catholic colleges were now being absorbed by their all-male counterparts or closed permanently (Poulson & Higgins, 2003). The voice of the sisters who ran these institutions is largely undocumented in the history of higher education and it is unclear what they did after the closing of their institutions (Schier & Russett, 2002). Some of the stronger all-women Catholic institutions remained open and are still operational today, though many converted to co-education as well to maintain student enrollment (Scolforo, 2012). Today, there are only ten all-women Catholic institutions in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Catholic Higher Education Today

Catholic colleges and universities today are primarily co-educational and, as of Fall 2019, had an enrollment of almost 700,000 undergraduate and graduate students, roughly 3.5% of college students across all institution types (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Catholic institutions are typically small to midsize with an average student body size of 3,400. Women make up 62% of all Catholic college students while men make up 38%. Additionally, the primary racial categories for which Catholic institution students identify are 56% white, 16% Hispanic or Latino, 9% Black or African American, and 6% Asian (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

The United States has the largest enrollment of students in Catholic post-secondary institutions, but unlike Catholic institutions in other countries, their enrollment is declining (Wodon, 2020). One factor that could contribute to declining enrollment is, in 2018, the College Board ceased asking students about their religious affiliation on the SAT Student Questionnaire,

a tool used for targeted student recruitment by colleges and universities (Fernandez, 2019). Additionally, a challenge for Catholic colleges is the recent closing of many Catholic elementary and secondary schools, creating a shallower recruitment pool in an already fiercely competitive college market (Seltzer, 2021). Finally, a 2019 survey of college freshmen revealed that only 9.6% of incoming students rank the religious affiliation of an institution as an important factor that attracted them to an institution (Stolzenberg et al., 2020). That number increased to 18.1% for first-year students enrolled at Catholic colleges and universities. Still, religious affiliation does not strongly influence most students' choice of an institution as much as cost, financial aid, and academic reputation, all of which ranked first for influences on student college choice at both Catholic and non-Catholic institutions (Stolzenberg et al., 2020).

While Catholic institutions once opened the doors for poor Catholic immigrants, today average tuition costs among Catholic institutions are steep compared to public institutions, though they come in slightly lower than their non-Catholic, private non-profit counterparts. In 2019, the average price of tuition at a Catholic college was $49,421 annually (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). With 83% of students at Catholic institutions receiving some form of financial aid, the average net cost of tuition for a Catholic college student is $25,064 annually. While Catholic institutions' average cost of tuition comes in close to, if not a little lower, than the national average cost to attend college in the United States, their price tag is still significantly higher than the average in-state tuition at a public 4-year university which is approximately $8,500 (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). For years, institutions of higher education have been battling with the dichotomy of rising operation costs and societal pressure to keep college affordable (Johnstone, 2016). Catholic institutions are no different and over the last decade, several small Catholic institutions have lost the battle and were forced to merge with another

institution or close entirely due to a lack of financial resources and low student enrollment (Seltzer, 2017).

Despite increasing challenges for Catholic higher education, Catholic college and university students have successful graduation rates. In 2018, the average 6-year graduation rate for students enrolled at Catholic colleges and universities was 70.6% compared to 60.1% for all 4-year institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The Association for Catholic Colleges and Universities (2017) reported that Black and Hispanic students graduate at higher rates, 43% and 52% respectively, compared to all private and public 4-year institutions where 35% of Black and 44% of Hispanic students graduate within six years. This is particularly important as Students of Color typically struggle to graduate at the same rate as their white peers. While Black and Hispanic students still graduate at a lower rate than white students at Catholic institutions, data suggests Black and Hispanic students are more successful at Catholic institutions than public and non-Catholic private 4-year colleges and universities (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2017).

The Catholic University Mission

Though the religious affiliation of an institution may not be what is driving most students to attend Catholic institutions, Catholic identity is what sets these institutions apart from all others. To be a Catholic institution the operations of a college or university must reflect a Catholic identity through its mission and commitment to the Catholic intellectual tradition. In 1990, Pope John Paul II issued an apostolic constitution, intended to redefine what it meant to be a Catholic college or university. This constitution, known as *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, stated that an institution of Catholic higher education must have four distinct characteristics. These

characteristics included a (1) Christian-inspired community, (2) a responsibility to conduct research rooted in faith and reason, (3) a commitment to Church teaching, and (4) a dedication to service for all (Pope John Paul II, 1990). These characteristics are often demonstrated through a university's mission statement (Boylan, 2015; Estanek et al., 2006). Further, the mission statement of a Catholic institution is engrained in the day-to-day operations of the college or university in a unique way. A study of Catholic university mission statements revealed that Catholic identity and Church teachings are deeply integrated into student learning outcomes stated in mission statements (Estanek et al., 2006). Explicitly tying the Catholic identity of an institution into the mission statement creates an expectation that all university community members are responsible for ensuring the priorities of a Catholic collegiate experience. For example, it may be in a Catholic university's mission statement to encourage students' religious or spiritual development, foster a sense of social responsibility, and call on students to serve others by being responsible leaders (Estanek et al., 2006). Thus, influencing major success markers for the various divisions around campus including mission and ministry, student services, and academics. Catholic-informed objectives in a mission statement invoke a call to faculty, staff, and administrators to provide specific experiences to students through a Catholic lens.

Many Catholic institutions also have a charism, or a set of values and traditions, that reflect the mission and spirit of a founding religious order (Doud, 2014; Sanders, 2010). These charisms further deepen the campus culture to reflect the heart of the founding organization. For example, Providence College, an institution founded by the Dominican Order of Preachers, states the four pillars of the Dominican tradition in its mission statement: study, prayer, community, and service (Hagstrom, 2010). All features of the institution from the curriculum to the physical

architecture point to Catholic and Dominican tradition symbols and customs, both implicitly and explicitly, to root campus life in the charism of its sponsoring organization. A study comparing student perceptions of the mission at Catholic and non-Catholic independent universities revealed that students at Catholic institutions demonstrate a stronger recognition of the mission through campus operations and culture (Boylan, 2015). Additionally, students' appreciation of the institutional mission was higher in their senior year than in their freshman year indicating growth in how a student views the mission throughout their time at an institution. While most students may not originally attend a Catholic university because of the mission, there is evidence to suggest mission influences the student experience at Catholic institutions.

The Catholic University President

As with all institutions of higher education today, a leader with vision and creativity is needed to ensure the success of a Catholic college or university. Further, for Catholic colleges and universities, a leader who understands the mission and charism of an institution is invaluable (Morey & Holtschneider, 2003). To make strategic decisions that respect the heritage of the founding religious organization a Catholic university president must have a working knowledge of Catholic identity and Church teaching. Presidents of Catholic colleges and universities have all the expectations of any college president with the added responsibility of demonstrating an appreciation for and support of the Catholic mission, identity, and charism of the institution along with respect for the Church and its teachings (Pharr, 2017).

Catholic institutions were formerly led primarily by ordained priests and vowed religious sisters often of the religious order that sponsored the institution (Gardner, 2006). Not only were the presidents a member of the sponsoring religious organization but often so were the board of

trustee members (Morey & Holtschneider, 2003). After Vatican II, fewer men and women were joining the priesthood and sisterhood, meaning there were fewer qualified vowed religious men and women to lead Catholic higher education (Pharr, 2017). Colleges and universities that were founded and operated by religious orders were more often turning to lay presidents to carry out their missions in the 1970s and 80s. Lay leaders are usually more prepared with the education and professional experience to take on the role of president than priests or sisters (Morey & Holtschneider, 2003). However, according to a study analyzing leadership trends in Catholic higher education, boards of trustees exhibit a strong preference for vowed religious presidents, sisters and priests, regardless of their preparation for the role, over lay presidents when available (Morey & Holtschneider, 2003).

Today, the typical president of a Catholic college is not much different from the president of a non-Catholic college. Presidents at Catholic colleges and universities have similar educational backgrounds as those at non-Catholic institutions though presidents at Catholic institutions are more likely to have a degree in religion or theology (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2018). Further, 94% of presidents at Catholic colleges and universities identify their religious affiliation as Catholic, whereas only 19% of non-Catholic institution presidents identify as Catholic (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2018). Catholic institution presidents are also more likely to be unmarried, which is expected considering many Catholic institution presidents are priests or sisters. Two studies conducted to compare presidents of Catholic institutions to presidents of non-Catholic institutions revealed, for the most part, similar pathways to the presidency and demographic makeup of the presidents including gender, race, and age (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2018; Morey & Holtschneider, 2003). The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (2018) noted that

while the 2017 American College President study aimed to provide a general overview of the individuals that make up the presidency, they leave out important questions that would distinguish one president's role from another depending on institution type (Gagliardi et al., 2017). In particular, the study does not consider the experiences of presidents at a faith-based institution where mission plays an important role.

There were two main areas in which Catholic university presidents stood out from their peers. A significant distinction between Catholic higher education and non-Catholic higher education is the presence of women in the presidency. Women presidents make up 38% of the presidency at Catholic institutions compared to just 26% at non-Catholic institutions (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2018). The representation of women in the presidency at Catholic institutions is impressive for an institution supported by a patriarchal organization that prohibits women's leadership (Acker, 1990; Ecklund, 2006; Pope Paul VI, 1976). However, the number of women presidents at Catholic institutions has steadily declined since the late 1800s when over 200 all-women Catholic colleges had vowed religious women as presidents (Morey & Holtschneider, 2003; Nelson, 2012). As the early all-women Catholic colleges closed in large part due to the co-education movement in the 1960s and 70s, women lost their footing as Catholic university presidents. Most recently, when a sister president leaves her role, she is likely to be replaced by a layman (Nelson, 2012). Studies comparing Catholic university presidents to non-Catholic university presidents remark that the shrinking number of women in the presidency could indicate Catholic institutions gaining uniformity with their non-Catholic counterparts (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2018; Morey & Holtschneider, 2003). Perhaps instead, these data support the presence of a stained glass ceiling, once briefly shattered by the bold sisters of the early history of Catholic higher education for

women, a ceiling now waiting to be broken again. Still, the higher representation of women in the presidency at Catholic institutions calls for further investigation into the lived experiences of the women who successfully became presidents of Catholic institutions.

Women's Leadership

To understand the experiences of women presidents at Catholic institutions, a deeper understanding is needed of the various barriers and challenges women leaders across all industries face as well as the factors that contribute to their success. Additionally, it is important to consider what is known about women leaders at religiously affiliated institutions. Though there is little empirical research available on the experiences of women presidents of Catholic colleges and universities, there is some research available on women leaders at religiously affiliated institutions such as Christian colleges and universities and Catholic parishes. These studies provide insight into how religious organizational culture can influence the leadership experiences of women.

The Glass Ceiling

When examining the absence of women in top leadership roles, the term glass ceiling is often used to illustrate the invisible barrier across all industries that prevent women from ascending to leadership ranks in their fields. The concept of the glass ceiling first came about in a *Wall Street Journal* article seeking to explain the dearth of women in business leadership (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). The article pointed to gender stereotypes and myths as the reasons why a seemingly invisible barrier existed preventing women from becoming managers and leaders of companies. Since the phrase emerged in the late 1980s there has been extensive literature affirming the existence of a glass ceiling among many sectors including higher

education (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Longman & Lafreniere, 2012; Seliger & Shames, 2009; United States 1995). The gender stereotypes that contribute to the glass ceiling for women in higher education range and can be categorized into three different levels of influence: individual, organizational, and societal (Diehl, 2014). These barriers for women include low self-esteem, lack of confidence, family obligations interfering with or delaying career advancement, and even instances of sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Many of these barriers exist because of deeply rooted and harmful gender stereotypes that influence society's expectations of women (Diehl, 2014; Eagly, 2007). Additionally, a recurrent theme within the literature on the glass ceiling is the misconception that women do not possess the ability to be effective leaders compared to men (Eagly, 2007; Heilman, 1983; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014).

Leadership qualities are often characterized as masculine or feminine and influence follower expectations of the leadership behaviors of men and women (Northouse, 2019). For example, women are expected to be collaborative, warm, and indirect while men are expected to be competitive, aggressive, and assertive (Heilman & Caleo, 2018). Studies on successful leadership, until recently, were conducted primarily with male participants, making much of the accepted notions of successful leadership associated with masculine characteristics (Dunn et al., 2014; Kruse & Prettyman, 2008). A woman is often evaluated negatively when she exhibits masculine leadership traits such as assertiveness. Feminine leadership traits can be positive; however, research suggests that followers prefer masculine leadership traits for male-typed roles (Eagly, 2007; Heilman & Caleo, 2018; Northouse, 2019; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Roles are considered male-typed when they exist in male-dominated fields (Heilman & Caleo, 2018). Though women now outnumber men as students in higher education, the role of college

president and much of academic leadership, historically and currently, is male-dominated (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Women leaders are presented with an impossible situation, they are expected to exhibit feminine behaviors in roles where masculine traits are preferred. Further, when leading with typically masculine characteristics women are evaluated negatively (Lyness & Heilman, 2006).

Gender stereotypes not only impede a woman's access to leadership roles but also have an impact on the perceived effectiveness of women leaders (Eagly, 2007; Lyness & Heilman, 2006). Studies regarding gender and leadership effectiveness have indicated that women leaders are equally effective and, in some cases, have a slight leadership advantage over men (Cann & Siegfried, 1990; Eagly, 2007; Rosser, 2003). Women more often tend to adopt leadership styles that are positively associated with organizational effectiveness including transformational leadership, a style of leadership based on follower empowerment and role modeling (Eagly, 2007). Women also exhibit transactional leadership style traits, which rely on objective-driven interactions between leaders and followers. Feminine traits of collaboration, emotional intelligence, and relationship building are valued and preferred when organizations are in crisis or failing (Cook & Glass, 2014). In these instances, women are generally perceived as better managers but are also set up to lead a failing company or organization, this concept is referred to as the *glass cliff* (Ryan et al., 2011). While women in these situations are promoted past the glass ceiling, they have to work harder to succeed, often take on personal blame for the organization's failure, and are criticized more harshly if they do not succeed (Cook & Glass, 2014; Ryan et al., 2011).

Overall, the differences between stereotypical men's and women's leadership styles are slight, indicating that men and women lead with a variety of styles and can both be effective leaders (Eagly, 2007). A recent study indicated that the continued, albeit slow, growth of women in the workforce has shifted antiquated stereotypes of women's competence (Eagly et al., 2020). Women leaders are now more likely to be viewed as competent leaders, however, gender stereotypes continue to exist surrounding gendered personality traits, which contributes to the pigeonholing of men and women into gender-typed jobs (Eagly et al., 2020). While it is promising that gender stereotypes may be more flexible than once assumed, they continue to exist and serve as a detriment to women's career advancement (Eagly et al., 2020). However, as evidenced by the growing presence of women in leadership roles across industries, the glass ceiling can be broken.

Within higher education, mentoring is a frequent theme in the literature as a strong catalyst for women's advancement to leadership. A mentor plays a critical role for their mentees by providing guidance and advice, access to professional development opportunities, and an advocate for the promotion of mentees (Ballenger, 2010; Brown, 2005; Oikelome, 2017). While mentoring can be successful regardless of the gender of both the mentor and the mentee, research suggests that women mentoring women has significant benefits including providing insight into how other women navigate work and family life (Brown, 2005; Longman & Lafreniere, 2012). An additional strategy for breaking through the glass ceiling in higher education is women's participation in leadership programs. Women presidents of colleges and universities were more likely than their male counterparts to have participated in a leadership development program (Howard & Gagliardi, 2018). Formal leadership programs help to develop a participant's confidence, peer networks, and increase connections to mentors (Aala, 2012). These strategies

aid in the promotion of women as they primarily address issues within the women's leadership pipeline. Continued research of women's experiences within their leadership roles will assist in understanding additional barriers women leaders may face once they have reached the top of their fields.

The Stained Glass Ceiling

Women leaders of Catholic-affiliated organizations may face further difficulty in their roles due to the presence of a stained glass ceiling. Similar to the glass ceiling, the stained glass ceiling is the concept of an invisible barrier to women's success strengthened by a religious organization's exclusion of women from leadership roles (Longman & Lafreniere, 2012; Mock, 2005, Seliger & Shames, 2009). Acker (1990) stated that organizations are gendered if they meet evidentiary criteria that indicate the organization operates in a way that creates a distinct difference between the roles and power assigned to men and women. These organizations not only implicitly operate in favor of one gender but actively seek to retain gender differences foundationally and functionally. The Catholic Church is a gendered organization that operates with an intentional patriarchal hierarchy that prohibits women from holding the formal leadership role of priest within the organization (Pope Paul VI, 1976). While women do fill roles as parish administrators and leaders of women's religious organizations, they are not permitted to become ordained priests, a requirement in becoming part of Church leadership through roles such as cardinal, bishop, and pope (Ecklund, 2006).

Understanding the leadership experiences of women in gendered organizations begins to shed light on the experiences of women Catholic college presidents. Research suggests that women who are in gendered organizations experience barriers created by gender stereotypes at a

higher rate than women who are not in gendered organizations (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Ecklund, 2006; Longman & Lafreniere, 2012). In a study comparing the barriers experienced by women who were higher education leaders at all institution types and women who were mission executives in religious organizations, both groups of women experienced the same gender barriers (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). However, several barriers were more prominent for women in religious organizations including cultural pressure to remain at home to raise a family, absence of mentoring, and exclusion from social networks. Women leaders in religious organizations also had a higher rate of failing to recognize the influence of gender bias in the workplace and took on personal blame to explain away issues of gender inequity (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Instances of what Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) refer to as "male-gatekeeping," or male permission and influence for hiring decisions regardless of their role in the process, were more salient in religious organizations. Male-gatekeeping was a theme found in another study comparing the experiences of women who held positions as Catholic parish administrators (Ecklund, 2006). The extent to which women were given authority and power as leaders in the parishes studied depended largely on priest views of lay leadership and women's Church leadership in general. The presence of heightened barriers for women leaders at faith-based gendered organizations supports the presence of a stained glass ceiling.

Theoretical Framework

To further understand how women presidents in a Catholic college context experience their leadership journey, this study utilizes the theoretical framework provided by Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations and Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) Women's Leadership Development Model (WLDM). Both theories provide a perspective for understanding how

identity, leadership, and organizational culture inform the experiences of women Catholic college presidents.

Theory of Gendered Organizations

Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations provides a critical look at organizational hierarchy and structure through a feminist lens. Acker (1990) argued that organizations are not gender neutral but rather they are built on structures that are controlled and influenced by symbols and systems that create, maintain, and perpetuate inequities between men and women. In an effort by organizations to exert control over their employees, they attempt to separate the ideal worker from their human body by suppressing connections to sexuality, emotions, and procreation (Acker, 1990). It is the disconnecting of a worker from their human body that permits men to stand out as the ideal worker given society's over-sexualization of the female body, the misconception that men are not emotional beings, and the limited physical and social impact on the male body for procreation (Acker, 1990). Since men and male bodies are more aligned with the ideal worker, women are often excluded overtly and covertly from hierarchies and organizational processes. Acker (2012) also highlighted the importance of intersectionality when considering gendered structures. Class, race, and gender are linked to one another, and each has its influences on how organizational systems create issues of inequity. This study will focus on gender identity, but themes of intersectionality are also important to consider.

Acker (1990) defined gendered organizations as the following:

> To say that an organization, or any other analytic unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action, and emotion, meaning and identity,

> are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. (p. 146).

Organizations exhibit gendering in five ways: (1) the division of labor, behavior, physical space, and power; (2) the construction of symbols and images to support those divisions; (3) gendered social interactions between men and women; (4) gendered identity expectations; and (5) the inherently gendered constructs in organizational logic and decision making. All five tenets interact to reinforce the systemic exclusion of one gender, most often women. The gendering of organizations occurs when processes and policies intentionally or unintentionally benefit, or promote, one gender over another (Acker, 1992). Inherent gendering also occurs when a shift in procedure reinforces the gender constructs that limit women in the workplace because they cannot always adapt their beings, behaviors, and out-of-work lives to fit the image of the ideal worker. The result of gendered organizations impacts women in many ways including pay disparity, poor job evaluations, and lack of hiring and promotion (Acker, 1990; 1992).

Researchers have utilized Acker's theory of gendered organizations across many fields including higher education (Lester et al., 2017). Whether the research focused on student, faculty, or staff experiences, the consensus is clear, higher education functions as a gendered organization (Erickson, 2012; Iverson, 2011; Sallee, 2012). For example, Sallee (2012) draws upon Acker's theory of gendered organizations to highlight how prescribed gender roles and images of the ideal worker prevent male faculty from being present fathers. Though this study did not focus on the disadvantages that gendered organizations create for women, as many do, it does highlight the overall consequences of gender constructs and the false narrative of a gender-neutral ideal worker. Presumably, if men are not present fathers, childcare is distributed

unequally to a mother's responsibility. While higher education does not formally exclude women from leadership roles, the historical structure and culture of the field do allow the acceptance of male leadership norms and expectations (Madden, 2011).

Catholic higher education presents an additional layer of gendering as the Roman Catholic Church is a gendered organization (Stalp & Winders, 2000). Organizational governance and positions of power and leadership are exclusively given to men within the Church. While women can be a part of a formal religious organization as sisters or nuns, they are limited in the overall hierarchy of the Church (Stalp & Winders, 2000). The gendering of both the Catholic Church and higher education would indicate that Catholic colleges and universities are nestled in a culture of systems, policies, processes, and symbols that inherently perpetuate gender inequity. For example, most Catholic institutions of higher education do not prohibit women from leadership roles, however, some Catholic institutions require priests to be presidents (Providence College, 2016; University of Notre Dame, 2021). Given this evidence, there is reason to suspect that women who are in leadership roles at Catholic colleges and universities encounter various components of gendered organizations that make it difficult for them to advance to and succeed in the president position.

Women's Leadership Development Model

Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) emerging theory for women's leadership development builds on the gendered organization framework provided by Acker (1990) by considering additional factors that influence women's leadership development in the context of organizational culture, specifically Christian higher education. The WLDM was developed as a result of a grounded theory study of women who attended a leadership institute specifically

designed for emerging women leaders at Christian colleges and universities (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). The study focused on women faculty and administrators who exhibited progressive leadership experience and potential for higher levels of leadership. The findings indicated that the participants experienced a cyclical process of motivation, validation, resistance, and leadership efficacy wrapped in and influenced by organizational culture and self-identity.

The WLDM first explores a woman's motivation for leadership and states that it comes from three sources (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). The first motivator is a sense of relational responsibility, or rather, an intrinsic purpose that is derived from personal connections to others. The second motivator is an awareness of calling or giftedness for leadership, suggesting that women who take on leadership roles do so out of self-awareness that their identity and skills align with the role of leader. Finally, the third motivator for leadership is mentor encouragement, which provides external support for a woman's leadership progression. These factors for motivation vary from person to person and experience to experience. Once motivation is present, a woman will continue to progress from leadership efficacy, confidence in one's leadership ability, to gaining leadership experience, and finally to leadership competence as new opportunities and responsibilities arise (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). At each level, the leader is met with support or resistance which will either push her to the next level or cause her to delay her next level of leadership and go back to her motivating factors.

Once a woman experiences validation, her self-efficacy builds, and she is more apt to engage in higher levels of leadership (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Resistance along a woman's leadership journey can result in discouragement to progressing on to another leadership role and

presents challenges to a woman's leadership efficacy. In some cases, resistance causes a woman to reconsider her journey and stall career progression, in other cases, resistance acts to build resilience and then serves as motivation to persist. However, once a woman decides to progress to the next level of leadership, the cycle repeats until she experiences either validation or resistance (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Eventually, as a woman progresses through this cyclical experience, she develops a sense of leadership competence.

Women's leadership development is also influenced by the context of organizational culture and self-identity (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Dahlvig and Longman (2014) discovered that women who found themselves in unsupportive work cultures, most often male-dominated environments, were likely to leave their roles or disengage from leadership opportunities. Other participants found themselves adjusting their identities to align with organizational fit and expectations. Dahlvig and Longman (2016) later built on the influence of a Christian culture for women's leadership development finding that an evangelical, or a Christian, worldview created additional barriers to leadership. Many of these barriers are a result of the male-gendered narrative around authority found in Christianity from the bible and the patriarchal structure of Christian organizations (Dahlvig & Longman, 2016). Overall, Dahlvig and Longman's (2014; 2016) theory for women's leadership development provides a model to better understand how women experience leadership development in relation to their own identities, significant leadership experiences, and organizational culture.

For centuries, the role of college president has been associated with male leadership. Male-typed roles and organizations make it increasingly difficult for women to garner leadership legitimacy amid gender stereotypes. In the process of adapting to organizational culture and

expectations for the sake of approval, women leaders often edit their identities to appease a prescribed narrative, typically rooted in masculine norms (Dean et al., 2009). Women must navigate and constrain their identities within a leadership context to gain and maintain credibility. Bornstein (2009) stated that a successful president must be viewed as legitimate by followers, who determine success based on their perceptions of a leader's institutional fit and leadership effectiveness. Utilizing the WLDM provided by Dahlvig and Longman (2014) and Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations, this study explored how women presidents at Catholic colleges experience their identity and leadership experiences within a gendered organization.

Specifically, the WLDM provided a framework for understanding the factors that contribute to women's leadership motivation and experiences (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). The WLDM considers the role of self-awareness and the influence of organizational culture but does not consider how complex the relationship is between context, identity, and the leadership experience for women who have reached the pinnacle of leadership. Further, this study extends the WLDM by applying it to a Catholic institutional context. Acker's (1990) theory of organization focuses primarily on how male-centric organizational culture creates various barriers for women to obtain leadership roles, though does not consider how a woman might navigate toward success in a gendered organization. Additionally, Acker's (1990) theory is extended by this study in considering how religious identities, such as being a sister or laywoman, contribute to the experiences of women in gendered organizations. To understand the phenomenon of being a woman president at a Catholic institution, this study considered both women's leadership experiences and the influence of organizational culture. Both the WLDM

and theory of gendered organizations must be used to fully grasp the essence of the experience women face within this unique role.

Conclusion

The success of colleges and universities is crucial to the continued advancement of society and culture and is largely associated with the leadership of the institution's president (Guskin & Marcy, 2002). Throughout history, and still today, white men have held an overwhelming majority of the college presidency (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Therefore, much of what is known about college presidential leadership is centered on the male narrative. Studies have begun to explore the representation of women and People of Color in the presidency but focus largely on pipeline issues and often do not extend beyond entry into top leadership positions (Howard & Gagliardi, 2018). The experiences of women presidents past their entry into the presidency continues to be an area of need for future research to assist with the normalizing and acceptance of women as leaders. Aspiring women presidents, hiring entities, and institutional stakeholders all serve to understand more about the gender stereotypes that prevent women from being perceived as effective leaders.

Catholic colleges and universities are sponsored by the Catholic Church, a gendered organization that prohibits women from assuming formal leadership roles (Acker, 1990). While Catholic higher education does not prohibit women from formal leadership roles, research suggests the influence of the overarching gendered organization, the Church, may reinforce existing barriers to women's leadership within higher education (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Longman & Lafreniere, 2012). The WLDM (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014) and Acker's (1990)

theory of gendered organizations serve as a theoretical framework to further explore this phenomenon.

Chapter III

The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of women who serve or have served as presidents of Catholic colleges and universities. By exploring the stories of women Catholic college presidents, I was able to garner rich qualitative data regarding their lived experiences on the pathway to the presidency and within the role. Through a qualitative phenomenological approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 women who are current or retired presidents of Catholic institutions. An analysis of the data collected was conducted to identify themes relevant to success factors and barriers that the participants faced during their journey to the presidency and within the role.

Throughout this study, I utilized a social constructivist paradigm. Social constructivism allows the researcher to analyze participants' views and make meaning of their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The themes and meanings that emerge from this paradigm are formed through interactions with others and the influence of cultural norms. Social constructivism considers how history and culture shape the context for participant experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological studies are commonly done with a social constructivist paradigm as it relies on participants sharing their narratives in the context of a specific experience (Moustakas, 1994). A social constructivist paradigm for this study is appropriate as I explored women's leadership experiences within the context of a greater organizational culture created by historical and societal gender roles and views. Through analysis and interpretation, I sought to explore participant stories to unearth common themes that highlight the nuance that comes with the phenomenon of being a woman leader in a gendered organization.

Research Questions

To accomplish the purpose of this study, the following research questions were used:

1) What motivates women on their pathway to becoming a Catholic college president?
2) In what ways, if at all, do women experience challenges on their path to the presidency and within the role?
3) In what ways, if at all, does the organizational culture of a Catholic institution impact the leadership experiences of women presidents?

Methodology

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study to draw themes out of the stories provided by a small but unique population of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is not enough to just know that there are proportionately more women presidents at Catholic institutions than at non-Catholic institutions. Qualitative research gives meaning and voice to the numbers provided by quantitative data to provide insight into the lived experiences of study subjects. Women leaders in higher education face a great deal of adversity and barriers in their leadership journeys (Diehl, 2014). Qualitative research allows for the collection of emotions, attitudes, and beliefs through each shared story of struggle and success (Bansal et al., 2018). The analysis of each story collected provided common themes that, together, produced a shared experience of women presidents at Catholic colleges and universities.

For this study, I utilized a phenomenological approach to explore women's leadership in the context of Catholic higher education. The literature on women's leadership and gendered organizations suggest that women presidents of Catholic institutions experience a phenomenon unique to women in that role. A phenomenological inquiry allows for the discovery of themes that exist across participants who share a common experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Specifically, a hermeneutic, or interpretive, phenomenological approach requires the researcher to interpret the texts, or transcripts, of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through interpretation, the researcher can make connections and sense of what may initially appear as trivial details (Laverty, 2003). Interpretive phenomenology relies on the researcher to utilize their world views, backgrounds, and experiences to analyze the data collected through participant interviews (Connelly, 2010). It is the stance of interpretive phenomenology that the researcher's bias cannot be separated from the interpretive analysis and therefore the researcher must be aware of how bias can impact the data.

Within interpretive phenomenology, the researcher plays a part in the research by existing in the same world as the study participants (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). The prior knowledge and experiences of the researcher provide a context in which participant data can be analyzed and explained. Further, interpretive phenomenologists believe that it would be impossible for the researcher to completely eradicate all prior knowledge and experiences when analyzing research as required by the objective nature of descriptive phenomenology (Tuohy et al., 2013). Descriptive phenomenology only allows a researcher to have knowledge of what is presented to them by study participants. Conversely, interpretive phenomenology allows for a deeper understanding of the complexities presented by study participants in what they say and what they do not say by exploring narratives within the context of the world around them (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). These narratives are derived from an interview protocol that not only seeks to know about one's experience but also seeks to uncover meaning. Without prior knowledge or understanding of a phenomenon from the literature and the researcher's own experience, it would not be possible to develop an interview protocol that elicits substantial data that can be interpreted for significance (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009).

Rather than attempt to deny any connection to the self, interpretive phenomenologists recognize and reflect on their own biases and experiences. Reflection allows the researcher to understand how their own identity and experiences will influence data analysis and therefore requires them to be open to new ideas (Tuohy et al., 2013). To combat instances of bias contaminating data analysis, interpretive phenomenology also requires the researcher to be transparent in their assumptions and pre-understandings prior to the study. In this study, I provide a positionality statement to acknowledge how my prior experiences may influence my understanding of participant stories. Further, to honor and recognize any preconceived notions I may bring to this research, I executed continuous reflection through memos during the data collection and analysis process.

For this study, an interpretive phenomenological approach was used to explore the phenomenon of women presidents at Catholic colleges and universities. Interpretive phenomenology allows for an understanding of the complexities present within women's leadership in the context of gendered organizations. This was done by analyzing common themes of motivation, barriers and challenges, and success factors among participants. Interpretive phenomenology was an appropriate method for this study as evidence of gender barriers may not be explicitly stated in participant interviews. Diehl and Dzubinksi (2016) found that many women leaders in religious organizations denied that their gender impacted their leadership experience negatively, however, they shared many examples of gender inequities and gender-based barriers. For this reason, it was imperative that I utilize interpretation when analyzing participant stories to uncover themes of gendered organizations, motivators and barriers, and self-identity as they relate to a woman's leadership journey within Catholic higher education.

Sampling Criteria

Utilizing purposive sampling, the sample for this study consisted of individuals who currently serve or have served as presidents of a Catholic institution within the last 10 years, and identify as women. Purposive sampling is typical in phenomenological studies because it allows a researcher to study individuals who have experienced a specific phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition to purposive sampling, I relied heavily on snowball sampling to garner participants. Snowball sampling is when study participants offer the name of another individual who would meet the study criteria (Goodman, 1961). Noy (2008) states that snowball sampling is occasionally used to access networks of individuals who may be considered social elites or members of groups with a certain degree of social capital. Due to the high-profile role of college presidents, they are often inaccessible to people outside of their networks. Snowball sampling allowed me to utilize existing relationships within a network of women presidents to gain access to otherwise private contact information and introductions that provided greater trust and credibility with participants.

While phenomenological studies can range in sample size from as little as three to as many as a few hundred, similar qualitative studies on women leaders within higher education typically fall in the 3-26 participant range (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Diehl, 2014; Oikelome, 2017). A definitive number of participants was determined when the data reached the point of saturation. Data saturation occurs when data collected during interviews results in no new themes or codes (Guest et al., 2006; Mapp, 2008).

At the time of this study, there were 198 Catholic colleges and universities in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Of those institutions, 65 at the time were led by

women. To expand the pool of potential participants, women who were retired but had been president of a Catholic institution within 10 years of this study were also included in the study criteria.

Recruitment

Once a sample strategy was determined and approval was given by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) I began to recruit participants for this study. In many cases, public directory information was available for presidents on their institution's website. I utilized this information to locate an email address for the presidents who met the study criteria and sent them an IRB-approved recruitment email. Presidents who were interested in participating were then given an IRB-approved consent form to review and sign indicating their willing participation in the study. Further, snowball sampling allowed for study participants, as well as colleagues, to provide introductions to other eligible women who might be interested in participating in this study. Once I received a potential participant's email information, I sent the IRB-approved recruitment email and subsequently the IRB consent form to obtain their permission to participate in this study. In total, 16 women met the study criteria and agreed to participate.

Participants

Given the highly public nature of the role of college president and the already small number of women who have served as Catholic college presidents, participant information is presented in aggregate form to maintain confidentiality. Out of the 16 participants, five were women religious. Nine of the participants were currently serving as president and seven were retired. Four participants had served as a college president for 10 years or less, 10 had served for 11-20 years, and four had over 20 years of experience. In total, participants had held 23

presidencies; 11 succeeded a vowed religious sister, seven succeeded laymen, four succeeded a priest, and one succeeded a laywoman. All participants held a terminal degree. Eleven of the participants had risen to the level of the presidency through a traditional academic route. For this study, all participants were given a pseudonym, and any information regarding the sponsoring organization or dioceses for their institution was removed to further ensure confidentiality. See Table 1 for additional information regarding participants.

Table 1

Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Woman Religious or Laywoman	Employment Status
Agnes	Woman Religious	Current President
Bernadette	Laywoman	Retired
Cecilia	Laywoman	Current President
Diana	Laywoman	Retired
Elizabeth	Laywoman	Current President
Faith	Woman Religious	Retired
Genevieve	Woman Religious	Retired
Helen	Laywoman	Current President
Irene	Laywoman	Current President
Josephine	Laywoman	Current President
Karolina	Woman Religious	Retired
Lucy	Laywoman	Current President
Maria	Woman Religious	Retired

Olga	Laywoman	Retired
Philomena	Laywoman	Current President

Data Collection

Phenomenological studies primarily employ interviews as a data collection strategy (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mapp, 2008). Interviews allow for a one-on-one setting so that the researcher may ask questions of the participant to gather data regarding the lived phenomenon being studied. Interviews are the most appropriate style of data collection for this study as they will allow for the discovery of details, emotions, and attitudes within the leadership experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A pre-determined set of interview questions served as a guide for a semi-structured interview with participants. The pre-determined interview questions addressed the three research questions guiding this study (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). However, the semi-structured nature of the interview also allowed for probing of deeper meaning. The research questions for this study were developed to better understand the phenomenon of being a woman Catholic college president. Within phenomenological studies, it is necessary that the research questions and interview protocol align with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, the ability to follow up on pre-determined questions through a semi-structured interview allows for new ideas to be presented to the researcher (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

Through the first set of interview questions, I sought to gain an understanding of the sources of motivation that women experience within their careers that results in their decision to pursue or accept a presidency. Next, questions regarding leadership style and identity were asked

to determine how, if at all, participants experience their self-identity within the context of leadership. Additionally, this section of questions began to elicit examples of challenges that women may have experienced on their pathway to the presidency as well as within the role. These questions were crafted utilizing the theoretical framework provided by the WLDM to explore if women presidents at Catholic colleges experience a similar leadership development cycle (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Finally, to explore the context of women's leadership experiences within a Catholic institution, interview questions focused on the organizational culture of the participants' institutions and the role of the Catholic Church. Both the WLDM (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014) and Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organization suggest that women experience gender-related barriers as a result of organizational culture. An interview protocol informed by the theoretical framework of this study assisted in answering the research questions to further explore the phenomenon experienced by women Catholic college presidents.

Interviews were conducted with participants via the virtual platform Zoom or a phone call and lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. A one-on-one conversation allowed for rapport building and follow-up questions to be asked in a safe and confidential setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Virtual interviews or phone calls were chosen over face-to-face in-person interviews to widen the availability of potential participants. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) note that virtual interviews allow both the researcher and the participant more flexibility with timing and scheduling. Given the many commitments college presidents have, a virtual interview can be scheduled with greater ease than an in-person one. Additionally, the sample chosen for this study is geographically spread across the United States. Virtual interviews allow the researcher to recruit a greater number of participants without the constraints of time and the costs of travel. In

a post-COVID world, a virtual interview offers most, if not all, of the same benefits as an in-person interview.

Interviews were recorded with consent from the participants and transcribed for analysis utilizing Otter.ai, an online transcription service. Once interviews were transcribed by Otter.ai, I reviewed and edited the transcript for accuracy. Participants were then provided with a copy of their interview transcript for optional review. This opportunity for member checking allowed participants to edit, add, or remove statements made during the original interview. Recordings, transcripts, and all other relevant data collected were stored digitally on the password-secured virtual platform Microsoft One Drive and will be deleted three years upon completion of this study.

Data Analysis

Once interviews were complete and the data was cleaned, I organized the raw data through sorting and coding. A codebook was developed utilizing deductive and inductive coding methods. Deductive coding is when a researcher enters the data analysis period with a predetermined list of codes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Inductive coding, however, is when a researcher allows the data to determine codes by using words, phrases, and quotes from participant interviews.

The first round of coding utilized deductive coding guided by the theoretical framework for this study. Deductive codes were created utilizing components of the Women's Leadership Development Model (WLDM) and the theory of gendered organizations (Acker, 1990; Dahlvig & Longman, 2012). Initial codes from the WLDM included: sources of motivation (e.g., calling, relational responsibility, and mentors); self-awareness; leadership self-efficacy; leadership

experience; and leadership competence. Additional first-round codes included Acker's (1990) five processes of gendered organizations: division of gender lines; gendered identity; gendered interactions; organizational logic; and symbols/images.

A second round of coding was done using inductive coding, specifically in vivo coding and values coding. In vivo coding utilizes the participant's actual words and phrases to generate codes (Miles et al., 2014). In vivo coding allows for a deeper, more emotional, data analysis to fully capture the essence of the phenomenon and how it is experienced by study participants by utilizing direct quotes and word choice (Miles et al., 2014). Examples of in vivo codes that emerged within this study include being "the first," healing, vocation, and "the presidential mantle." Additionally, values coding allows for the extraction of values, attitudes, and beliefs within participant narratives (Miles et al., 2014). Values coding assisted in discovering how participants viewed their leadership experiences with regard to identity, interpersonal relationships, and organizational culture, all relevant and important aspects of being a university president. Examples of the values codes that emerged in this study include institutional fit, purpose, authenticity, and Catholic identity/mission.

After the first and second rounds of coding, 105 total codes were identified within the data. Then I combined codes to create larger themes within the data. For example, the codes challenging, caretaker, spouse, "the presidential mantle," and job duties, contributed to the larger theme of work-life balance.

Interpretive phenomenology calls for the researcher to utilize their prior knowledge and experience, which can be done through deductive coding, while also being open to new ideas, which emerge from inductive coding (Tuohy et al., 2013). Coding the interview transcripts with

the flexibility of both inductive and deductive coding allowed me to identify common themes and patterns across all interviews.

Positionality

It is important to note that as the researcher, I have my own experiences, biases, and positionality related to the topics explored in this study. I have worked for over 10 years in Catholic higher education and currently hold a mid-level leadership role in student affairs. In my experiences, I have encountered situations where I perceived my gender identity influenced how effective I was as a leader. In many instances, my contributions in a meeting were ignored, only to be praised when paraphrased by a male colleague. In other settings, when I was the only woman in the room, the men abruptly changed their conversation and tone because there was "a lady present." In an interview for a promotion, the hiring manager told me he was not sure about my candidacy because I did not smile when I said hello to him in passing one morning. Whether it be a small, subconscious slight or a major and intentional offense, in these moments I perceived that assumptions about my leadership and ability to do my job were influenced by widely accepted gender stereotypes and norms. When this happens, I experience a range of emotions, many times prompting a questioning of my skills, talent, and accomplishments. Do I really know what I am doing? Do I have what it takes to lead? These experiences, while sometimes difficult, have inspired and motivated this research.

As I continue to grow professionally and personally, understanding the experiences of successful women who have reached the highest levels of leadership within Catholic higher education will provide a less ambiguous path for my own success and strategies for navigating the challenges and barriers that come with being a woman leader. I entered this research with

assumptions of what women may have experienced as they navigated the hierarchy of higher education based on my own experience. For this reason, this study utilized an interpretive phenomenological approach so that I was able to interpret narratives shared by study participants utilizing my own experiences as context. It would not have been possible for me to completely disregard my own experiences and subjectivity but rather, it was accounted for with reflexivity throughout the research process (Hopkins et al., 2016). Reflexivity involves a negotiation of one's subjectivity through the continuous reflection of pre-understandings and the ways they influence the research process (Hopkins et al., 2016). Throughout my research, analysis, and writing process, reflection was an important tool to ensure my bias did not influence the integrity of this study.

Validity & Trustworthiness

Recognizing the potential effect of researcher and reviewer bias, I used several strategies to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis. For phenomenological research, the first criterion for judging validity is ensuring that the research questions directly address the participant's experiences of the studied phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the research questions sought to understand how women experience the phenomenon of becoming presidents of Catholic institutions, and their experiences within that role with a focus on motivation, challenges, and organizational culture.

Further, the validity of the data is achieved when the researcher can convey the overall meaning and spirit of the participants' lived experience with a richness that allows for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure that the data gathered was factual and accurately represented the information shared by study participants, I provided the

opportunity to review the interview transcript to participants for member checking (Morrow, 2015). The women who participated in this study shared their lived experiences, in many cases including personal stories of hardship and challenge, therefore it was imperative that those narratives be reflected accurately and with care. In most cases, participants either did not respond, or approved of the transcript as it was presented. Three participants requested minimal edits be made to clarify statements and remove verbal disfluencies. Allowing for member checking ensured the validity of the data presented by participants and safeguarded the data from researcher bias.

Additionally, throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing process of a phenomenological study, validity can be addressed when the researcher provides evidence of reflexive thinking (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To do so, a researcher should provide a transparent positionality statement and consistently utilize reflective memos during the interview, analysis, and writing process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Throughout this study, the use of reflective memos, conversations with my dissertation committee, and the support of previous literature provided accountability to ensure personal bias and assumptions did not influence analysis and findings. Reflective memos allow the researcher to comment on their observations and interpretations of data collected while also engaging in self-dialogue regarding assumptions and subjectivity that could influence the findings with bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, this study utilized strategies to ensure validity through the use of reviewers. A trusted dissertation committee, including an expert in the topic area, was provided ample opportunities for review and feedback to ensure that the integrity of this study was upheld.

Limitations

As with any study, some limitations are to be expected. First, given the relatively small population of women presidents at Catholic colleges and universities and the busy nature of their roles, it could be difficult to recruit participants to be available for an hour-long interview. Phenomenological studies seek a richness of data to provide an in-depth analysis of how a phenomenon impacts a human's lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, it is important to have a large enough participant pool and an ample amount of time for an interview to probe for deeper meaning within narratives.

One limitation of this study is that the primary recruitment tool was snowball sampling. While this method of recruitment proved to be the most effective way to gain access to participants considered "social elites," it also means that the data may be somewhat limited (McClure & McNaughton, 2021; Noy, 2008). Snowball sampling typically relies on utilizing social networks in which the members of a group may have similar characteristics or experiences (Noy, 2008; Parker et al., 2019). For example, the lack of racial diversity in this study could be linked to the limited number of Women of Color who have or currently are presidents of Catholic institutions, it could also have stemmed from the limitations of snowball sampling.

Still, recruitment efforts resulted in having 16 participants, a substantial sample size given the limited number of potential participants based on the sampling criteria and qualitative nature of this study. Another limitation of this study was time. McClure and McNaughton (2021) found that university presidents were difficult to schedule interviews with due to their busy schedules. While a 45-60 minute interview garnered significant detail for this study, a longer interview would have provided additional opportunity for follow-up questions to provide even more data regarding certain aspects of our conversation. Throughout the interviews, I was able to

ask questions that covered all three research questions but found that more time would have been helpful to probe for more detail.

Further, participant confidentiality limited a full analysis of findings within this study due to the highly public nature of this niche group of leaders within higher education. Participant experiences were often shared in the context of the type of institution they worked in. Founding religious orders and dioceses associated with the institutions led by participants often played a role in the type of experience that participants had. It would be impossible to present this information without making participants easily identifiable. While most participants were candid about their experiences with their sponsoring congregations, bishops, and networks of peer presidents, this information had to be redacted from the findings. This context would have provided the opportunity for additional findings regarding Catholic institution type and the influence organizational context has on the experiences of women leaders.

Conclusion

Utilizing an interpretative phenomenological qualitative approach, this study sought to understand the lived experiences of women presidents of Catholic colleges and universities. Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling. In total, 16 participants who met the study criteria expressed interest and agreed to a 45-60 minute semi-structured interview. Following data collection, interviews were transcribed and coded using inductive and deductive coding to identify major themes within participant narratives. In Chapter IV, I provide study findings.

Chapter IV

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of women presidents at Catholic colleges and universities. Throughout this study research questions sought to understand what motivates women to pursue the Catholic presidency, the challenges they experienced on their journey and within the role, and how the organizational culture of Catholic institutions impacts their leadership experiences.

Research Questions

1) What motivates women on their pathway to becoming a Catholic college president?
2) In what ways, if at all, do women experience challenges on their path to the presidency and within the role?
3) In what ways, if at all, does the organizational culture of a Catholic institution impact the leadership experiences of women presidents?

An interpretative phenological qualitative study was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 16 participants. Interview transcripts were then analyzed through deductive and inductive coding resulting in 105 codes. Those codes were then used to develop nine major themes, and 15 subthemes to answer the research questions guiding this study. The following is a summary of the major themes and subthemes along with context from participant interviews to provide a deeper understanding of how themes and subthemes emerged. Additionally, Table 2 provides a visual representation of how themes and subthemes were organized by the research questions within the findings.

Table 2

Research Questions and Corresponding Themes and Subthemes

Research Question	Major Theme	Subthemes
What motivates women on their pathway to becoming a Catholic college president?	Mentors	mentor recognition, professional development opportunities
	Relational responsibility/calling	duty to a sponsoring organization/institution, self-awareness, God's plan and vocation
	Mission aligning with personal and professional values	
In what ways, if at all, do women experience challenge on their path to the presidency and within the role?	Work-life balance	family, "the presidential mantle"
	Being "the first"	"It's a girl!," challenges for laywomen
	Transitioning into the role	predecessor, follower perspective
In what ways, if at all, does the organizational culture of a Catholic institution impact the leadership experiences of women presidents?	Gendered organizational culture	gendered interactions, gender identity
	Catholic mission and identity	institutional fit, Catholic with a big 'C'
	Threats to Catholic higher education	

The Findings

Research Question 1: What Motivates Women on Their Pathway to Becoming a Catholic College President?

In speaking with participants, regarding their motivation to become a university president, almost all had experienced an external motivator to initially pursue the role. That external motivation also led to an internal motivation that provided ambition and drive along participants' journeys to the presidency. Motivation for participants on their pathway to a Catholic university presidency fell into three major themes: mentors, calling or relational responsibility, and mission aligning with personal and professional beliefs. Participants experienced all three themes in different ways on their paths to the presidency. Among the major themes, several subthemes appeared in participant narratives. First, the subthemes relating to mentor motivation included mentor recognition and professional development opportunities. Motivation born out of a calling or relational responsibility had subthemes of duty to sponsoring organization/institution, self-awareness, and God's plan and vocation. Finally, motivation stemming from the theme of mission aligning with personal and professional beliefs explores the unity that many participants felt between their personal values, faith, and their professional role of president at a Catholic institution.

Throughout participant narratives, the theme of mentors was prevalent in serving as a catalyst to recognize participants' skills and talents for presidential potential. For many participants, mentor encouragement and support allowed them to also think past their original career goals, engage in higher leadership opportunities, and view their skillset and leadership talent as having presidential potential. In some cases, participants also referred to "sponsors" when discussing mentors, the term sponsor is often used simultaneously with mentors in higher

education (Hill & Wheat, 2017). Participants often credited mentors and sponsors with providing them with professional development opportunities to experience critical leadership moments that, later, led participants down the presidential path. Other participants were nominated or put forth in more direct ways by mentors and sponsors for presidential opportunities. For example, a mentor or sponsor would nominate a participant to be considered for an institution's presidential search. For the purposes of this research, I will use the term "mentor" to encompass mentors, sponsors, and other colleagues who promoted, encouraged, or provided advice that motivated participants to pursue the presidency.

Several participants also spoke of motivation to pursue the role out of a calling or relational responsibility to lead an institution run by their religious order or an institution where they already had a significant leadership role. In these cases, participants viewed their strengths as "just what the institution needed at that time." Their heightened self-awareness allowed participants to identify areas where their talents, skills, and leadership qualities would align with an institution's mission and areas of need. Many viewed the role as a *vocation*, a term used within the Catholic faith to mean a calling from God to serve Him through the use of one's skills and talents (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, n.d.b).

Finally, participants were motivated to pursue the presidency specifically to lead an institution within the context of a Catholic mission, as it provided an environment where participants could feel a greater sense of unity in their professional and personal values. Participants were drawn to lead Catholic institutions because of their Catholic faith and a deep appreciation for the mission and charism of their chosen institutions. Often the participants described their role as president as providing for a "marrying" of personal and professional

values which allowed them to bring their authentic and "whole self" to the role. For many, this made the role feel like a privilege and a gift.

The following is an in-depth description of these themes and their subthemes as it relates to participant motivation on their pathway to the presidency.

Mentors

A ubiquitous theme throughout participant narratives is the role of mentors. Within this theme, two subthemes emerged: mentor recognition and professional development opportunities. All 16 participants noted that mentors were vital along their journey to the presidency for motivation, encouragement, and support. Most frequently, mentors were a main source of external motivation. Typically, a mentor in a higher position than the participant, usually a current president, told participants that they should consider being a president in the future. This recognition of demonstrated talent and success helped to further encourage participants to explore higher levels of leadership. Participants also spoke of "being tapped" by mentors for greater administrative roles including the presidency.

Beyond recognition, mentors provided access to experiences and settings where participants could build networks and take part in professional development opportunities including shadowing mentors in executive leadership roles such as the presidency. These experiences allowed the women to observe and practice executive-level leadership. Professional development also gave participants a sense of confidence regarding their preparation to take on each next role and eventually put themselves forward for a presidency.

The following is a summary of the subthemes: mentor recognition and professional development opportunities.

Mentor Recognition. Mentor recognition of a participant's potential to be a university president inspired many of the women to believe that the presidency role could be within their reach. One participant shared that she was recognized early on in her career and was able to set herself on an educational and professional path toward executive leadership. Agnes was first told a college presidency was something she "might want to consider" by her religious community. This inspired her to get a master's degree and eventually a doctorate in higher education administration. She had taught and was working as an administrator at the institution her religious community sponsored when they asked her to pursue a doctorate. Agnes shared that this encouragement came from a hope that the founding sisters would continue to be a part of the college's governance, "We have a college, and so we certainly would like that college…to have members of the founding order…visibly present." Along the way, Agnes encountered many mentors who provided her with further encouragement and opportunities.

> I had these great role models…I think that was also very motivating. I got opportunities I might not have had if it wasn't apparent that I either had the skill set…to become a president or if they didn't see something in me and want to encourage that. (Agnes, interview)

Most women were already well into a career in higher education when they were recognized as having presidential potential. A love for teaching, research, and working with students had been all Elizabeth needed to enjoy being faculty for her entire career. She dabbled in an administrative role as a faculty mentor and began to hone her leadership skills. Then, one casual comment from her president set her on a trajectory that would end in her own presidency. Elizabeth fondly recalled the moment when the presidential spark was ignited in her by a mentor:

> In my time as an associate dean, one of my first administrative positions…the president of the institution said to me, 'Kid, you're going to be a college president someday, what's your plan?' And…I hadn't really thought about that…I hadn't really set myself toward that. But as soon as he articulated it…I started to…work towards that path. (Elizabeth, interview)

Cecilia's spark was more of a shock. She had been a faculty member for 20 years, served as a director of a campus-wide program, and eventually was elected as chair of the faculty senate. She had seen herself in a place where she could happily finish her career. However, chairing the faculty senate had given her president a front-row seat to observe Cecilia's leadership. It was not long until the president told Cecilia what she needed to hear to begin her professional development journey that led to not one, but two presidencies.

> The president at that time…he felt that I had the potential to become a university president and I was stunned by that conversation…up until that time I thought I would finish my career [there]. …I had already been there for 20 years, I was very happy, I thought this is my career. He started off by sending me to the Harvard Management Development Program that summer. (Cecilia, interview)

Elizabeth and Cecilia took their mentor recognition in stride and started on intentional paths to prepare for the presidency. Maria was a bit more reluctant and set out on her presidential path unintentionally thanks to her mentors. Maria had loved teaching and could not see herself in administrative roles for fear of not being able to teach. In her experiences, she had not seen many examples of leaders in administrative roles who still taught.

> I never wished to be a college president and in fact, vehemently said to many people, many times, 'No, no, no, I'm never going to be a college president.'…I always wanted to be a teacher, that's all I ever really wanted to do in life. (Maria, interview)

Despite Maria's declaration, she heeded the advice of her mentors each time they suggested she explore that next leadership role because of her strong administrative skills. From department chair to dean to the provost and eventually, the presidency, Maria engaged in interviews just to "get [them] off [her] case." To only Maria's surprise, she landed every job.

> A new president came and at the end of his first year…he said, 'You ought to be a president.' 'No, no, no, no, no,' I said, 'never going to do that'. …And in the meantime, my community, and other people I really respected, including people who've gone on to be presidents kept saying to me, [Maria], you really ought to think about a presidency… Finally, after four or five years of this, I thought, 'Okay...I'll apply to a couple of places.' …I applied to five places, all Catholic…and to my astonishment, all five of them called me in for semi-final interviews. (Maria, interview)

Maria went on to say that a constant theme in her life was that her many mentors always said, "If we didn't think you could do it, we wouldn't encourage you, and we'll help you." Her second and final presidency was an intentional one. By that time, she knew what she wanted and how to get it. However, it did not start that way. It was her mentors that pushed her each step of the way. Maria reflected, "People look at my resume and say, 'Well you were on a clear path to the presidency.' And I always say, 'I didn't know that.'"

Philomena experienced a similar reluctance and credits mentors who "knew that [she] was going to do this way before [she] was willing to admit that as a possibility." Her mentors

made strategic introductions and collaborated with her professionally to accelerate her career. Still, with mentor encouragement, Philomena struggled to recognize her ability to take on a presidency due to her young age.

> I was [young] when I…was offered…the presidency I took, which was the fourth presidency I was offered…my mentors would encourage me to interview and I'd interview and then I get to the offer and I'd say well, I'm too young to be president. (Philomena, interview)

While mentor recognition served as an important catalyst to set many participants on the path to the presidency, it was professional development opportunities, provided by mentors, that allowed participants to get hands-on experiences. Through testing the waters of executive-level leadership, many participants began to realize their potential and feel confident in their leadership abilities.

Professional Development Opportunities. Mentors not only recognized leadership potential in the participants, but they also set them up to engage in meaningful professional development opportunities to prepare them for the presidency. These opportunities were both formal programs, geared towards preparing professionals for the presidency, as well as, informal access to observe the presidency up close and, in some cases, to take on aspects of presidential duties themselves. Olga had engaged in several professional development opportunities provided by mentors.

> The provost at the time…he sent me to fundraising school because, he told me just in one of our one on one weekly meetings, he just said, 'Someday, [Olga], you're going to be a

> president. And I was just like, 'Well, I don't really have that on my list,'…and he was like, 'Trust me.' (Olga, interview)

Olga had another mentor president who had asked her to serve as a permanent substitute on a board for a major local organization.

> I'm sitting here with senior execs from [major companies and organizations] and you know I'm this lowly dean…they wanted her there, but she sent me…without a doubt to give me that experience to network and see what high-level board work was like. (Olga, interview)

Cecilia was given the opportunity to embark on a yearlong American Council on Education (ACE) fellowship where she was sent to a university to be directly mentored by their president. Cecilia had specifically sought out a woman mentor for this experience to see how a woman led as a president. She had exclusively been mentored by men and thought a woman could provide a different view of leadership. Through this fellowship, Cecilia was exposed to all facets of a university community, from meeting with legislators and donors to understanding buildings and grounds and dining operations. This experience allowed for an immersion in the minutia of how a university is run and was coupled with the ability to observe a "different approach" to leadership through her president mentor.

> At the end of that year, [she] said to me, 'I'll be so disappointed if you decide that you don't want to pursue a university presidency.' And I thought, 'Wow…she was a longtime president, she was nearing the end of her career, and it made me really feel positive about the experience and the potential of the future. (Cecilia, interview)

Following her fellowship, Cecilia remained at that institution for another year to serve as an interim associate provost. When she returned home after that second year, Cecilia applied for, and became, a vice president for academic affairs, her last stop before being nominated for a presidency.

Overall, mentorship for many of the participants was the catalyst for exploring professional development and high-level leadership positions that eventually set them on a path to the presidency. Many of the participants shared that they were probably unlike other presidents in that they were never intentionally seeking the role. However, this was a consistent sentiment within most participant narratives in this study. Mentors were the most significant source of motivation for the women I spoke with, not only from an encouragement standpoint but also for helping women to access important professional development and new positions to prepare them for the presidency. Several of the participants emphasized the importance of mentoring, particularly for women leaders, and have made an effort to also serve as mentors to other women. As president, they viewed mentoring other women as a way of giving back and as a strategy to increase the representation of women leaders within Catholic higher education.

Relational Responsibility and Calling

Aside from mentoring, women experienced a motivation to pursue the presidency oftentimes out of a relational responsibility or a sense of calling. The term *relational responsibility* is a sense of duty in relation to a larger community. Three subthemes emerged: duty to a sponsoring organization/institution, self-awareness, and God's plan and vocation. The participants who were motivated by relational responsibility were more likely to pursue the presidency when they believed they were the right person, at the right time, to lead a specific

institution. Participants who were also women religious typically became presidents at institutions founded by their religious order. For others, usually laywomen, they experienced a sense of duty out of a loyalty to institutions they had great affection for, particularly, when they could identify ways in which their abilities, strengths, and style of leadership could benefit the institution. Many participants also felt a sense of relational responsibility or calling when they had a connection to the sponsoring organization of the institution.

Calling was an internal motivation supported by a strong self-awareness and a participant's belief in God's plan. The presidency was also referred to by the participants as a vocation, a way to serve God through one's gifts and talents. For some, God's plan is also what allowed participants to accept the idea that they could be a president.

Duty to Sponsoring Organization/Institution. I viewed relational responsibility as a sense of duty, or a responsibility to contribute positively towards a community that the participants felt loyalty towards. In some cases, this community was a religious order that the participant was a part of, or it was an institution where the participant went to school or had worked previously. Genevieve had the opportunity to become president of her alma mater which was also sponsored by her religious order. When the presidency became open, Genevieve had been on the board and knew that the institution had great potential. She identified areas of weakness at the institution and understood that her background and skills were exactly aligned with the type of leadership the institution needed. Genevieve shared, "It just seemed like…the right fit for me." With the encouragement of others to "throw her hat in the ring," she did so with a clear sense of how to root the institution in the founding values and where her skills could lead to institutional success.

While not a member of the founding order, Irene had a similar experience to Genevieve in that she too came to be president of her alma mater. The institution was struggling financially, and they were unable to find a stable president. Irene had been involved closely as an alumna while exploring a career in higher education.

> I had no intentions of being a college president…I was thinking maybe I'd go into teaching. …The opportunity came, and I was young enough to be opportunistic. Some of the trustees said to me, 'You've got a big mouth, why don't you do it.' I said, 'Well sure, I'll take a crack. I don't know what I'm doing but maybe it's good.' (Irene, interview)

Despite the cheekiness of the trustee, Irene considered the institution's needs and thought of herself as the "right person at the right time," to take on the immense challenge that awaited her.

> I didn't have any training, but it was good that I didn't know what I was doing because I didn't know what to be afraid of. I was able to say, 'Why do it this way?' …I was able to make change without adhering to tradition because I had no experience. (Irene, interview)

Bernadette and Lucy had both been provosts of their institutions when their presidents left abruptly. In both cases, they were appointed interim presidents. As interim presidents, both saw an opportunity to effect meaningful change for their institutions as permanent presidents and decided to pursue the opportunity. Bernadette shared, "I was vice president and I really enjoyed that position. But when I became president, it gave me the ability to have an even greater impact on the institution." She had prayed about wanting to hear a call from God and be able to fulfill the call. Bernadette stated that her motivation to be president was "the ability to make a difference." When she was appointed as interim president, she thoughtfully asked the board if they preferred her to be a "placeholder" or if they wanted her to "move the campus forward."

The board responded with the latter. Bernadette reflected, “Their confidence in me really helped me to think of myself as a president rather than an interim.”

Lucy shared that she never “aspired to the presidency” but instead always wanted to be a provost. As an academic, she saw it as “the perfect high-level job for [her].” However, Lucy had been the provost for two years before she was asked to serve as interim president at her institution. While she did not initially plan on applying to be the permanent president, it was both a love for her institution and an opportunity to see that she had the ability to be a president that led her to apply for the role.

> Our president left suddenly, and I became interim. That made sense to me because I was the provost, but I didn’t initially have any plans on applying. And it was in…handling three crises of various magnitude…[that] got me to thinking about interim president means keep the train on the tracks, don’t make any major decisions, just keep going until the real president comes. And those three things led me to believe that ‘wait a minute, you are the president…because…what would a president do differently that you’re doing?’ And it’s at that point that I decided to apply…it was a deep care for my institution, but it really took seeing me do the job for me to be convinced that I could do that job. (Lucy, interview)

Not only did relational responsibility motivate many to pursue the presidency, but for most participants it continued to be an anchor for them in the challenging role of president. Participants spoke of the opportunity to lead these institutions as a privilege and an honor. To be entrusted with the mission of these special places motivated them each day to continue in their role of president. Agnes shared how her connection to her university keeps her going:

> I'm working at the institution that my religious order founded. And so, I kind of feel like I'm in the family business. So, it's worth it for me. And I think if someone wants to be a Catholic college president, you have to figure out why you want to do it. (Agnes, interview)

Self-Awareness. Self-awareness was an almost necessary component of motivation for women in this study to engage with the possibility of being a president. Despite mentor recognition and a sense of duty, there had to be some kernel of faith in one's own ability to even test the waters of executive leadership. A clear sense of self and one's talents and skills motivated some participants to pursue leadership experiences in preparation for the presidency. Self-awareness was also developed by observing mentors and other leaders and reflecting on how the participant would lead in the same situation.

Karolina described herself as an ambitious person and, from the beginning, she considered various roles she could explore within her religious community. Quickly she determined she was meant for something big, and she went after it.

> I entered religious life when everybody was leaving institutions [of higher education]. …I tried my darndest to work out of institutions. I tried parish work, I was on a reservation, I did all kinds of things, and I was not meant to be there. …[I said] to one of the sisters who I worked with…'This isn't for me.' She said, 'Thank God you came to that yourself because pretty soon I was gonna have to tell ya.' …What I wanted was a bigger arena, I wanted to have an impact more broadly. …So, I went to our university president and said, 'I'd like to try my hand at this.' (Karolina, interview)

Karolina went on to serve in roles that ranged from enrollment management to student affairs to academic affairs and finally a presidency. She saw the presidency as a "culmination of a career" and an opportunity for her to meaningfully do her ministry as a sister.

While Agnes' initial motivation had come out of encouragement and support to pursue the presidency, Agnes also saw that her skills and passions aligned well with the challenges that administrative roles presented. She shared, "I really loved administration. I liked the variety, the challenges…thinking strategically about things." Agnes reflected that her education and experience prepared her for the challenges that awaited her when she did reach the presidency. Further, Agnes' access to mentors and role models helped her to grow more self-aware and refine her leadership style. Agnes would observe how others handled situations and thought, "I would do that, but I wouldn't do that…it wasn't always emulating everything that I saw. Some of it was, I would do that much differently just because of my personality." Elizabeth, too, saw a motivation to become a president as moving from external to internal. Through self-awareness and leadership experiences she was able to see herself in the role.

> My motivation really was external at first [when] someone said…'You should think about this.' And then it really became internal…at that point I really kind of strategically [sought] opportunities for professional development, to learn more and to engage, to work towards that path. …I've been at institutions that have had struggles and so being able to see how others lead in times of challenge…helped me refine how I would lead in those moments. (Elizabeth, interview)

God's Plan and Vocation. The subtheme of calling also emerged when participants spoke about God's plan and referred to the presidency as a vocation. In other words, according to

participants, God called them to serve Him by using their gifts for leadership to carry on the mission of Catholic institutions. Helen described an inexplicable draw to leading a Catholic organization, "You just felt like there's a sense of belonging and that you're called to be there." For some, the call was clear. Others needed some convincing. Bernadette's call, however, was quite literal:

> I felt strongly that I had a call from God to be the president at [my institution]. And I've always said that God is very clear, I'll answer the call. …It was a very literal call for me. I got a [phone] call on a Friday evening from the board chair saying the president resigned. Would [I] be the interim? I've always prayed about wanting to hear the call and then fulfill it. I guess it's just down to my deep spirituality and my belief that we are all called to some vocation. (Bernadette, interview)

Faith had been asked to take on an interim vice president role when the president and other cabinet members had resigned as a result of a crisis. Later, she was encouraged by the board to apply for the presidency. She saw their encouragement as polite and a courtesy. Faith still applied, though she could not accept that she could be a serious candidate for the position. Faith shared that she believed other "really highly qualified candidates, who wanted to be president were going to emerge" but that never happened. When the final round of the search was just days away, a friend told Faith that the board really did think she could do it, and more so she was being called to the role.

> When she said that to me, scales fell from my eyes. And I realized, 'Don't you trust that God can act through these trustees who love the university, and their highest responsibility is to choose an excellent administrator?'…Once I got over that hump, I

> realized how utterly sincere they were and how much they were hoping I'd accept their invitation, then my resistance broke down. (Faith, interview)

Reflecting on her experiences, Cecilia felt that there was a "sort of Divine Providence" that led her to have opportunities and experiences that she felt prepared her to be a successful president.

> When I look back, I kind of see the hand of God that led me into saying 'yes' to some things that at the time, I thought, 'Why am I doing this? This doesn't have anything to do with what I'm doing.' But they were enriching kinds of experiences that allowed me…when the right position came…I could move into [it]. (Cecilia, interview)

Participants also experienced a calling to the role when they saw the presidency as a vocation. Diana felt that she had a calling to education and saw the presidency as a way to live out her vocational calling. She had a deep appreciation for the Catholic intellectual and spiritual traditions, much of which was foundational in her education and studies. Diana saw the role of president as a "great platform to promote, to advocate, and, in some cases, even preach." Further, she viewed the role of president as a way to protect and foster an institution's Catholic mission. "So much of this job has less to do with what you personally can accomplish, [it is] more about how successfully you invite and persuade others to join you in work on behalf of the mission." For Josephine, her vocation was to be a leader.

> It's really simple for me, this is a vocation. It may not be a vocation to religious life, and it's separate from a vocation to married and single life. But there's nothing short of this being a vocation. …I was called to leadership. (Josephine, interview)

The role of president comes with many demands and for Philomena, she shared that motivation to take on the challenge of the role has to come from a deep sense of commitment to the responsibilities. Philomena's vocation, or calling, to the presidency comes from a commitment to the mission. She shared that mission helps shape how she lives out her vocation to the presidency: "I know why I'm doing what I'm doing because I have a deep sense of vocation and alignment with the mission." Philomena has also mentored aspiring presidents by helping them discern and understand how mission can "anchor" them in their vocation, providing something "deeper than the leadership role." For Philomena, vocation and fit are "important to resilience."

Mission Aligning with Professional and Personal Beliefs

Participants also found the motivation to be president of a Catholic institution in the opportunity for, as Cecilia, Diana, and Elizabeth described it as, a "marrying" of their personal and professional values and beliefs. Through this marriage of personal and professional values, they found a chance to bring their full selves to the role, in particular their faith. This joining of personal and professional values and beliefs with the faith-based mission of their universities allowed for a deeper sense of connection, a true authenticity, and a sense of belonging within the as they persisted through their journey to the presidency. Diana, who led both a public and private institution as president said that as president of a Catholic institution, she was able to "bring a little bit more of [herself] to her work." She cherished her Catholic faith and valued that she was able to bring that dimension of herself to institutions that "also had the traditions of [the] Church." Likewise, Cecilia had spent half her career in public institutions, and while she had good experiences there, Catholic institutions offered a personal connection.

> My introduction to Catholic higher education…really felt like there was no longer a separation of who I was as a person and my values and beliefs, with the person I was at work. That was just a real blessing and a benefit. …What's so important to me is that…prayer and speaking about my faith are just a normal part of my everyday life. …And I think that not only strengthens the lived-out mission of our institution as a Catholic entity but also strengthens my prayer and faith life. (Cecilia, interview)

Elizabeth also had experience working at public and private institutions. As she continued in her career, she felt that she wanted to work at institutions that "mirrored the personal and professional" which led her to Catholic institutions. She found the alignment of the mission with her personal values to be "incredibly enriching." It was important for Elizabeth to find an integration of her faith life and her leadership. As soon as she arrives at her office, she visits the chapel on campus and engages in prayer to start her day.

> The last part of my prayer actually comes from a sister…at my last institution. …She said, '…daily I pray, help me to be Jesus to all I encounter.' And that's really how I try to live my faith and leadership, is to see God in others and to be Jesus for others, be that person who, who sees people. (Elizabeth, interview)

Likewise, Josephine sought unity in her personal and professional lives. She had previously been a tenure track faculty at a secular institution and though she enjoyed her interactions with students, she felt called to find an institution that more closely aligned with her faith. She shared, "I was just missing that unity in my life. I just really wanted to be contributing towards a Catholic work." She found that unity in her role as president at a Catholic institution.

> The values, the commitments, the beliefs that I hold personally, I am able to work in a place [that] explicitly adopts many of those same values and beliefs and commitments. So, there is that personal unity of life…that as a working professional is something I was seeking. (Josephine, interview)

Karolina found that the presidency enabled her to align her personal and professional values and beliefs as a sister. For Karolina, ministry was what she was meant to do as a woman religious and the presidency offered her a rewarding way to minister.

> I did several years at [a state institution] and then at [another state institution] but that's not where I wanted to be. …[The presidency is] a culmination of a career. It was a great and rewarding career. I did good things, touched lots of lives. …It was meaningful for me, I did good ministry. I took the gospel and justice to places where I went. …I was shaped by the values of my religious order and the orders that I worked with, and [the presidency] was a way to extend those. (Karolina, interview)

Participants also felt that working at Catholic institutions allowed them to support students more holistically with a focus on social justice. The ability to connect deeply to the mission and charism of their institutions provided additional motivation for participants to pursue the presidency and even further informed their style of leadership and decision-making. Bernadette shared that social justice was in the "DNA" of her institution. Similarly, Elizabeth valued that her institution was dedicated to service and upholding human dignity in a way that she had not experienced at public institutions. Participants were proud to have created and supported programs that addressed the needs of low-income, racially minoritized, undocumented students as well as the communities surrounding their institutions.

Overall, the ways in which participants experienced motivation on their pathway to the presidency came from both external and internal sources. Mentors provided external motivation through recognition of participant talent and skills and access to critical professional development opportunities. Further, an internal motivation to pursue the presidency came from a sense of calling or relational responsibility to lead institutions with a faith-based mission. Many participants felt a deep sense of duty towards the university and the presidency and saw that their gifts and talents could make a difference. Finally, participants were also motivated to pursue a presidency specifically at a Catholic institution because the mission aligned with their own personal and professional values.

Research Question 2: In What Ways, if at All, Do Women Experience Challenges on Their Path to the Catholic College Presidency and Within the Role?

While participants found their motivation from positive sources on their pathway to the presidency, they did experience challenges along the way. Those challenges also persisted while they were in the role. Challenges fell into three major themes: work-life balance, being "the first," and transitioning into the role. The theme of work-life balance also had subthemes of family and "the presidential mantle," a term used by Cecilia as a metaphor for the weight of the roles and responsibilities of the presidency. The theme of being "the first" had subthemes of "It's a girl!," a phrase taken from Rose's narrative that discussed the ways in which participants and institutions navigated their first woman presidents, as well as a subtheme of challenges for laywomen. Finally, the theme of transitioning into the role had two subthemes: predecessors, and follower perspective.

It is also important to note in this section that while all participants experienced some degree of challenge as they navigated career advancement and the presidency, they were all, in the end, appointed as president at least once. The narratives provided below highlight the ways in which the women experienced and navigated challenges on their pathway and within the role of president.

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is a phrase used to describe the negotiations people make between career and personal matters so that time and attention can be given to both (Lester, 2015). Subthemes that emerged within the theme of work-life balance included family and "the presidential mantle." Some participants made career decisions while on their pathway to the presidency due to family life, usually because of motherhood or the role of caretaker for other family members. Some participants highlighted that their gender as a woman led to additional expectations in the home, making it difficult to balance family and work commitments. Many spoke of the support they received from spouses and loved ones to be able to continue in their careers while also raising a family.

Once they were in the presidency, participants also shared that they experienced a great demand for their time, attention, and energy. The women described the many ways in which the role required long hours for travel, events on nights and weekends, and how the sheer magnitude of the president role can exhaust a person. Cecilia described the weight of presidential responsibilities as "the presidential mantle" that one carries with them always. The weight of this invisible structure built with the responsibilities and expectations that presidents have for their campus communities, is one that a president must shoulder alone. While many described the

presidential role as rewarding and fulfilling, they were clear that the university presidency is a challenging profession.

Family. Family was a source of challenge for work-life balance, primarily among the laywomen participants. The topic of family rarely came up in my conversations with participants who were women religious. Challenges for participants on their way to the presidency and the demands of family manifested for participants in two ways. First, family was a challenge when women described themselves as caretakers for others. Several participants made career choices based on how career moves would impact their ability to have, raise, and care for their children. Most participants with children stated that they took on a presidency when their children were adults or, if they had young children, with a support system to help with childcare. In addition to children, some participants experienced a need to care for a spouse or elderly parent while in the presidency, making it hard to focus fully on either family or work.

Second, the role of a spouse was particularly highlighted in the narratives among participants who had been married during their presidential searches and when assuming the role. Some participants found themselves having to negotiate their leadership experiences and presidential candidacy while being a partner. However, participants also highlighted the role their spouse played, in many cases, as a source of support and encouragement as they tried to balance work and life.

Being a caretaker, typically, a mother, dictated career moves for several participants. For Helen, it was about 10 years into her higher education career when both her biological and tenure clock began competing with one another. She made the difficult decision to delay her tenure to raise children.

> I was in my early 30s and it was time for us to start our family. I was teaching a five-four [course load at my institution] and would have to get my doctorate within seven years of the tenure clock. I literally gave up my position and I went back to being an adjunct. And the chair thought I was out of my mind but there was no FMLA back then, there were no rights to be off for maternity. …How was I going to do all of that? I was going to have two babies, teach a five-four load, and work on a doctorate? I don't think so. (Helen, interview)

Following the birth of her second child, Helen and her husband agreed she would begin her doctoral journey once both children were in school full-time. During the first five years of her sons' lives, she held two part-time consulting jobs and relied heavily on help from her parents to balance a career and motherhood. During our conversation, Helen wondered aloud about a different path.

> I love teaching, I loved being full-time faculty. So, I always think, if I had chosen a different path and pushed them to say figure this out for me, give me a leave, let me take the time off so I can have the baby and I can make this all work. What would that life have looked like? (Helen, interview)

Similar to Helen, Elizabeth made a difficult decision along her journey in the interest of her family.

> I had the opportunity to return [to my home state] to be close to family. But I had a horrible experience in the department I went to. …It was an incredibly challenging position, but it was a great experience for my family and the community we lived in. (Elizabeth, interview)

Helen and Elizbeth had both made sacrifices to put family first before a career by postponing or delaying career moves. Josephine, too, balanced having a young family and pursuing leadership.

> I got my PhD late…our youngest was [due to be] born a week after my graduation from my PhD, which made me very motivated, I knew hell was on its way and I needed to get this done before that happened, no matter what. (Josephine, interview)

When she was approached about a presidency, one that required a relocation, Josephine thought it was "nonsense." She said, "We were in the throes of little kids and busy schedules." However, Josephine pursued the position, "with the support of [her] husband," she added, and she accepted the role. Several years later, Josephine had a second opportunity for a presidency, one that again required relocation. Her husband transitioned out of his career to provide primary childcare for their children while Josephine continued in executive leadership. Josephine credited the support of her husband as "the single greatest enabler for these leadership roles…the single thing that allowed any of this to happen." While Josephine had a supportive spouse that she felt enabled her to focus on her career, she noted that many women are often burdened by the role of caretaker.

> This will sound sort of like a caricature, but men do a lot of work on the golf course and that holds true. We [women] continue in these roles to carry the burden…personal burdens. I mean, that's just the reality. We continue to raise children and take care of aging parents and do pet care, you name it. Women are still the frontline for that. (Josephine, interview)

She also shared that her husband had played a significant part in her presidency as the first married person to hold the role.

> I mean, he is here all the time…[and] it's different than a male [president] with their spouse. Most of the people I'm talking to still here are men, like, when I think of my board, when I think of the big donors, these are largely men. So, it really is helpful. If I've got my husband with me, they can, you know, 'talk sports' and all of that…really assists me in my work. …If I had had a different husband, I know I would never have moved in this direction. And I certainly would never have continued with presidencies after the first. (Josephine, interview)

Diana was a single mother throughout her presidencies, and like the others, she also alluded to the challenges that mothers may have in balancing both a career and family.

> A dimension of my presidencies included being a single mother. My son was nine when I began my first presidency; 35, when I retired. When considering a presidency those with young children should take into account the impact that this very full-time job will have on the family dynamic. I had a lot of support in the early years because my mother lived nearby and cared for my son after school until I returned from work. (Diana, interview)

In addition to caring for children, participants who were married also spoke of their relationships with spouses when reflecting on work-life balance on their presidential path. Participants' spouses were supportive but also experienced sacrifice. Cecilia had been exploring executive leadership during an ACE fellowship year and had been in a "commuting marriage" with her husband who was living several states away. When she was approached about spending another year at her fellowship institution, she called her husband to discuss.

> They asked if I would stay another year…when I called my husband…he hung up on me. I thought, 'Oh, I've pushed the envelope right over the cliff.' But he called me right back and he said, 'I thought about this, and you absolutely need to do this, and yes, let's figure out how.' (Cecilia, interview)

After that year, Cecilia thought it was time to return home. She was an only child with an elderly mother and felt she needed to get back and care for her. Not long after she returned to her home state, she applied for and was selected for a provost role that would, again, result in a commuting marriage for the next several years. When Cecilia was ready to explore the presidency, she had her "husband's blessing and input" and together they searched for institutions in locations where they could both envision living. Not only was Cecilia's husband supportive during her search, but he was also a major part of her interview process and was interviewed just as much as she had been. Cecilia described the process of being offered the role and the subsequent decision to accept it always with "we" statements demonstrating the joint commitment from both her and her husband to take on the presidency. During her presidency, Cecilia's husband experienced health issues and she took on the role of his caretaker.

> Just getting through caring for him was the stretch of my abilities while I was still the president. When I think about doing that on a daily basis for small children, who have every right to expect a mother's love and attention, and focus, I know that women do that, but I think it's really very hard. (Cecilia, interview)

Olga too had spent a portion of her career in a commuting marriage. Olga's husband had a successful career of his in higher education and supported Olga in her desire to pursue the presidency. She had become a finalist for a presidency at a Catholic institution and the board

chair asked that her husband join her on her next trip out for the final interview. To Olga's surprise, the board chair shared that they had already a couple of ideas for new jobs for her husband. Olga informed the board chair that, while thoughtful, that would not be necessary as her husband would not be relocating. When the board chair informed Olga that her husband's relocation would be essential to her presidency, she promptly withdrew her candidacy. This had been Olga's second presidential search and despite her disappointment, she found herself engaging in a third search, clear on her non-negotiables, one being, her husband would not be relocating. During her third search, Olga found an institution that had previously been run by sister presidents, therefore there was no spousal role nor expectations that the institution's president has a spouse. With that detail out of the way, Olga found that the institution's mission and values fit her own and that her strengths could contribute greatly to their needs. It was a match.

While the challenge of having a family did not emerge as a theme within my conversations with participants who were women religious, one participant highlighted that not having a family was a challenge in her role as president.

> You have to remember that I didn't have a family and I didn't have children. So, I never got to see people in other settings. They didn't know me as the mom of a kid playing baseball where I could have worn shorts and a T-shirt. …I think about my male [president] colleagues…[one] had a wife and seven kids, they were part of a parish, they were parts of all kinds of things, so people had other references for them. [The other], had two young sons and his wife worked in town so they did have other sets of relationships. My relationships were all related to [my institution] and no one ever saw me do normal

> things. …So, there is a certain pressure…I couldn't just go to the country club by myself and belly up to the bar…it would have been scandalous. (Karolina, interview)

While family presented challenges for participants logistically on their career journey, there were additional social and cultural norms that participants navigated as evidenced by Karolina's point about not having a family. Additionally, some laywomen participants viewed their status as a mother as helpful in informing their leadership style and differentiating themselves as leaders. This more conceptual view on family and motherhood is discussed in the following section on gendered organizational culture and gendered identity.

The subtheme of family influenced work-life balance both before and after a participant became president. However, once in the role, the magnitude of the presidency position came with an increase in responsibilities and demands on participants.

"The Presidential Mantle." The phrase "presential mantle" came out of Cecilia's interview, when she used it as a metaphor to describe the magnitude of the role of president and how it can weigh on an individual. Many participants shared a similar sentiment that the duties and expectations of a president require much of the human being in the role. This had great effects on participants' personal lives as they navigated the emotional, mental, and physical demands of the job. At the time of our interview, Cecilia had recently returned from an overseas vacation with her husband and reflected on a particularly poignant moment during the trip.

> On day three he said to me…'Oh, my [Cecilia] is coming back to me.' It broke my heart…what he started to see was the further I got away from the job, both geographically and…in my mind, the more the person that I can be, when I'm not thinking about the challenges and responsibilities and the weight of the job, that person surfaced. It made

> [me] feel sad because I'm still that person underneath, but I guess I carry the weight of the presidential mantle pretty much all the time, you don't ever really walk away from it. It's a 24/7, 365-a-year job. (Cecilia, interview)

All 16 participants reflected, advised, and almost warned me, that the presidential role was a significant one, that came with many personal sacrifices. Philomena called the presidency a "lifestyle" indicating there was never going to be a balance but rather an integration of work and life. Diana described the job as "lonely" and "isolating." Lucy described the job as inescapable saying, "There comes just the ultimate weight of the job that you have to really get accustomed to, because you can go on vacation, you can go home, but the job is never, never, never, away from you."

However, it was during Rose's interview that I could see the weight of the presidential mantle physically take hold. The interview began and Rose cheerfully, almost gushing, spoke about her passion for her role, for students, and for the many ways she's been a proud steward of her institution. When I asked her about how she balanced family life and the role of the presidency, her brow furrowed, she took a deep sigh, and she gradually sank lower and lower in her chair.

> Let's just say that's a work in progress. …I have to compartmentalize at times and have intentionally select times where it's family time. Otherwise, you could have some serious unintended consequences. …There are times when I really…make a mess of things and I overwork. And I'm not proud of that at all. …These are intense jobs, and you could get lost if you're not careful. (Rose, interview)

Participants often pointed to peer presidents, mentors, and supportive family networks as ways to combat the weight and pressure that comes along with the role of president. They also stressed that institutional fit and mission were key factors in their decisions to take on the role, making the hard days and moments "worth it." Irene mused about the next generation of Catholic college presidents.

> We need great leaders for these institutions. A lot of us who are somewhat older now… wonder about who's coming next, are they going to have the energy and stamina, the drive to do this kind of work? Because it's endless work. It's not easy work. It doesn't have a beginning or an end, it just rolls forward. (Irene, interview)

While participants often emphasized the challenge and demands of the presidency, they also expressed that the role comes with immense joy, satisfaction, and even fun. Agnes shared, "No matter what anyone tells you, it's fun to be the boss." Despite the magnitude of the role, participants still saw the presidency as an exciting endeavor. Irene shared, "If you have a thirst for adventure, go for it. These are wonderful jobs in spite of the challenges."

Being "the First"

Many of the participants I spoke with had experienced being labeled "the first" in some way when they assumed the presidency. The first woman president, the first laywoman president, and the first layperson to hold the presidency role at all. These women had shattered the stained glass ceiling, endured a path that was not paved, and took on the responsibility of setting the standard for what it meant to be a new kind of leader for their institutions. For all, being the first was a point of pride. For some, being the first came with unique challenges. Two subthemes emerged, the first was "It's a girl!" a phrase used by Rose in describing how she was announced

as the first woman president of her institution and the first laywoman to hold the role at any institution sponsored by that religious order. The second subtheme that emerged was challenges for laywomen. The participants who were the first woman president to follow a priest or sister seemed to have more heightened challenges while transitioning into the role of president compared to the participants who were sisters or not the first lay leader to take on the role.

"It's a girl!" The subtheme "It's a girl!" came out of a story that Rose shared during her interview that suggested institutions were joyful about their first woman president but also grappled with how to introduce her to the larger institutional community. Rose was not only the first woman to lead her institution, but she was also the first laywoman to lead an institution of her institution's sponsoring organization. The other women to lead an institution of this sponsoring organization had been women religious. Rose felt the magnitude of this moment and thought about the implications of her taking on this leadership role.

> Was the institution ready? How would the alumni feel? They were used to having priests. …Would I be the role model that I want to be for young women who study here? Could I do the job well enough such that other institutions should consider hiring women? …I wanted to show ultimately…that a woman can carry on the charism. There's only a few things I can't do and we both know what those are…I can't do homilies…I can't do the sacraments…[but] I could steward the institution financially, in terms of mission, academic excellence, all those things. (Rose, interview)

Once Rose accepted this responsibility, it came time to announce the historical presidential appointment. To do so, the university went the route that many parents do to announce their baby's gender. Rose shared that "they sent out what we would call, birth announcements…and

the announcement said, 'It's a girl!' with a pink balloon." She continued, "[It was] kind of fun and cute." While many were accepting and open to Rose's institution taking a great leap in being the first to appoint a laywoman president, Rose found it a struggle to be the only laywoman among her peer presidents.

> It was a bit awkward and uncomfortable at first…I didn't feel like I had a place at the table literally and figuratively until one of the [priests] grabbed my placard with my name on it and said, 'Sit next to me.' …They already had deep relationships, [and shared] a bond of being ordained priests. So, I didn't feel welcomed but part of that was my own insecurity. (Rose, interview)

Maria, too, was the first woman to be selected as president of her institution. Maria's institution originally opened and operated for 100 years as a male-only institution, though had been co-ed for nearly 30 years when she became president. The institution wanted to introduce Maria to the alumni, most of whom were male, in a way that resonated with them. Maria did a four-week, 16-night, meet and greet with alums dating back to 1939 featuring, what the advancement office insisted be, a masculine menu of beer and pretzels. Maria shared that the staff said to her, "'This is a men's college so we're having pretzels and beer. We hope that's ok.'" Maria responded with, "'Great, fine with me, terrific. I'll have a beer with them, what the heck.'" Maria had a wonderful experience at the meet and greets and was welcomed warmly by all, except for one tense night with the 1950's era graduates. Maria described the scene:

> So, they come in, and one guy goes to the back of the room, and he sits there like this [arms crossed] the whole time, never moved…I'm doing my spiel, and I can read this

> right, if looks could kill, I'd have rigor mortis but everybody else is lovely. (Maria, interview)

The evening continues, the pretzels and beer slowly disappear, and everyone leaves, except for the man in the back of the room. Maria assures her staff she's "from New York" and can "handle herself" so they leave the room and the man from the back approaches her. Maria says the man opened by saying he "didn't want to come" that night and "sure did not want to meet [her]," but his wife insisted. Maria replayed the conversation:

> He said, 'The reason I didn't want to come is [because] I could not imagine my university being led by a woman. I just couldn't feature that. And I thought, 'It's the next sentence that matters…[He said], 'But I don't feel that way now.' (Maria, interview)

Maria recalled dropping her "poker face" taking both of his hands, smiling, and saying, "If for no other reason, we did these meetings for you, thank you for coming tonight and please thank your wife." Maria described this moment as the only time she experienced any overt gender discrimination. She was sure there was "other residual stuff out there," but never again did she experience gender discrimination anywhere quite like that meet and greet.

Josephine experienced being the first laywoman president of an institution and later being the first woman to lead two institutions formerly led by priests. When Josephine spoke of her first experience leading an institution sponsored by an organization of sisters with former sister presidents, she said there was a "sort of recognition" of female leadership that had made the transition easier. Going to institutions that had been run by men, specifically priests, was a greater challenge for Josephine. The first time she succeeded a priest, Josephine wished she had been more intentional in communicating with the sponsoring organization upfront.

> That community of men lost the guy that was sitting at their dinner table every night telling them what was going on at the university. So, they ended up pretty quickly not knowing. I wasn't intentional enough about building new channels of communication and I think I learned a tough lesson there. …I think they felt a little slighted and then I was kind of behind the eight ball at that point and it was just hard to recover from that. (Josephine, interview)

Her second time around, Josephine was intentional about building a relationship and involving the sponsoring organization from the very beginning. She described her most recent transition as smooth and as having a sense of "warmth." Josephine made it a point to have priests from the sponsoring order be the first guests in her presidential home for a mass led in their style of prayer.

> Things like that, that sort of recognition that these are the most important VIPs…in my thinking, in my world…that goes a long way. It wasn't that it was a dinner, it was the gesture of 'you're the first group that we're having in this house because I want you to come and say mass. …I've gotten a little bit wiser. (Josephine, interview)

Challenges for laywomen. Women who were the first lay president of the institution had an additional level of challenge in being "the first." Regardless of if the participant replaced a priest or a sister as a laywoman, participants often found that they had to prove that they could carry on the institution's mission and charism as a layperson, someone not from the founding order of the college. Participants also alluded to an unspoken set of rules that changed when they replaced a sister or priest as president.

Helen was the first layperson to take on the presidency at two institutions where her predecessors had all been sisters. When I asked her about what those experiences had been like, she laughed and said, "They won't give me a habit, I've asked them. It would work so much easier." While it was a bit of a joke, Helen went on to recognize the challenge and responsibility that come with being the first lay leader.

> When you're the first lay leader there is always a focus on [if] the mission and the values of the institution [are] moving forward. And…is there a void because the president isn't a religious? …Most of us lay leaders have to sort of really make a very, very, purposeful, intentional effort to speak the mission, to learn the language of the founding order, to ensure this community that, again, you're there because of the mission and the vision and the values of that community. …I get it…these sisters spent their whole lives building these institutions and then all of a sudden, somebody who's not one of them comes in to run it. (Helen, interview)

While all participants shared that they regularly spoke about the mission, values, and charism of the institution, the laywomen felt that they had to be explicit in their connection to the sponsoring organization of the college. Bernadette was proud to share that one of her predecessors, a sister, had told her, "Bernadette, you talk about the [founding order] more than I do." She felt that because she was not a sister, the mission and founding story had to be more explicitly cited by a lay president, it was not as "apparent" without as many sisters around.

The laywomen were intentional in their efforts to understand the charism they inherited as presidents of their institutions. For example, Diana spent time in the archives, reading about and studying the institution's early history, their founding documents, and the vision and history

of the sponsoring organizations. At the start of their presidential career, Olga and Cecilia had gone on pilgrimages to the lands of the saints associated with their institution's founding order. These experiences were transformative in their understanding of the sponsoring organization's values and charisms. Cecilia was also an associate of both the religious orders that founded the institutions she led. Lay people can become an associate of a religious order by engaging in an educational program to learn more about the charism and take lay vows to promise to uphold these values.

In addition to being abundantly clear that the mission of the institution was safe in the hands of a laywoman, some participants felt that as the first lay leader of the institution, they had a different set of rules and expectations.

> When the first lay president comes along in any Catholic institution, after generations of religious leaders, the community, including the alum community may react in ways that are undermining for a while. …Nobody would confront a sister president, but everybody goes after the first lay president. …I felt there was something to the sisters, [they] had a little bit of aura…or something that made them a little less vulnerable. Now maybe they would disagree with that, but I just measured the kind of…hostility that I sometimes encountered. (Irene, interview)

While Cecilia did not describe her experience as hostile, she did share a story that highlighted how as the first lay president she learned quickly that things were going to be different. When Cecilia had become president of a university sponsored by a religious order of sisters, she learned that parts of the campus were owned by the sisters.

> That was problematic because I think as long as a sister was the president, it was sort of 'all in the family.' Then when I came, there was a view that now we have to sort of start to divide and understand who owns what and how we're going to handle this. (Cecilia, interview)

About six months into her presidency, she was called in by the sisters to discuss their property that was leased by the college.

> I was told that the leases of the property…had been allowed to lapse under my predecessor, remember she was a sister. And she had been paying a dollar a year for these leases. And I was now going to be charged market value for the property rent. And I was expected to pay five years back because she had not been paying the dollar, only I wasn't going to be paying the dollar, I was going to be paying market value. (Cecilia, interview)

Already under significant financial pressure, Cecilia knew she did not have the money to cover this debt, but she was able to negotiate the sisters down to three years back rent. It was clear to Cecilia that things were going to be different for her as a lay president.

Interestingly, Genevieve, who was a sister within the sponsoring organization of her institution shared that "being a member of the congregation wasn't necessarily any big help to [her]." Though she did recognize some privilege in her position when she needed to take over a building that belonged to the sisters. She shared that it made sense for her, "as an outgoing president and a sister," to repurpose the building which involved relocating a group of sisters and using the building as a student residence hall, causing some campus controversy.

Transitioning into the Role

Across most participant stories there was some degree of challenge when adjusting to the role beyond being the first woman or laywoman to lead an institution. This theme had two subthemes: predecessors and follower perspective. Participants shared stories of how they navigated being compared to their predecessors and responding to follower criticism. Though participants usually spoke of these challenges when discussing the beginning of their role as president, they did experience challenges to their leadership throughout their time as president well after their transition. The role of college president requires individuals to be the public face of an institution in good times and bad. It is no surprise that they would be challenged regularly as they make major decisions that impact a large group of people. Diana shared that "effective leaders will be challenged" and that "trying to make everybody happy is the worst thing for an institution."

Predecessors. In discussing predecessors, it did not matter if the predecessor had been beloved or disliked by campus constituents. Several participants found that they needed to make a deliberate effort to differentiate themselves from the former president. In some cases, predecessors left their positions amid a crisis that the participant then needed to sort out. Some participants also found that their constituents had to have a warming-up period to adjust to their leadership style compared to their predecessors. Participants were sensitive in sharing about how their predecessor may have unintentionally made the participants' transition into a role sometimes more difficult. One participant had asked me to stop recording when asked about her predecessor. Overall, while discussing predecessors, participants were careful not to disparage those who had come before them, recognizing that the presidential role is a difficult one.

Agnes had started her presidency and discovered that her predecessor had kept the board in the dark about the debt he had been accruing, almost bankrupting the college. She described the former president as charismatic but misleading, "Monsignor, he always wore his collar…he was always [saying] the check was in the mail, the money's coming. …I think it was hard for some of them to say 'no' to Monsignor." Though, when Agnes became president, she did not receive the same accommodations Monsignor did, "Suddenly, once he was gone, [people] put their foot down, and it was like, 'You want that service? You pay for it upfront.'" Not only did Agnes find difficulty in dealing with the crisis he created, but she also commented on how her predecessor's behavior resulted in misgivings from the community.

> I had a lot of people who were angry at the previous president and taking it out on me. The faculty were just a pain…now they don't bother me at all…but that was not the way it was in the beginning. So, there was a lot of stress. I think even my leadership team that I inherited felt, in many ways, betrayed by my predecessor and the things he had done. (Agnes, interview)

The financial crises that Agnes inherited had caused significant hurt and pain for her community, and it led to her needing to adapt her leadership style to meet their needs.

> There was a lot of healing that I felt…I was called upon to really kind of balance the professional experience I had, and the knowledge, with the compassion that was needed. …Where I could be Dr. [Last name], I had to be Sister [Agnes]. I mean it, people needed more spiritual kind of guidance and listening, they needed me to listen. (Agnes, interview)

Faith, too, had followed a priest president whose actions led to a public scandal leaving the campus community feeling betrayed. She felt that she needed to be careful in how she reacted to help the community heal from her predecessor's presidency.

> I came into office following a president who had behaved as to bring respect and trust for the presidency down to just about zero. So, people looked at authority in the president's office with a very jaundiced view. So, it wasn't as though everybody was standing at my door applauding. There was a slush fund of mistrust that people could dip into any time they pleased, and they did, and I understood. So, I just did my best level best not to lose my temper, to stay calm…and to have reasonable answers, and not to be angry or snippy. (Faith, interview)

As Faith reflected on what she might do differently in her presidency, she thought that she may have done a better job at interacting with the faculty in the early stages of her presidency again, as a result of her predecessor's leadership.

> Our faculty was very fractioned, they had experienced an authoritarian president. They were shamed and angered by his misdeeds. And probably just interacting with them through formal channels was absolutely inadequate. I didn't figure out a way to interact with them that would have been more familiar or collegial. (Faith, interview)

Perception of predecessors, even when positive, also presented challenges for some participants as they transitioned into their role as president. Josephine's predecessor had remained on campus as a professor after his presidency. She shared that he had been very involved in academic life, and when she had to make major changes, his presence made it difficult. Karolina also followed a deeply beloved president who remained at the institution

during Karolina's presidency. Karolina described her predecessor as a "powerful force," active in the local and national community, and a hugger.

> The fact that she was more of a hugger and all that, they missed that. In the town…I heard a lot of 'Wow, we wondered how you would ever come in and follow her and how you would stand up to her. And yet you have done all that and continued to work with her every day.' We found a way to use her every day. …In the last year, she would side more with the alum, so that hurt a little bit. (Karolina, interview)

Karolina had to find ways to adapt to having her predecessor working side by side with her. Twice, her predecessor had stepped in front of her at an event. Karolina shared she was "so angry, [she] could barely stand it."

> She would step in front of me. Eventually, I learned I was much taller…and younger, I can get there first. But you know, she just thinks she's the best thing since sliced bread and it's like, ya are, but you're not the president, so get out of the way. …Took me a while…but eventually it's like 'no, you are the president, stop it, she can do whatever she wants, she's a cute little old lady, but you are the president.' (Karolina, interview)

Elizabeth followed a beloved president who had led the institution for two decades. She shared that she "adored" her predecessor and was grateful for all he had given to the campus and their collaborative relationship. Followers still wondered aloud to Elizabeth how she would "fill his shoes." She stated their differences were what made everything okay, but it took a "getting used to" by her campus community.

> People early, early, would say to me 'My goodness, you've got big shoes to fill,' and I'd say 'It's ok, I wear heels! He didn't. It's just fine.' You know, I just really kind of make

> light of it. Because I do think that there's an advantage of being a woman versus him being a man. (Elizabeth, interview)

Elizabeth laughed and shared that her predecessor told her that his "view of shared governance" was that he told the faculty "what to do and they did it," she said, "That's not shared governance." Elizabeth found that the faculty, her senior leadership, and the board had to adjust to her collaborative leadership style compared to her predecessor's directive leadership.

> He and I are just very different in our leadership styles, and I think the ways in which we are different has been well-received. …I would say for the first three…maybe six months, people were like, 'That's not bad, it's just different.' And they were trying to get used to that. (Elizabeth, interview)

Follower Perspective. Regardless of if the institution was in crisis or not, new presidents had to work to establish themselves as trusted leaders among their followers. For some presidents this was particularly true at the start of their presidencies, for most, this remained a consistent theme throughout their experience as president. Presidents experienced challenges when they received criticism of their leadership from followers, most often, faculty. Others found that it did not matter what decisions they were making, some faction of their community was always going to be upset with them. Participants found support in navigating this area of challenge from their boards, peers, mentors, and their own resilience.

Cecilia began her presidency at an institution that was in a financial crisis that had not been communicated to the faculty and staff. She had already felt the pressure of being the first lay leader of the institution and now had to share with the faculty, six weeks into her presidency,

that she was going to have to take some "draconian" action to rectify the institution's financial predicament. She gathered the faculty and presented her plan.

> After I gave my presentation, a faculty member stood up and said, 'We don't know you, we don't trust you, your predecessor never said anything to us about there being a problem. Why should we believe you?' And I'm standing up there thinking, 'Well the honeymoon is over.' (Cecilia, interview)

Cecilia responded to the professor by saying:

> 'Well, let me tell you what I've discovered in my first weeks here, and when I've convinced you that we have financial problems, you [hold up your hand].' I looked at my watch and talked for 14 minutes about…the issues and he gave [the sign to stop]. And he said, 'She's right, we have problems.' (Cecilia, interview)

Cecilia later learned this professor was from the business faculty and was well-trusted by his peers. She said it "gave [her] some quick credibility" when, to her surprise, she didn't have any at the start.

> Maybe that was naïve, but I've always been the kind of person that will give people the benefit of the doubt or the respect and then if they don't deserve it, because their behavior doesn't merit it, I might change my opinion later. I think for presidents these days, there's not that starting ground, I think it's the inverse. …And that's okay, you have to earn the respect, the trust. Sometimes that's very difficult to do when you're an unknown quantity. And I was also coming from the Midwest to the Northeast…people were suspicious about my intelligence [and] how quickly I could think, because they thought I talked

> more slowly and had a southern accent. Those were things that were said to me in the early days, and I was kind of surprised by that, to be honest. (Cecilia, interview)

Cecilia went on to say she had some "quick wins" and was able to demonstrate that her ideas and strategies had merit. Under Cecilia's leadership, the institution brought in more students, addressed issues contributing to low retention, and found a way to better market themselves. These successes not only kept the college open but led to earning university status, further improving their esteem.

Similar to Cecilia, Irene took over a university on the brink of closure. On her first day as president, Irene gathered the faculty and gave what she thought was "the best speech of [her] life." Upon finishing her speech, the faculty silently got up and walked out.

> I was stunned. I turned to the woman who was the academic dean…quite a formidable woman…I said, 'What just happened?' She looked at me and she said, 'Don't ever do that again.' I said, 'What?' I brought a message of hope and opportunity.' She said, 'You lectured them…you didn't engage them in any discussion, you just gave them a speech. They don't need speeches, they need engagement.' …Well, that was my first day and I was horrified, I was also angry. I thought, 'Well, my God, the place is falling apart, I'm the last thing standing between them and the repo man and this is the 'thanks' I get?' (Irene, interview)

Eventually, Irene worked with the faculty to get them on board with her vision and half-joked that she was able to use "retirement initiatives rather creatively to get the resistance to retire with lovely packages." However, Irene continued to face significant backlash from alumni as she implemented creative strategies to redefine the institution and keep the doors open. It was her

board that helped Irene focus her attention on the transformation she was orchestrating at the college.

> There was an open and ugly rift between me and the [alumni]. They went after me; they wanted me fired. The board chair stood up to them. That was the best advice I ever got, the board chair took me aside and said, 'Shut up and do your job. We brought you here to fix the college, not to fight with the alums.' …I had to learn that not every fight had to be fought by me. And in fact, not every fight is worth fighting. (Irene, interview)

Irene also credited her age with helping her to learn to "settle down" but acknowledged that criticism from followers comes with the role.

> On any given day, even in the best of times, somebody's going to be mad, you just have to accept that as part of leadership. And if you don't like people to be mad at you, then don't take the job, you know. So that's why I get the front parking space out front. Because people are mad and waiting for me usually out there to yell at me about something. (Irene, interview)

Many of the participants shared the same sentiment, that leadership will always come with critique. Maria shared that she tells all new presidents that they will be criticized for every decision made and that people take "potshots" all the time. Genevieve said the president is "an easy target." Diana recalled being "publicly castigated" when some thought her institution was "too Catholic," and at other times for "not being Catholic enough." Josephine noted that often she faced resistance from faculty for "no reason." Philomena shared that in these cases it was imperative to learn how to differentiate between "what comes at you because of the position

you're in" and "what comes at you personally." To navigate these moments, participants spoke about talking with mentors, peer presidents, and their boards.

When discussing negative follower perspective, participants spoke about how necessary a good and supportive board is for presidents. Some described being "blessed" to have a good board indicating that not all presidents were so lucky, however, all 16 of the participants in this study found their boards to be supportive partners throughout their presidency.

> Before accepting a presidency, it's important to gauge as much as possible the support you will have from your governing board. I can't overstate the importance of beginning a presidency knowing that you enjoy the board's support. It's then up to you to build their trust and confidence in your leadership. They may not always agree with things that happen down the road, but you've got to start your journey knowing the board has your back. (Diana, interview)

Irene credited her board with her ability to remain in the presidency role. She went on to say that presidents have the opportunity to recruit and train new board members. She stressed the importance of finding new board members who are invested in the mission of the institution and committed to working with, not against, the president.

> One of the most corrosive things you see, in higher ed…are people on boards of trustees who believe it is their job to torture and eventually fire the president. You know, they just are second guessing everything, that is unhelpful. I've said to the board chair and the nominating committee many times…I'm happy to be challenged, I need to be held accountable. I don't shy from any of that. But if somebody comes in here with an agenda and divides the board and goes after me, I'm out of here. I don't need this, you know, so

> I'm not threatening, I'm just saying that we have to have a board that is harmonious. (Irene, interview)

Karolina found solace in the face of critique as a president in reminding herself that the decisions she made were in the best interest of her institution. Even at the end of her presidency, she found that criticism was always a part of the role. Karolina had made some big changes to help boost enrollment at the college, angering some alumni.

> The last year, the things that were said about me online were just…I didn't read it. …Why would I beat myself up like that? …I can beat up on myself enough. …In the end, that's really hard. And you just do it because it's the right thing to do. …And I do a whole lot of…'God still loves you.' So that's how you get through those things, you just do them because you know they're the right thing to do. (Karolina, interview)

Women experienced several challenges not only on their pathway to the presidency but also within the role. Challenges were often personal when women were navigating supporting a family, being a mother, and balancing their well-being against the weight of the "presidential mantle." Further, once they reached the presidency, women were often challenged by being "the first" to take on the presidency as a woman while the institution adapted to a new model of leadership. Further, as women transitioned into the role, they were challenged by the legacies of their predecessors, good or bad, and how followers perceived their leadership as a new president. Women were able to navigate various challenges by leveraging their strengths and differences to respond to the needs of their campus communities.

Research Question 3: In What Ways, if at All, Does the Organizational Culture of a Catholic Institution Impact the Leadership Experiences of Women Presidents?

This study specifically sought to explore the phenomenon of the experience of women presidents at Catholic colleges and universities. The findings in this research suggest that women presidents of Catholic institutions experience the following themes: gendered organizational culture, Catholic mission and identity, and threats to Catholic higher education. The theme of gendered organizational culture had the subthemes of gendered interactions and gender identity. The theme of Catholic mission and identity had subthemes of institutional fit and "Catholic with a big 'C,'" a phrase used by Elizabeth and Maria to describe the institutional Catholic identity as more than just mission. Finally, the theme of threats to Catholic higher education explored the difficulties presidents may face due to the current state of Catholic higher education in the United States.

Gendered Organizational Culture

It is important to note that the participants in this study led institutions of higher education sponsored by the Catholic Church, a patriarchal institution. Within a gendered organizational culture, one gender has more authority and power than the other, largely in part due to the systems and hierarchies in place to supply one gender with power and authority. The Catholic Church is governed by men. There are limited roles for women within the Church, none of which are within the formal hierarchy of governance. To be president of a Catholic college or university means that these women were selected to serve in the top executive role within Catholic higher education. As presidents, they work closely with sponsoring religious congregations of priests and sisters, local ordinaries including bishops, archbishops, and

cardinals, and operate within the context of governing documents set forth by the Catholic Church. Participants shared many instances with the subtheme of gendered interactions that reinforce the gendered power dynamic between men and women within an organization. Additionally, the subtheme of gender identity was prevalent in participants' stories when discussing their leadership style as it relates to gender as a woman or religious status as a laywoman or religious sister. Participants found that their position as women in a male-dominated culture had both advantages and disadvantages.

Gendered Interactions. Many participants shared stories of interactions with others where their gender set them apart positively and negatively. Gendered interactions consisted of interactions that created a pattern of dominance in this case, male dominance. Gendered interactions among participant narratives frequently featured stories with a local ordinary, the governing Catholic official for the dioceses in which the college was located. I will use the term bishop to encompass different levels of Church leadership that include bishop, archbishop, or cardinal who would serve as the local ordinary for a Catholic university.

When Karolina began working in higher education, she knew early on she was going to be a president and began to align her education to set her up for success in a Catholic college presidency. She shared that when it was time to pursue a master's degree, she decided to pursue a master's degree in theology. Karolina shared her reasoning: "I thought that any college president had to know more theology than the local bishop did. I knew that there were going to be battles over those kinds of things." She was referring to controversies that Catholic institutions have when hosting speakers, events, or initiatives that could be viewed as against Church teaching. When such things come up, it is usually a bishop whom presidents have to

answer to. Karolina and the first bishop she worked with as president had a friendly relationship until she invited a commencement speaker to campus that raised the eyebrows of some in the Catholic community as he had sponsored a stem-cell research bill in Congress. The bishop called Karolina:

> I went to see him, and he was mad. I wasn't mad, I just wasn't backing down. So, he was sure we were gonna get all this fallout and everything. Well, he got six phone calls, and I got four…but he wouldn't forgive me. He just wouldn't do it. I thought, 'How am I going to make up with the bishop?' You spend a lot of time figuring out how you're going to make up with people. (Karolina, interview)

Following their fallout, Karolina put together a three-part lecture series at the university and sent the bishop a letter asking permission to have his canonist, an expert in Church law, assist in the event. After this peace offering, Karolina said that she and the bishop were "best buds again" and he went back to attending the commencement ceremonies. When a new bishop came to town, Karolina invited him over to her house once a year for dinner, but they did not have the same relationship as her previous bishop.

> He's got a diocesan school that he pays close attention to. But I wasn't diocesan, I was religious, and he wasn't about ready to fight with the nuns. So, he pretty much left me alone and came to graduation every year. (Karolina, interview)

Many participants shared a similar sentiment that as a non-diocesan institution, they had less interference from the bishop as he was not a member of their board. Some participants, also alluded to strained relationships between their sponsoring organizations, usually sisters, and the bishop, saying that their institution was largely left alone as a result. When I did speak to a

participant who was president of a diocesan institution, she asked me to stop recording when talking about her relationship with the bishop.

Irene also found herself having difficult conversations with her local bishops, one of which she shared, had been paying particularly close attention to her at the start of her presidency.

> When I first started, [the bishop] wanted to keep an eye on me. He had me over to his place quite frequently for little talks about this or that like, 'Why did [the] student newspaper have an article about birth control?' And, you know, it was weird to sit and talk to this elderly [bishop] in his robes about birth control, but it was friendly. (Irene, interview)

One of her visits to the bishop's residence was meant to discuss *Ex corde Ecclesia*, a major Church document discussing the status and standards of Catholic higher education. Irene was joined by two other presidents of local Catholic universities, one a priest and one a layman, and the bishop's advisor, also a priest. In her narrative, Irene references *clericalism*, a term used to refer to the maintaining or promotion of a religious hierarchy (Meriam-Webster, n.d.).

> I was in my best Catholic girl's school blue suit…looking very prim and demure. Well, the men started telling seminary jokes, in Latin. I mean they went off on a riff. And I'm just sitting there looking at these guys…literally speaking Latin to each other. …Instead of having a serious discussion about the document, they were all doing this inside-baseball kind of thing. …It was a long time ago, but it's still stuck with me that their comfort zone is exclusionary and that's what clericalism is all about. That they have a lot of inside stuff that goes on and it just makes it hard for the rest of us to penetrate. I think

that still goes on today. …I just don't get invited to things. …the clerical system operates in a way that's very closed shop. (Irene, interview)

Rose had to navigate being the only laywoman, and one of only two women at the table with her peer presidents. She spoke about her first president's meeting as awkward and uncomfortable. When they asked her to contribute to the conversation, she began to find her voice.

> They asked me to weigh in on some things. After that, it started to get really comfortable really fast. …The real test was when I disagreed with some of them on something and how that would be perceived. …We can disagree without being disagreeable…and the relationships deepened over time. I would say the first hour of my very first president's meeting was tremendously anxiety provoking and then after getting over that, I never looked back. (Rose, interview)

Gendered interactions were not exclusive to participant interactions with their bishops or colleagues who were priests. They also happened in everyday moments for the participants. Lucy shared a story of when she had brought a fundraising plan for a new building to completion after two previous presidents had tried to do the same. Under her leadership, the money was raised, and the project was started and completed but it was her predecessor who had received credit from one of the board members.

> The board member who had served under [the previous president] said to me, 'This is so exciting…wouldn't it be great if [the previous president] were here?' And I had this feeling of like well, he didn't raise any money. So I just had to smile and say, 'Yes, it

would be wonderful.' …We raised the money, we built the building, and they were still going back and kind of giving him credit for it. (Lucy, interview)

Participants also noted these patterns and themes of male authority and power in lighter moments throughout their presidencies. Olga shared that a priest who had accompanied her on her presidential pilgrimage to Italy "confronted her" about bringing a certain Catholic tradition back to her campus.

> He said, 'You should be doing this on your campus.' 'Yes, Father!' I had the feast and invited him to be the first celebrant. …He thanked me for taking his advice and I thought it was fun he used the word 'advice.' (Olga, interview)

For Josephine, she found the positives in gendered interactions when she was in the process of transitioning into a new presidency. The institution was purchasing a house for the president and wanted her to see it before finalizing the sale. It was still highly confidential that the institution was appointing Josephine, the first layperson, and woman, to be president, so they told the staff that the house would be for a visiting professor. Josephine and her husband flew out to see the house.

> We show up, there's 25 people there. Everybody assumed [my husband] is the professor so they swarm him. He's like up against the wall. Perfect. I've got the measuring tape and they're ignoring me. I'm over, looking where we are going to put a podium…I'm looking at the kitchen. …I'm doing all of this and I'm sure they're thinking 'Oh, isn't that nice, the little woman is looking around and seeing how she's going to have a tea party.' It was so ridiculous but that was the assumption, must be him. Meanwhile, it worked out well, I got to get a really good look…and they had no clue. (Josephine, interview)

Gendered interactions among participant stories revealed that women still experience a power dynamic within the gendered organization of Catholic higher education. Some of the participants in this study decided to use their gender identity to differentiate themselves as leaders and offer a different style of leadership that men could not match.

Gender Identity. The subtheme of gender identity was prevalent when participants presented themselves as a gendered member of an organization. Due to the gendered organizational culture of the Catholic Church, participants often found themselves being able to distinguish their leadership from other presidents because there were fewer women presidents in Catholic higher education. Participants in this study tended to use their gender identity to assist them in navigating potential issues of gender bias by using their differences as advantages rather than disadvantages. Within a gendered organizational culture, being different allowed some participants to find a purpose for their voice in a room where they were not equally represented.

While Elizabeth had earlier shared that her distinctiveness in being a woman gave her an advantage when discussing following a male predecessor, she also recognized that women leaders in Catholic higher education are presented with different challenges. Elizabeth reflected on the ways in which she sees her gender intertwining with her role as president.

> I know that people respond differently to me, because…one, I'm a president, and two, I am a woman. And even though that may not be the first thing I think about, it's the first thing that people see…and perhaps that's the first thing that they think about, and that might shape how they respond to [me]. I think women leaders in the Catholic faith…are presented with different challenges. …I think about the number of rooms I've walked

> into where it's mostly men…the number of situations where there are certain assumptions made. (Elizabeth, interview)

Elizabeth did not elaborate on the assumptions that may be made in those moments. However, she did stress throughout the interview that being a president of an institution founded by sisters has had distinct differences in her leadership from her colleagues at institutions founded and still governed in part by the local dioceses. This concept is explored in the following section regarding the theme of Catholic identity and mission.

Philomena saw her distinctiveness as a laywoman in a male religious-dominated culture as an asset. She described herself as a "curiosity" to some when she first began her presidency. She recalled the chancellor telling her, "'Oh, your skirts are shorter than we're used to and your heels are higher, but I love it, keep going.'" Philomena felt blessed to be different.

> I felt very validated and welcomed as a woman president in Catholic higher education. …If you see the glass half full your distinctiveness is an asset. …I was a four for four, I was younger, I was a woman, I was a non-nun, and I was Catholic. It enabled me…gave me access and experiences on boards, speaking. …Now I had to demonstrate I had the chops to do it…but I was very often in settings that gave me and the institution profile an advantage because there were so few women leading in Catholic higher ed at the time. …Yes, there are moments when you're sitting in the pew and all your colleagues are presiding and you're saying, 'Hey, I'm the senior president here,' but there are real opportunities too. (Philomena, interview)

Like Philomena, Rose leaned into the ways she was different as a woman and as a mom. She used this aspect of her identity to define her leadership style.

> I can promise you, I've never been with a president…who would engage with students the way I do. There's just no way. I go skating…play soccer…go to concerts with the students. …I engage with student government regularly…more than the average president. …The last thing I want is to look like the conventional, speaking historically, the tall white male that you typically think of when you think of a college president. …Part of it comes from, insofar as I'm concerned, it's because I'm a mom. …The priests…they're not dads. And that gave me a dimension where I can, by nature, be more relatable. (Rose, interview)

Lucy also saw motherhood as a helpful experience when working with a large number of board members. She shared, "Once you have [a lot] of children, there aren't enough hands to hold everybody's hand at the same time. …You really have to learn about…rejuggling your priorities as a mother…it's similar [with a] board."

Faith viewed women's leadership as an asset to the presidency but also warned about being too concerned about how gender can contribute to a troubling dynamic between men and women.

> Don't lock yourself into some kind of feminist role where [you've] got to prove to all of these people that because [you're] a woman [you] can make all this happen. I mean, you've got to prove that you're going to be a good president, period. And I do believe that women bring to a presidency qualities that can really make the presidency different. More collaborative, more open, warmer in terms of the way women network, the way women link info, to affirm and celebrate other people. I think women do all of that instinctively and I think men learn from that. …It isn't easy. There's a lot of pressure on

> women today to be leaders, to be different kinds of leaders to make their mark…but I don't think we want to end up pushing the men away…or constricting their role in their voice as the price to be paid for us getting our role in our voice, that's not helpful. (Faith, interview)

Participants found that their gender identity was an advantage for them as they set themselves apart from predecessors as well as the stereotypical image of a male president. They used their distinctiveness to offer a new perspective. In many cases, participants shared that their institution intentionally sought a woman president, setting the stage for participants to differentiate themselves positively.

Catholic Mission and Identity

The Catholic mission and identity of the institutions that participants led was the singular thread that weaved all participant narratives together. All participants stated that they were drawn to lead Catholic institutions explicitly to advance the mission of the university. For this reason, it was important that the participants accepted the role of president at institutions with a mission they could understand, appreciate, and use to anchor their leadership. The subtheme of institutional fit appeared often when participants spoke about accepting the position of president and within their experiences of working with the founding order. Catholic mission and identity also had the subtheme of "Catholic with a big 'C.'" Elizabeth and Maria used this phrase to distinguish the mission of a Catholic institution from how the Catholic Church expects institutions of Catholic higher education to deliver an education rooted in the Catholic intellectual tradition. Participants often discussed that they were responsible for safeguarding the

Catholic mission and identity of the institution and therefore made decisions and leadership choices to uphold that responsibility.

Institutional Fit. Participants were sure to stress that institutional fit was important for future women to consider when exploring the opportunity to be a Catholic college president, as it had been for them. First, as discussed in the previous section on motivation, the participants were particularly motivated to lead institutions that aligned with their own personal and professional values and beliefs, in particular their faith. Beyond motivation, some participants were careful to select institutions where history and sponsoring organization's mission and charism aligned with how they would lead as presidents. Diana for example found that she was attracted to a presidency at an institution whose sponsoring organization's tradition and educational philosophy was one she had studied and felt aligned with her own "desire for God in [her life]. Karolina sought out an institution that was founded by a religious order whose "concept of Catholicism aligned" with where she was coming from personally. While she did not outright say what her concept of Catholicism was, it was clear that Karolina meant she was in search of a less conservative Catholic environment. Philomena, too, identified deeply with the sponsoring organization's ideology and charism.

> The charism of [the sisters]…was a way to [lean] into my Catholic faith from a feminist social justice perspective that was very healthy for me. …[The sisters] were feminist before the word was coined, and they really had a healthy sense that the academy was faith in conversation with current issues and that one needed to be out there wrestling with the changing world and changing issues and sometimes pushing the envelope…and that was a good space for me. If [the institution] had a more conservative religious

> congregation founding it, or it was a more conservative political environment, it might have been different for me…I landed in the right place. (Philomena, interview)

Fourteen of the 16 participants in this study had been president at an institution founded by religious sisters, most having once been an all-women's institution. These institutions, in their early days, had been led primarily by sisters of that founding order. The founding sisters created avenues for women to receive a Catholic education when they were otherwise excluded from Catholic universities, a mission that continues to inspire women to lead these types of institutions. Irene shared the founding story of her institution during her interview. She spoke of a "bold," "feisty," and "visionary" sister who went out, advocated for, and eventually established an institution where women could receive a Catholic higher education. So many of the founding stories of the institutions led by the participants of this study had similar themes of bold women leaders.

> The colleges founded by religious orders of women, tend to be pretty progressive and liberal. And we've all got that in our bones that we're here to be of service to the [students] we serve. We're not here to erect monuments to canon law. (Irene, interview)

Elizabeth perhaps offers another reason why more women presidents may be attracted to institutions sponsored by congregations of women.

> Come to understand if you are drawn to serving at a diocesan institution versus, for example, institutions founded by orders of sisters, they're just different. The lived experience is different. I can only say that having served institutions founded by sisters, but I've worked closely with colleagues at archdiocesan institutions. …Catholic institutions founded by sisters tend to be more flat in their organizational structures, there

> is more community kind of access to leaders and shared agreements. …Some ways how sisters…navigate…there's not hierarchy. …I would say spend some time really discerning what kind of Catholic institution…because it allows you to determine whether or not you can authentically live [and lead]. (Elizabeth, interview)

As Josephine suggested earlier in her experiences transitioning into the presidency as the first laywoman, the institution founded and operated by religious sisters had the smoothest transition, given their familiarity with women's leadership. While most participants had worked at institutions founded by sisters, several also shared success stories of leading institutions that were founded by men. However, a critical look at the organization's history and culture and readiness for a woman leader is important to consider when taking on a position as demanding as the presidency.

Catholic with a big 'C.' Participants viewed the Catholic mission of their institutions to be central to their purpose as presidents. The mission acted as a foundation for participants enabling them to make difficult decisions and served as a guidepost for them throughout challenges and hardships. Philomena described the mission as "an anchor" stating that, "When the going gets tough, I know what I'm doing because I have a deep sense of vocation and alignment with the mission." Diana too saw commitment to mission as a means to get through the difficult days. Participants emphasized that upholding the mission needed to be a primary role of the president. Regardless of if the president was a sister or a laywoman, the mission was always the priority. However, participants also noted the difference between the mission and Catholic identity. Elizabeth described it as the "big 'C'" and "little 'c.'"

> Being a leader of a Catholic institution is living both the big 'C,' that is upholding the Catholic intellectual tradition, the Catholic faith practices, and so forth as part of the existence of a Catholic institution. But also, really very important for me, and this is part of the kind of Catholic institutions I served, is the Catholic little 'c.' That all-inclusive, welcoming, and authentically inclusive living of our charism. (Elizabeth, interview)

Maria, too, used the phrase big 'C' to emphasize that Catholic institutions would never go against Church teaching. Her example, impinges on academic freedom to uphold the Catholic values of God-given dignity of every human being. She added, "You walk a lot of challenging lines on all kinds of moral issues, and you have to lead clearly, while at the same time respecting that you're a teaching institution. That's what it's all about."

The big 'C' is an added layer of responsibility for presidents of Catholic institutions. Presidents are expected to understand and articulate Church doctrine, Catholic social teaching, and the Catholic intellectual tradition, principles set forth by the Church that instructs Catholic institutions on what it means to lead an institution in the context of Catholic identity (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, n.d.). Not only does this mean that course offerings, campus activities, and the physical campus must reflect elements of Catholic identity, but presidents must also promote an understanding and commitment to the institution's Catholic identity to the board, faculty, staff, and students.

> Presidents are often called upon to explain, promote, or defend the Catholic character of the university. It is not always sufficient to delegate this to a campus mission officer. Sponsoring communities and the local ordinary, among others, often need assurance from

> the president that a particular decision or strategic plan is consistent with the institution's Catholic identity. (Diana, interview)

Many of the participants highlighted that in today's political climate, being the president of a Catholic institution is harder than ever. Philomena added, "Particularly as a woman you need to have done your homework around your own issues and beliefs and operate with a sense of conscience and align…commitment to mission." When social issues are front and center in the news, many look to leaders of institutions to comment, provide calls to action, or words of comfort. Several participants spoke of the recent decision to overturn Roe v. Wade (410 U.S. 113, 1973), a court case central to abortion laws within the United States, and the pressure to make a statement or stay silent. Philomena received advice early in her career from a respected president that has since helped guide her through these tumultuous moments.

> I was fussing over something, I'm sure it was some Church related something. He said something to me, that I repeat often and was transformative. 'In my leadership,' he said, …you can see the limits or the possibilities of Catholic higher ed. The lens you choose determines how you lead.' …When we hit those controversial moments or those moments where it is still challenging to be a woman in Catholic higher ed, or we hit *Roe v. Wade*, and students are looking at you, faculty are looking at you because you're a woman…I think, what are the possibilities? What are the opportunities to lead and to educate in this challenging moment? And he taught me that. (Philomena, interview)

In the narratives illustrating big 'C' and little 'c,' it was the little 'c,' or a focus on the mission that helped the participants navigate and respond to the controversy of big 'C' issues, or political and social issues like *Roe v. Wade*. Mission consistently served as a guide for participants to lead

with a social justice lens to cut through the noise around hot-button political issues to focus on student success.

> I said to another woman president of a small Catholic college, 'We're just like the Martha in the Mary and Martha stories. We just go about doing the dishes and taking care of our [students].' We're not bringing in canon lawyers or theologians, we're just helping our [students] to survive and keep going. And honest to God, that's mission. …That's what Pope Francis calls the field hospital. We're doing field hospital work and they're all blustering and posturing and whatever they do. And I know there's a place for that. And it's important. But everybody's worked up into a lather about things that don't help my students. And I have to focus on what's going to help my students live another day or two. So that's what I do. (Irene, interview)

Rose was hopeful that leaders of Catholic colleges and universities could role model through mission how to find ways for inclusive and respectful dialogue among differences.

> I think this is one of the most challenging and wonderful times to be a president of a Catholic institution in this country. On one hand, you see in some parts of the country, a contraction of the Church. You also see this horrendous polarization where we can't agree or disagree in civil ways within the Church forget about…Washington, DC. And it's the Catholic institution, I think that can provide more light than heat. …And that's part of our tradition, respectful dialogue. …We need to get past our polarized views, even within the big tent that is the Catholic Church. We need to do better to set an example for those who aren't a part of our tradition. (Rose, interview)

Though the participants were intentional about their decisions to pursue a presidency at Catholic institutions, they did recognize that the Catholic identity adds unique challenges to a presidency. However, participants often saw Catholic identity and mission as an opportunity to provide leadership focused on social justice and creating pathways to educational success for all. Participants' social justice initiatives included creating access to education for low-income and racially minoritized students, serving undocumented students, and building robust campus services to serve a diverse student body, particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Threats to Catholic Higher Education

Participants throughout this study were wholly dedicated to and proud of their role as Catholic university presidents. They viewed the position as a great honor and privilege, not only to lead a community dedicated to student success but also one that was grounded by a Catholic mission. Though, participants also highlighted the many challenges that Catholic institutions are facing today. The threats to the future of Catholic higher education were threefold: financial distress, declining enrollment, and the future of mission-centered leadership.

At least four of the participants had shared that they started their presidency in significant financial distress at their institutions. Though, it was clear that finances were difficult for a few more participants when they assumed the presidency, creating a need to make big changes at their institutions. Agnes was able to retire most of the immense debt caused by her predecessor by "selling off half the campus." She worried that her legacy would be that she sold so much of the campus, but she described it as the "right move." While she made the difficult decision to sell campus land, her legacy instead is that due to her leadership, the university remains open today.

Many Catholic institutions today remain tuition-driven, with the largest source of revenue coming from students. Karolina shared that she had many colleagues, who as presidents, were surprised by the finances of their institutions. When entering her role as president, Karolina had asked for copies of the audits and financial records to understand what financial situation she was taking on. She said, "You better know it because there are no small…Catholic institutions that are in good financial situations." She added that the financial situation of tuition-driven colleges comes with "huge pressures" that require presidents to "make decisions about your institutions that don't look at Catholic first…[the] look at what sells."

Further complicating this matter is the declining enrollment in Catholic institutions. Genevieve described the enrollment decline for private institutions as "staggering" warning that, "It's not going to get better because the population data tells you it's not going to get better." Rose had expressed concern about the condition of Catholic primary and secondary schools also struggling to enroll students, in turn causing a pipeline issue for Catholic colleges and universities.

Though, enrollment decline is nothing new for Catholic higher education. Many of the early all-women institutions struggled to keep their doors open as women students began to be accepted into the previously all-male institutions. Few all-women's Catholic institutions remain fully all-women today. Both Lucy and Genevieve led their institutions through a co-educational transition, a strategic move to boost enrollment. Lucy described the talking points that helped her and her staff when responding to angry students and alumni who were upset with this change.

> We are not going to debate whether single-gender education is special or not, it is. And we're not going to debate on whether there was a time in the history of America it was

> really important, it was. We're not going to debate that single-gender can't still exist in some places, it will. What we're going to say is it's not working here. And so, our next mission is to be co-educational. And we stayed on point. (Lucy, interview)

Karolina had upset alumni as well with her strategic decisions to boost enrollment including bolstering athletic programs and focusing new academic projects on science rather than the humanities. Many of the participants shared similar stories of making decisions to keep their institutions fiscally solvent including new graduate and STEM academic programs (Cecilia, Karolina, Olga) and making efforts to enroll different student populations who prior struggled with access to education (Irene, Philomena), and even cutting academic programs and employees (Helen, Genevieve).

In addition to finances and enrollment, participants expressed their concern about the future of mission-centered leadership at Catholic colleges. Most notably, participants spoke of a shrinking sisterhood. Karolina saw herself as the last of her kind saying, "The religious orders are getting smaller and smaller. …We started these institutions; we fostered them all these years. …The end of the religious orders sponsoring colleges and universities is at an end." Lucy described the difficulty of working alongside a sponsoring organization that is declining.

> I love and respect them…they are wonderful, they built a wonderful school, the story is dynamic. …But we share a campus, and it's really challenging to share a campus when they're declining and we're on the rise. And they still remember when they ran everything, the entire school. …So the power is shifting and I think that's really hard because trying to maintain an honor and respect for them, what they've accomplished, and then at the same time say no, we need this road. …Because it gets right down to

> logistics sometimes. …They're beautiful forward-thinking women, [who] have done extraordinary things, and it's sometimes really hard to be sharing everything. (Lucy, interview)

Several participants shared that the founding congregation has several reserved seats on their boards, however many are left empty without sisters to fill them. Irene's board has only two out of five seats filled for the sisters of her institution's founding order. She spoke of the challenge of finding sisters for the board.

> I'd love to recruit new sisters but there are very few who are not already retired, or who are willing to do it and also have the…expertise necessary to do well on a college board. …That's a hard component in a Catholic college and all Catholic colleges I think are struggling with this right now. Because the founding congregations are disappearing, there are very few left. (Irene, interview)

Philomena also shared her concern about the dwindling influence the sponsoring sisters might have on her institution.

> I really found a home with the congregation that sponsored the university…they were really formative for me. …I do worry that the formative influence of, in my case the sisters, is not there anymore. …They gave me a sense of community and a sort of unequivocal care and affection that was really formative for my experience and that's just not there anymore. …Will the culture of kindness and empathy survive without those vowed [religious] at a time of such stress and change? …It's going to depend upon a different set of variables, but I was lucky I got in…when some of the greats were still

there. And as a consequence, I've given a lot of eulogies, I've given a lot. (Philomena, interview)

Faith, a sister, had also discussed the next generation of Catholic institutional leadership. She said that Catholic higher education was now "solidly in a new era of lay leadership, as it should be." She went on to share that it was not about not having enough sisters or priests to run institutions, but rather building off Church documents such as Vatican II that encouraged more lay leadership within Catholic organizations. Further, Faith wondered if Catholic higher education would consider more presidents who were not practicing Catholics. She suggested that Catholic institutions "keep a weather eye" out for individuals who would not be able to uphold the Catholic mission of an institution, and "weaken what generations have built…into a strength."

Conclusion

Women are largely underrepresented within the role of president at institutions of higher education. Research on gendered organizations suggests that women leaders within Catholic higher education experience heightened barriers to leadership due to their gender. This study provided findings that help to further understand the ways in which women are motivated to pursue the Catholic presidency, the challenges they face on their journeys and within their roles, and how the culture of a Catholic institution shapes their leadership experiences. The major themes within the findings indicate that women are drawn to the role of president due to mentors who recognized participants' talents and skills and assisted them in gaining access to important professional development opportunities. Participants were also drawn to be presidents of Catholic institutions due to a relational responsibility and calling. In many cases, participants felt

a sense of duty or loyalty to an institution or their sponsoring religious organization. Further, a sense of self-awareness allowed the women to recognize how their talents and skills as a leader would fit the needs of their institutions. Additionally, participants spoke of a divine calling when they felt that the presidency was part of God's plan for them and when they viewed the role as a way to fulfill their vocation, a way in which to utilize their gifts and talents to serve God. Finally, women were also drawn to lead Catholic institutions due to the faith-based mission being closely aligned with their own professional and personal values. Many women saw the Catholic presidency as a way to serve others, particularly students, through a social justice lens.

Participants experienced challenges both on their path to the presidency and within the role. One significant theme of challenge emerged when participants discussed their work-life balance. Some participants made decisions to have and care for children, delaying their entry into leadership. Further, once in the role, participants described the role of president as all-consuming, finding it hard to escape and referring to the "weight" of the "presidential mantle." Another major theme that emerged when discussing challenges was when participants were "the first" woman to take on their roles. In many ways, the women in this study shattered glass ceilings within Catholic higher education. This led to a need for adjustment for the many constituents that participants worked with including alumni, faculty, board members, and members of the sponsoring religious organizations. Further, laywomen experienced an additional level of challenge as they navigated building relationships with the founding order of sisters and priests. Laywomen felt that they were held to a different standard without the credential of being a sister or priest. Finally, participants spoke of the challenges as they transitioned into the role. Some participants, followed predecessors who had left the institution amidst crises, causing a depletion of trust in the president's office. Others followed beloved predecessors who were often

used as a comparison tool for new presidents' success or failure. Participants also shared that follower perspective was in many cases turbulent, particularly with faculty, when making any sort of public decision. A supportive board was most often the saving grace for participants to feel supported when they had some faction of the community upset by their decision-making.

Finally, findings indicated that women experience various aspects of gendered organizational cultures including gendered interactions. Typically, participants discussed working relationships with local bishops and peer presidents who were often priests, interactions that in some cases felt exclusionary for the women. Participants also discussed how their gender identity made them distinct in positive ways, giving them a space to provide a differing, but welcomed, perspective. Further, participants were very intentional in their decisions to pursue the presidency at Catholic institutions. Institutional fit was important to participants when choosing which institution to lead, to ensure that the mission, values, and associated charism of the sponsoring organization provided a space in which they felt they could authentically lead. Many also shared that the Catholic mission and identity provided them with an anchor when navigating challenging situations, in some cases conflict between social-political issues and Church doctrine. Participants also spoke of the various threats to Catholic higher education and the difficulty of leading small, private, tuition-driven institutions. Declining enrollment, financial strain, and the shrinking of what were once robust sponsoring organizations of Catholic sisters left participants concerned for the future of Catholic institutions and the ability to prioritize mission along with keeping doors open.

In Chapter V, I provide a discussion of how these findings relate to what is known in the literature on women's leadership, gender organizations, and Catholic higher education. Further, based on this discussion I provide recommendations for practice and areas for future research.

Chapter V

The voice of women presidents at Catholic colleges and universities is largely undocumented in the literature on American college presidents. This study sought to explore the lived experiences of women who have served as presidents of Catholic institutions. Specifically, this study focused on the participants' leadership experiences on their path to the presidency, within the role, and how the culture of a Catholic institution influenced those experiences. To accomplish this, a qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized to draw common themes out of participant narratives to understand the ways in which they experienced the phenomenon of being a woman president at a Catholic institution. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) What motivates women on their pathway to becoming a Catholic college president?
2) In what ways, if at all, do women experience challenges on their path to the presidency and within the role?
3) In what ways, if at all, does the organizational culture of a Catholic institution impact the leadership experiences of women presidents?

In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the research questions and how the findings of this study relate to what is currently known in the available literature on the experiences of women presidents at Catholic institutions. I then provide recommendations for practice and opportunities for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What Motivates Women on their Pathway to Becoming a Catholic College President?

The first research question for this study sought to explore the ways in which women are motivated to pursue the Catholic college presidency. Given that women are still largely underrepresented in the role of university president, it is critical that we understand in what ways women are motivated to take on such a significant leadership position (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Much of what is known of the presidential pipeline and experience within the role is centered on a male narrative (Birnbaum, 1992; Cohen & March, 1974; Smerek, 2013). There is some literature that discusses the experiences of women college presidents; however, the research is still primarily quantitative and focuses on the path to the presidency as opposed to their experiences within the role (Howard & Gagliardi, 2018). There is even less research available on the experiences of women presidents within the context of Catholic higher education. This study provides a perspective from a unique subset of women presidents.

Understanding motivating factors for women to pursue higher-level positions within higher education can inform strategies to increase women's presidential aspirations. Dahlvig and Longman's (2014) emerging theory, the Women's Leadership Development Model (WLDM) looked at the motivating factors that contributed to women's engagement with leadership experiences in Christian higher education. The study was limited in that the participants were emerging leaders and had not yet reached executive-level leadership. However, the WLDM did provide a foundation for deductive coding in my study when analyzing motivators among participants including: (1) mentoring; (2) relational responsibility; and (3) calling. All of these codes later emerged as major themes within participant narratives.

Motivation for the participants within this study fell into three major themes: mentors (subthemes: mentor recognition and professional development opportunities), relational responsibility and calling (subthemes: duty to a sponsoring organization/institution, self-awareness, and God's plan and vocation), and mission aligning with personal and professional values. Almost all participants in this study shared that they did not originally intend on pursuing the role of university president. Hill and Wheat (2017) also found that women did not originally plan to become senior leaders in higher education, though they credit this in part to a lack of access to mentors. Conversely, mentors were critical for participants in this study in recognizing presidential potential before they were ready or even willing to see it for themselves. Further, mentors provided participants with hands-on professional development opportunities to explore the various duties of a president's role including fundraising, board relations, and holistic oversight of an entire campus. However, it is important to consider that the participants in this research study all successfully achieved the presidency, the findings and conclusions drawn do not consider women who have not been able to reach this level of leadership.

Mentoring has received a significant amount of attention within the research on women's leadership in higher education as a critical tool for career advancement (Ballenger, 2010; Brown, 2005; Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Oikelome, 2017). Several studies found that women had limited access to mentors and role models (Ballenger, 2010; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Oikelome, 2017). Brown (2005) conducted a quantitative study of 91 female presidents and found that more than half of them had primary mentors, but the overwhelming majority of those mentors were men.

All 16 participants in this study had primary mentors, who in many cases, were women. Participants in this study credited their mentors with playing a significant part in providing motivation, encouragement, and support both on the journey to the presidency and within the role. Participants spoke of seeking out mentors, stating that generationally "mentoring" was not as popular as it has become today. One participant, who had exclusively male mentors, "sought out" a woman president to shadow, sensing that female leadership might be different than what she had experienced from male mentors. Further, participants also caught the attention of higher-level administrators through successful performance in their roles. This led to administrators providing recognition, advice, and opportunities to participants to aid in career advancement. Several participants spoke of women mentors who brought them along to shadow and observe how the mentors fulfilled presidential duties. Women leaders tend to approach leadership with less emphasis on hierarchy and more focus on collaboration and transformational leadership (Eagly, 2007; Northouse, 2019). Therefore, when women can mentor other women, they provide more intentional professional development to mentees (Hill & Wheat, 2017). Given that many of the participants had worked in university settings that were founded and operated by religious organizations of women, it is likely that they had more access to women leaders than their counterparts at non-Catholic institutions. Most participants in this study had also worked at institutions sponsored by Catholic sisters along their path to the presidency, this meant that they also had more women president role models, as many institutions were still run by Catholic sisters at the time. Having role models in executive-level roles provides evidence that women can achieve those positions and be successful in them (Hill & Wheat, 2017).

Consistent with the WLDM, the participants in this study experienced both internal and external motivation throughout their pathway to the presidency (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).

Mentors served as primary external motivators for participants in this study by providing recognition and opportunities to engage in professional development. Professional development opportunities further led to participants developing confidence in their leadership ability and discovering an internal motivation to pursue higher levels of leadership. Dahlvig and Longman (2014) found that the ability to engage in leadership situations gave women leaders an opportunity to experience validation or resistance to their leadership performance. Positive feedback during professional development situations encouraged participants to continue pursuing higher-level leadership experiences as they experienced a greater sense of self-efficacy. The participants in my study shared that professional development institutes, formal shadowing programs, and the ability to take on presidential duties, either as an interim president or proxy for a current president, encouraged them to further pursue a presidency. Since there is no formal training or education for presidents, these experiences were critical for women in this study to feel more prepared and encouraged to apply for presidencies (Selingo et al., 2017). Participants shared that by successfully engaging in hands-on experience with presidential duties such as fundraising and working with boards, they felt more prepared, confident, and motivated to pursue a presidency.

Further, an internal motivation emerged for participants when they experienced a sense of calling or relational responsibility, two additional motivators within the WLDM (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). While the WLDM separates calling and relational responsibility, in this study, the two concepts were closely related in participant narratives and thus I saw it as one major theme: relational responsibility and calling. Participant narratives revealed a subtheme of a sense of duty to sponsoring religious orders and institutions with which they felt an affinity. Further, they displayed a great sense of self-awareness when they recognized that their skills and talents

aligned with an institution's needs. Many participants in this study stated that they felt called to the role of the president by God, or that they saw the role as a vocation in which they could do God's work through. A sense of calling is not exclusive to women in the Catholic college presidency and is a major theme across the experiences of women leaders in higher education (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Monroe, 2017; Wheat & Hill, 2016).

Additionally, the participants in this study were also motivated to pursue the presidency because of a sense of alignment with the mission of Catholic institutions and their personal and professional values and beliefs. Participants shared that they were motivated by the opportunity to lead an institution that mirrored their values of faith, care for the whole person, and social justice which allowed them to have more of an impact on the communities they were leading. Catholic universities are often set apart from other institutions by their mission-driven approach to providing higher education (Estanek et al., 2006). Further, participants in this study emphasized that the president is responsible for ensuring that the mission and Catholic identity of their institution is protected and promoted in all university operations. Participants invoked mission many times in their interviews not only as motivation to pursue a presidency but also as a guidepost for how they approached leadership.

Mission was essential for participants as they chose what type of Catholic institution to lead. Ensuring that the institutional mission, values, and charism of the associated sponsoring organization aligned with participants' own beliefs and values. Participants knew that the role of president was a serious undertaking, one that demanded much of their time and attention. The Catholic mission of the university served as a beacon for presidents as they navigated small and large decision-making. Choosing an institution that was a "right fit" made challenges "worth it"

and, for many presidents, contributed to their decision to remain in such a challenging role. At the time of this study, I was unable to find empirical research exploring how mission served as motivation for women leaders in any sect of higher education. However, the role of mission is central to much of the literature on Catholic higher education, especially within the discussion of lay leadership (Estanek, 2006; Gardner, 2006; Morey & Holtschneider, 2003). While mission is not discussed as a motivator, it is often brought up in the context of presidential search qualifications when hiring leaders who understand, appreciate, and can speak to leading a mission-driven institution. Therefore, this research presents another motivational and success factor to consider for women as leaders within Catholic higher education.

The themes among the first research question examining women's motivation to pursue a Catholic college presidency intertwined with one another. Mentors were integral in providing an acknowledgment that allowed participants to realize their agency and ability to pursue the presidency while also providing access to professional development. Thus, mentors played a role in externally contributing to participants' increased self-efficacy. The themes of relational responsibility and calling and mission aligning with personal beliefs indicate that participants were motivated to pursue the presidency when they perceived a "good fit" between their skills and talents, responsibilities of the role, needs of the institution, and an identification with the mission of the institution. In a sense, participants were looking for and motivated by the right conditions in which they could succeed in effecting positive change for an institution and its community.

Motivation to pursue the presidency in this study, as with the WLDM, did not solely come from one source but instead came from a combination of sources (Dahlvig & Longman,

2014). These sources included both personal and organizational factors. Individuals can be driven to assume responsibility when they believe they are both able to succeed and that their leadership will benefit a community (Bandura, 1978). Participants spoke of motivation externally from mentors and internally from relational responsibility, calling, and mission aligning with personal values. Additional research on motivation among women leaders in higher education also supports that both internal and external factors are needed when considering upper-level leadership roles (Cox, 2008; Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Hill & Wheat, 2017). This study expands on the available literature in that it explores a distinctive cohort of women presidents and their motivation to pursue the presidency.

Research Question 2: In What Ways, if at All, Do Women Experience Challenges on Their Path to the Catholic College Presidency and Within the Role?

The second research question guiding this study focused on the ways in which participants experienced challenges on their pathway to the presidency as well as within the role. Research suggests that women experienced challenges and barriers rooted in gender stereotypes that make it difficult for them to achieve higher levels of leadership (Cook & Glass, 2014; Diehl, 2014; Eagly, 2007; Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). Women within male-dominated organizations also tend to face increased barriers along their leadership journey (Acker, 1990; Diehl & Szubsinki, 2016; Ecklund, 2006; Longman & Lanfreniere, 2012). Understanding the challenges for women to attain leadership roles within higher education further assists in addressing barriers that prevent women from reaching the presidency. The findings in this study indicate that women presidents of Catholic colleges and universities experienced challenges in three major themes: work-life balance (subthemes: family and “the presidential mantle”), being

"the first" (subthemes: "It's a girl!" and challenges for laywomen) and transitioning into the role (subthemes: predecessor and follower perspective).

Diehl (2014) suggested that women leaders within higher education experience over 20 different types of adversities that span both personal and professional concerns. This was consistent with the findings of this study in which participants described challenges that involved and influenced their personal and professional lives. For some of the participants in this study, their role in the family as both a mother and wife influenced career decisions along their journey to the presidency. A few participants delayed their careers to have children. Research suggests that women are more likely than men to have career delays or hesitate to take on larger leadership roles to have children (Hannum et al., 2015; Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Teague, 2015). Further, women are also viewed as incapable of higher-level leadership when they have children whereas men are viewed more favorably as leaders when they are fathers. The burden of household work and family care continues to affect women and their ability to advance in their careers.

Further concerning, women faculty are most affected by the impact of motherhood on their career trajectory, specifically when pursuing tenure (Hannum et al., 2015). The role of chief academic officer, or provost, is most often the previous role held by presidents, in particular, women presidents across higher education (Gagliardi et al., 2017). If women are less likely to achieve tenure, and subsequently high ranking academic administrative positions, it will continue to be difficult to promote women to the presidency with the same frequency as men.

Teague and Bobby (2014) found that women within higher education are less likely to pursue a career opportunity requiring relocation or some other burden on their family for

themselves but will relocate for a male spouse's career opportunity. The support of a spouse and other family support systems are particularly important for women with families and their pursuit of the presidency. Participants in this study who had children often credited their spouses, or other family members, with assisting in childcare so that they may continue to pursue their career goals. Many also shared that they could not do what they do as a president with small children at home, most had adult-aged children by the time they reached the presidency. Many participants also discussed the weight of the "presidential mantle" and whether or not they had children.

Participants found the presidency exhausting, isolating, and overall demanding. The role of president at any college or university requires a person to be able to manage and respond to many different aspects of university life including finances, board management, matters of personnel, curriculum, government relations, and so on (Bass et al., 2021; Gagliardi et al., 2017; Selingo et al., 2017). Participants in this study added that there is an additional layer of responsibility for Catholic university presidents as they are also stewards of the institution's Catholic mission. Thus, Catholic university presidents are also responsible for managing relationships with local ordinaries, sponsoring religious organizations, and other stakeholders concerned with the Catholic mission of the institution. Often, participants spoke of how challenging political issues, particularly social issues that conflict with Church teaching, cause additional tension as their communities look to them for guidance and leadership in times of struggle. Participants found themselves navigating carefully around their own beliefs, the Catholic mission of their institution, and the needs of their students and the university community. The weight of "the presidential mantle" combined with additional pressures on women within the home could contribute to issues of retention among women in the presidency role. While some participants in this study shared strategies for taking time off, many

participants shared that their sense of purpose and mission-driven leadership is what sustains them during difficult days. This study contributes to the emerging research on work-life balance and burnout in higher education by providing a perspective from leaders who see institutional mission as a factor, both positive and challenging when considering the personal impact of their role.

An additional area of challenge among the participants in this study was the ways in which the participants experienced being the first woman or laywoman to take on their role as president. Participants who were the first to take on the role of president felt excited by their ability to provide a model example for women's leadership but also experienced some challenges in how they were received. A consistent barrier to women's leadership is the "think manager, think male" phenomenon in which societal norms perpetuate stereotypes that associate good leadership with masculine qualities (Schein & Davidson, 1993).

The participants in this study who were the first women at all to lead their institutions, experienced challenges in navigating male-dominated organizational cultures. One participant was introduced to her new constituents through birth announcements brandishing the headline: "It's a Girl!" Though the participant shared the story in a lighthearted way, the style of communication chosen to announce a historic appointment of this institution's presidency in many ways, reduces the significance of the participant down to her gender. This is particularly dangerous in that many stereotypes and biases surrounding the perceived success of women leaders are still deeply rooted in gender (Diehl, 2014; Eagly, 2007; Heilman, 1983; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). Further, the use of the word *girl*, and even the metaphor of a baby's birth announcement, contribute to the infantilization of women. This choice of language has been

linked to implicit sexism and negative self-perception among women leaders (MacArthur et al., 2020).

Challenges for participants were also prevalent for women who were the first laywomen to lead their institutions. Participants noted feeling that they needed to be very intentional about invoking the founding mission of the university and the values of the sponsoring religious organization of the institution. This effort was a strategy to ensure stakeholders that the mission of the institution was always the top priority within the participant's leadership. Morey and Holtschneider (2003) found that boards were more likely to hire women religious or priests over a layperson when available, though lay leadership is on the rise. When a layperson is selected to lead, they usually have demonstrated a direct connection to the founding congregation. There are fewer women religious and priests who have the experience and education necessary to hold a college presidency in today's higher education landscape therefore making lay leadership necessary.

There has been limited research on the dynamics of lay leadership in the two decades since Morey and Holtschneider conducted their 2003 study. The participants in this study, however, echo similar sentiments of a shrinking sisterhood and the need for lay leaders to be explicit in their understanding and appreciation of the founding mission of their institution. This study also expanded on what is known about lay leadership by providing experiences of laywomen within the college presidency. Additional findings in this study indicate that laywomen face unique challenges in garnering support and trust from university stakeholders. For example, some participants shared that they were held to different standards and expectations than sister presidents had been.

Challenges in establishing community trust were not exclusive to the laywomen in this study. Participants, in many cases, shared that they followed predecessors that left the institution amidst crises. Several participants in this study shared stories of financial crises, untruthful and authoritarian predecessors, and a need for innovative leadership to keep a university open. Ryan and Haslam's (2005) research on the *glass cliff* phenomenon suggests that organizations that are performing poorly are more likely to appoint women leaders. Further research into the glass cliff suggested that stereotypical feminine qualities such as being understanding and sympathetic are more desirable for failing organizations (Ryan et al., 2011). The participants in this study who took the reins from unsuccessful presidents spoke of needing to provide healing to a campus badly hurt from the transgressions of their predecessors. One participant spoke about putting aside her knowledge and experience as a doctor, referring to her terminal degree, and being a Catholic sister first. This separation of identities illustrates how putting her role as a sister front and center in her leadership appealed to her constituents who needed a soft landing after learning of the significant financial concern for the college. Other participants discussed not losing their temper or "picking battles," suggesting that more confrontational traits, usually associated with masculine leadership, were not going to get them far to gain follower respect.

While in some cases aspects of identity presented challenges for participants, they also found ways to leverage those identities to serve them in different settings. Participants used their various identities (age, religious status, gender, prior career experience, education) to navigate different leadership situations and challenges, to be adaptable to whatever the moment needed. The view of masculine versus feminine leadership traits continues to perpetuate stereotypes of what "good leadership" should look like, though participants in this study used a mix of leadership traits and styles. Further, positioning women to lead failing organizations creates an

added layer of difficulty in achieving success markers when the initial focus is to ensure that the institution does not completely fail. This study also extends the glass cliff concept as Catholic institutions not only considered women in times of struggle but also laywomen or women religious. The added dynamic of religious status in this study highlights that failing organizations not only look for different types of leadership in terms of gender but also consider the positions of power and access within the Church.

Even when participants replaced beloved predecessors at institutions that were not struggling, they were still challenged by simply just being the president. As the most public-facing figure for a college or university, the president is expected to be all things to all people (Selingo et al., 2017). Participants were often criticized and shared that every decision they made was challenged. The participants also stated that the faculty challenged their decisions most often. One research study suggested that faculty still struggle to understand the role of the president and have negative perceptions of their effectiveness (Gearhart et al., 2020). Many of the participants in my study had pursued a more traditional route to the presidency through the faculty and chief academic officer roles. They credited their time spent as faculty with providing them the skills needed to work with faculty collaboratively as a president. As established earlier, chief academic officer positions, including provost, tend to be the most accessible route to the presidency for women (Gagliardi et al., 2017). However, given the difficulties that women have in achieving administrative roles within the faculty, the representation of women presidents may continue to suffer if something does not change.

Research Question 3: In What Ways, if at All, Does the Organizational Culture of a Catholic Institution Impact the Leadership Experiences of Women Presidents?

The third research question framing this study sought to understand the ways in which the organizational culture of a Catholic college or university influenced and impacted how women presidents experience leadership at Catholic institutions. The Catholic Church, by design, is a patriarchy, prohibiting women from holding formal leadership roles. The themes that emerged from the findings for research question three included: gendered organizational culture (subthemes: gendered interactions and gender identity), Catholic mission and identity (subthemes: institutional fit and Catholic with a big 'C'), and threats to Catholic higher education.

When an organization promotes authority for one gender over another it is considered a gendered organization (Acker, 1990). Organizations without explicit gender hierarchy may also be considered gendered when systems and processes implicitly promote one gender over another. Due to the deep historical roots that male leadership has within higher education, and the fact that more men hold university presidencies than women, higher education also has gendered organizational tendencies (Acker, 1990). Thus, Catholic colleges are considered gendered organizations. Catholic institutions of higher education are sponsored by dioceses or religious organizations of priests and sisters, and they also have close working relationships with the local ordinaries and other Catholic college leadership. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that the participants in this study would experience the different processes of a gendered organization. This study revealed that women presidents of Catholic colleges and universities do experience the five processes of gendered organizations: (1) division of labor, behavior, physical space and

power; (2) symbols and images; (3) gendered interactions; (4) gendered identity expectations; (5) gendered organizational logic (Acker, 1990).

First and foremost, the participants in this study, as women, were excluded from priestly duties that some of their colleagues and predecessors have access to. Priests can preside over Catholic mass, offer homilies, and ultimately serve as formal leaders within the Catholic Church. This division of allowed labor and power set the stage for an imbalance of authority for women who are unable to access this ultimate level of leadership within the Catholic Church and Catholic higher education (Acker, 1990). This also creates an imbalanced power dynamic between participants and the bishop, or local ordinary. The bishop serves as an authority of sorts on questioning if college events, programs, and initiatives are consistent with Church teaching should they rise to his level of attention.

Some participants also experienced a division of physical space to which they were not able to fully access (Acker, 1990). For example, participants who replaced a priest or sister as a layperson or as a woman religious of a different religious order than their own may not have had frequent access to that sponsoring organization. One participant referred to her predecessor as "the guy having dinner with [the other priests] every night" something she would not be able to do as she did not live in the priest community. Another shared that she was invited over to have dinner with the priest community but never wanted to take advantage of that open invitation. Others discussed going to the motherhouse when invited, usually for business. Even when the physical space was linked to other women, their lack of a distinct religious authority, or privilege, was obvious to participants.

Divisions of power are often reinforced by symbols or images within a gendered organization (Acker, 1990). Participant narratives also included references to clothing that signified power and authority within the Catholic Church including a priest's collar and a nun's habit. Further, the participants' gender was highlighted when referring to their attire. One participant described herself as looking demure in her "Catholic girl school blue suit." Another one pointed to her high heels as a humorous way to dismiss comments about filling her male predecessors' shoes. One participant even joked that having a nun's habit would make her job so much easier. The habit, though fewer women religious in the United States are wearing them today, remains a complicated piece of cloth evoking reverence and signifying obedience (Kuhns, 2007). The symbolism of clothing in this study signified a power that was inaccessible to participants given their role as women or laywomen.

The clear boundaries of power within a Catholic college or university for women were demonstrated frequently when participants discussed gendered interactions. Acker (1990) described gendered interactions as exchanges that enact patterns of dominance and submission. Also, in these interactions, men are often serving as actors while women are emotional support (Acker, 1990). Participants in this study experienced gendered interactions in both small and big ways. One participant described a situation where it was assumed by staff that her husband was the prospective job candidate, while she was largely ignored. Several participants discussed feeling excluded or awkward in rooms where they were the only woman. One participant went so far as to describe her experience interacting with priests stating that "their comfort zone is exclusionary." Many of the interactions described across all participant narratives supported Acker's (1990) suggestion that there is a display of one gender holding power over another. However, many participants also found strength in these moments by differentiating themselves

and their voices as the only woman. Further, participants felt that their ability to succeed and meaningfully contribute allowed them to serve as a model, potentially paving the way for the next, and hopefully larger, generation of women presidents.

Gender identity in some cases also further perpetuated difficulties for women leaders within the Catholic college presidency. A frequently appearing example among participant narratives was the influence of being a mother. Several participants discussed how being a mother gave them skills and influenced their approach to relationship-building with various constituents. One participant felt that as a mom she was given a bit more freedom to be an unconventional president, compared to the traditional "elbow patch" wearing male president. Another participant compared building relationships with a large number of board members to having a large number of children all requiring a mother's attention. Wheat and Hill (2016) found that participants in their study on women senior administrators in higher education also viewed their position as mothers as having informed their approach to leadership. Interestingly, while successful women leaders in higher education find that motherhood gives them tangible skills and leadership qualities, it is also a continued barrier for many women who are divided between career progression and caring for their family as noted earlier in Chapters II and V.

Cultural and social norms around gender expectations for women and families also negatively impacted the experiences of the participants in this study. One participant, a sister, described how not having a family put additional pressure on her as president in that people only viewed her as a president, as opposed to a more relatable role such as a mom. This example highlights that while laywomen may not be able to access the inherent respect Catholic sisters receive, Catholic sisters are unable to access aspects of gender identity that laywomen have

found to be positive influences on their leadership. Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations provides a framework for how one can expect to experience gendered organizational processes but lacks the nuance to consider the effect of gendered experiences outside of male-female comparisons. The complex relationship between gender and Catholic sisterhood begs for more understanding of the leadership experiences of women who cannot access the societal expectations of traditional gendered identity and behavior.

Throughout this study and the available literature on the history of Catholic higher education in the United States, gendered organizational logic is a consistent theme. Organizational logic includes formal documents and rules that dictate hierarchical structures and decision-making, promoting the authority of one gender over another (Acker, 1990). As discussed in Chapter II, the early history of higher education and Catholic higher education, saw exclusively male, usually priest, presidents (Gardner, 2006; Thelin, 2019). In some cases, organizational logic still requires that priests maintain the presidency at certain institutions (Providence College, 2016; University of Notre Dame, 2021). The remnants of historical organizational hierarchy in higher education are still prevalent, as evidenced by the participants' discussion of "male-dominated cultures" and their questioning of if their university communities were ready for a woman president.

Ultimately the participants still pursued and achieved the presidency and were excited to be "the first," however they still experienced a degree of challenge to their leadership. One participant discussed having to leave a presidential search because the institution expected that her male spouse relocates to take on a formal role during her presidency. She later had to refine her search for a presidency to find an institution that was open to her husband not relocating.

Another participant shared how during her annual performance review, the board chair commented on how her male spouse played a role in her success as president. She shared that she had not been aware that he would be part of her evaluation but later saw that he did indeed help her connect with constituents, in part due to his ability to "talk sports" with male board members and donors. Though this turned out to be a positive for the participant, it still highlights that organizational logic for gendered organizations falls short of fully embracing women leaders.

The many founding stories of Catholic all-women's colleges and the history of Catholic higher education for women usually include a reference to how the founding sisters were radical, feisty, feminist, and bold (Coburn & Smith, 1999; Landy, 2022; Oates, 1988; 2002). Even throughout participants' narratives for this study, sisters were still brought up in the context of being progressive, feminist, and confrontational with the bishop, to the point where they had earned being left alone. These labels perhaps are earned simply because the founding sisters and the sisters of today challenge organizational logic in a way that is unexpected from women, particularly those who have taken a vow of obedience. As the number of women religious dwindles on college campuses, questions linger about the future of this feminist spirit for Catholic higher education.

Catholic higher education is facing a period of transition as enrollment declines, increased financial pressure, and waning public support for high-priced college degrees continue (Johnstone, 2016; Seltzer, 2021; Wodon, 2020). Private, small, tuition-driven institutions are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain and operate amid financial struggles. Many participants also shared that Catholic institutions are facing additional societal pressures as social issues, including LGBTQ and women's rights, continue to contend with Church teaching. While

research suggests that women bring many strong leadership qualities to institutions that are struggling (Ryan et al., 2011), the representation of women college presidents at Catholic institutions continues to shrink (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2018; Morey & Holtschneider, 2003; Nelson, 2012). Further, though it was not the main focus of this research, participants spoke of their concerns about threats to the mission of Catholic universities as more institutions are selecting presidents who do not identify as Catholic.

Recommendations for Practice

Certainly, the time is now for Catholic institutions to consider various strategies to promote more women to the role of president within this unique sect of higher education. Given the current literature available on women's leadership and the findings within this study, I offer several recommendations for practice for leaders within Catholic higher education to increase the representation of women leaders. These strategies fell into two themes: the presidential pipeline and organizational logic and culture.

The Presidential Pipeline

To promote more women into the role of president at Catholic colleges and universities, more qualified women must be motivated to pursue the presidency. This study has illustrated that motivation is crucial for women to begin to engage in higher levels of leadership to prepare and advance into the presidency. Sources of motivation for the participants in this study came from mentoring, relational responsibility and calling, and an alignment of personal and professional values with the Catholic institutional mission. However, throughout most participant stories, it was evident that motivation to pursue the presidency did not occur until after participants had experienced success well into their initial careers. It was rare for a participant to recognize at the

start of their career that they could consider engaging in a pathway to the presidency. Strategies to increase women's motivation early on in their careers may assist in creating a larger pool of women eager to consider presidencies. Motivation coupled with important professional development opportunities can address issues within the presidential pipeline to ensure a deep pool of candidates ready and willing to take on the role of president.

Increase Formal Mentoring Programs at Catholic Institutions for Women

Research suggests that mentors are critical for career advancement in higher education, particularly for women (Ballenger, 2010; Brown, 2005; Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Hill & Wheat, 2017; Oikelome, 2017). However, women often have difficulty finding mentors, particularly mentors that represent similar identities around gender and race (Hill & Wheat, 2017; Oikelome, 2017). Mentors who hold the same identities as mentees provide an image of success for mentees to see that it is possible to succeed despite the adversities that come with underrepresented identities (Brown, 2005). All 16 of the participants in this study discussed the role which mentors played to assist them in recognizing their presidential potential and accessing important professional development opportunities. The participants in this study were successful in their presidency search which further indicates that mentors are a necessary component of the leadership path to the presidency. Formalized mentoring programs create greater access to successful role models in the field to guide, advise, and advocate for emerging leaders. Women who hold or have held the Catholic presidency should aim to take on women mentees who are at various levels in their careers to broaden access points to mentors. Women in other top administrative positions are also well-positioned to take on women mentees to increase the number of mentors available. Additionally, men in the presidency and other top administrative

positions at Catholic institutions must also seek women mentees to provide greater access to mentors and to lessen the burden on women mentors. A formal mentoring program should be available at the institutional level, regional level with nearby Catholic institutions, and through a formal professional network such as the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. By creating avenues for mentorship at Catholic institutions, there can be a focus on the nuance of leading mission-driven institutions. Having a sense of relationship dynamics with local ordinaries and sponsoring organizations, preparation for mission advancement, and navigating a male-dominated landscape as women will prepare future presidents for this unique role.

Expand Shadowing and Catholic Specific Professional Development for Women

Many participants in this study discussed how key professional development opportunities such as shadowing a current president or the ability to have hands-on experience performing presidential-level duties (e.g. fundraising, board relations, etc.) led to increased motivation to pursue executive-level leadership. Further, research suggests that engaging with positive leadership experiences leads to a sense of validation and further encouragement for women to continue exploring next-level leadership (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Longman & Lafreniere, 2012). Currently, the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, a primary professional network for Catholic colleges and universities, offers a program for individuals who aspire to be Catholic university presidents as well as an institute for newly appointed Catholic university presidents. Expanding these programs and offering formal shadowing opportunities with intentional recruiting of women at Catholic colleges and universities, will provide additional avenues for emerging women leaders to consider pursuing a Catholic college presidency.

Grow Professional Development Programs Focused on Catholic Mission and Identity

As mentioned earlier, institutions are more likely to hire women religious or priests for presidency roles over lay people (Morey & Holtschneider, 2003). When a lay person is hired, they have been able to demonstrate a significant connection to the founding congregation or Catholic mission of the institution. With a steady decline in the number of women religious and priests equipped for the role of president, there is an opportunity to bolster lay leadership among Catholic higher education. Participants shared that their motivation to pursue a Catholic college presidency came from their own faith life as Catholics or out of a deep appreciation for Catholic higher education after having worked at a Catholic institution. Additional preparedness programs about mission-centered leadership, theology, and Catholic social teaching for lay people will help to increase qualified candidate pools. Further, participants discussed that they were motivated not only by the institutional mission but also by how the mission aligned with their personal values and beliefs. Professional development opportunities that allow staff at all levels to reflect on their leadership values will give younger staff the tools to pursue job opportunities in which they can experience values-based leadership. Grounding values and self-reflection in a Catholic mission-centered discussion creates an opportunity for the next generation of leaders to be inspired to continue within the field of Catholic higher education

Improve Promotion Practices for Women Faculty

The majority of college presidents, in particular women, still follow a traditional academic presidential pathway through the provost or chief academic officer position. Research has demonstrated that women faculty face significant barriers to academic promotion and tenure caused by gender stereotypes and societal expectations of women (Brown, 2005; Caton, 2007;

Seliger & Shames, 2009; Winkler, 2000). These barriers include delays in career for women to have children, negative evaluations of women's performance based on gender stereotypes, and lack of access to faculty mentors thereby causing a lack of access to professional development opportunities. Faculty promotions are key in achieving the role of provost, the most common previous position on the path to the presidency and therefore a significant area of concern for the presidential pipeline. An increased focus on ensuring that faculty policies and practices around tenure programs are equitable is imperative for women to achieve parity in academic administration.

Organizational Logic & Culture

Many of the barriers that the participants in this study successfully navigated were rooted in gendered organizational logic and culture. Catholic higher education as a gendered organization exhibits several processes that make it difficult, and sometimes impossible, for women to achieve the presidency. These processes exist within organizational logic or governing processes that promote one gender over another, and culture which includes latent systems prohibiting one gender from achieving access to both symbolic and tangible aspects of power. There are several ways in which Catholic higher education can mitigate how gender serves as a barrier to women's leadership at these institutions.

Remove Gendered Organizational Logic from Governing Documents

To increase the number of women in the Catholic college presidency all barriers, explicit and implicit must be removed. This begins with institutions that still require presidents to be priests. Governing documents must be amended to expand eligible candidate pools to include individuals who are not priests. This change alone will include women in basic presidential

search qualifications. Further, institutions that do consider women for the presidency should consider their policies and expectations regarding a president's spouse. Participants in this study shared several examples of how their spouse was also a component of their interview process for the role and even as part of their performance evaluations. In one case, a presidency became inaccessible to a participant due to her insistence that her husband not be required to relocate as a stipulation of her appointment. By amending documents to remove language and expectations that are deeply rooted in cultural and social gender norms, the presidency will become more accessible to women.

Encourage Informed Hiring Practices for Boards of Trustees

A primary responsibility for governing boards of universities is the hiring and supervision of a president (Bess & Dee, 2012). Participants in this study often talked about how their boards were intentional about hiring women presidents. Many times, this occurred during a crisis, giving merit to glass cliff research that women are often preferred leaders in times of crisis due to stereotypical feminine leadership qualities (Ryan et al., 2011). However, there is no need to wait until a crisis to consider a woman leader. Participants in this study, as well as dozens of other successful women presidents, have demonstrated that women have what it takes to successfully steward a Catholic university. Additionally, women presidents are still coming to the presidency primarily through provost and chief academic officer roles (Gagliardi et al., 2017). When hiring, boards should consider looking outside of the "traditional" pathways to cast a broader net for more women leaders. Increasing board training around equitable hiring is one strategy that can break down common gender stereotypes about women's leadership. When considering a presidential search, a board should partner with search firms that focus on diversity in leadership.

Additionally, considering board makeup is also important to ensure equitable hiring. Women are largely underrepresented on university boards of trustees (Scott, 2018). Current university presidents should seek to increase the representation of women on their boards to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions.

Continue Networking Groups for Women Presidents

Many participants in this study described the presidency as isolating and lonely. Several also shared that they have found a sense of connection and mentorship among other college presidents, usually women. The ability of women to maintain strong networks aids in lessening a feeling of isolation in the difficult job of a president (Longman & Lafreniere, 2012). Additionally, networks allow women to be connected and encourage mentorship among themselves and a future generation of women leaders (Longman & Lafreniere, 2012). Networking is particularly important within gendered organizations as typically women could be intentionally excluded or unintentionally unwelcomed in male-dominated and, in the case of Catholic higher education, priest-dominated spaces.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several areas of future research to address limitations within this study, as well as, additional themes that emerged from participant narratives. Future research on women's experiences as presidents of Catholic colleges and universities should address the following topic areas.

Experiences of Women Unsuccessful in Pursuing the Presidency

This study explored the experiences of women who serve or have recently served as a Catholic university and college presidents. Throughout the findings, it was clear that these women had navigated many challenges along their pathway to achieving a presidency within Catholic higher education. Further research should be conducted on women who attempt to pursue the presidency but are unsuccessful. This will provide additional context on other barriers to women achieving executive leadership within Catholic higher education and can provide additional implications for research and practice.

Experiences of Women with Intersecting Marginalized Identities

This study was limited in that it did not include consideration for other social identities, in particular race and sexual orientation. There are a limited number of Presidents of Color and even fewer Women of Color across higher education and within Catholic higher education (Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, 2018; Gagliardi et al., 2017). The Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities reported in 2018 that 92% of Catholic college presidents were white. The significantly low representation of People of Color within the presidency at Catholic institutions suggests that there are substantial barriers for this population of emerging leaders. Further, individuals who identify as a member of the LGBTQ community may also experience heightened barriers to leadership based on the narratives around sexual orientation within the Catholic Church. Accessing this population may be difficult, however, future research will provide impactful data to inform better policy and practices regarding the Catholic presidential experience. Issues of confidentiality may be an issue when studying a unique but small subset of presidents. However, additional research must be done to consider

ways in which the Catholic college presidency can be truly representative among women, People of Color, and other typically marginalized groups of people.

Catholic Institutions with Non-Catholic Presidents

Another small but growing group of Catholic college presidents are those that identify as non-Catholic. While *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, the Church document outlining expectations of Catholic higher education, states that a president should be able to fully express their commitment to the Catholic faith, it also states that the president does not have to be a Catholic (Pope John Paul II, 1990). Participants in this study suggested that the next wave of presidents could include a larger representation of non-Catholic presidents. If that is the case, further research may be helpful in understanding the impact, if any, of non-Catholic leadership on Catholic university mission and identity.

Work-Life Balance for Presidents at Catholic Institutions

Recently, the amount of time that a president remains in their position has decreased (Gagliardi et al., 2017). As the literature has suggested, the evolution of the college presidency has become more complex with increasingly demanding duties and expectations (Selingo et al., 2017; Thelin, 2019). Many of the participants in this study discussed how the role of president impacted their personal lives. Participants found that the "presidential mantle" required a significant amount of time and energy, making it difficult to be a present family member, and even take care of themselves outside of their roles. Additional research regarding the many demands on a college president, once they are in the role, may aid in addressing issues of burnout and college president retention. Further, participants in this study discussed how being a mother and wife impacted their experiences along their career path and within the role of

president in positive and negative ways. Research regarding family and the role of president, particularly for women college presidents, could help inform strategies to increase the number of laywomen within the role of Catholic college president. Finally, participants stated that the Catholic mission of the institution also served as a motivating purpose to stay in their role during particularly difficult challenges. Future research on the impact of mission on a president's work-life balance may also provide strategies to promote mission-driven leadership to lessen burnout and presidential retention.

Expand Research to Consider Comparisons Between Women's and Men's Experiences

An additional area of study to consider is the differences in experiences between men and women presidents at Catholic universities and colleges. This study's focus was on how women experience the Catholic college presidency. However, to draw more concrete conclusions regarding how women may be challenged in accessing the presidency in Catholic higher education, it would be helpful to also understand how men are motivated to pursue the presidency, encounter and navigate challenges, and experience the presidency in a Catholic higher education context. While there is much research on the male experiences of the college presidency, qualitative research on the Catholic college presidency significantly lags (Dunn et al., 2014).

Utilizing a Feminist Theoretical Framework Lens

This study sought to explore the stories of women presidents at Catholic universities with the assumption that the culture of a gendered organization influenced their leadership experiences. While this study provided a discussion on the ways in which the participants experienced various gendered processes, there is still further opportunity for critical discourse

around the systemic barriers for women leaders in Catholic higher education. Utilizing a feminist critical theory as a theoretical framework for this study will allow for data to be analyzed to provide a greater understanding of how systems, processes, and policies still exist and create adversity for women's leadership (Ropers-Huilman & Winters, 2011).

Explore The Experience of Women Catholic College Presidents Through Narrative Studies

This study was designed to collect data to understand the experiences of participants whom all experienced the phenomenon of being a woman president at Catholic institutions. The data provided findings that explored how women were drawn to the role of president, the challenges that were presented along their leadership journeys, and how their experiences were impacted by a gendered organizational culture. However, there is an opportunity to dig deeper into the narratives of participants to better understand how their life experiences may have led them to leadership, specifically higher education leadership. Research suggests that the more women are exposed to women leaders, for example through an all-women's high school or college experience, the more likely they are to dismiss harmful gender stereotypes around women's leadership (Dasgupta & Asgari, 2004). Additionally, narrative studies may provide data regarding turning points within a participant's life (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Findings related to the life experiences of leaders provide a potential timeline for when professional development opportunities or leadership experiences may be most impactful for an aspiring leader's motivation and drive along the path to the presidency.

Women Catholic college presidents are a unique subset of a relatively exclusive leadership group. The experiences of the women who participated in this study shed light on the important need to increase the representation of women in the Catholic college presidency.

Additionally, the findings and discussion of this study provide strategies for improving access as well as improving leadership experiences for women leaders within gendered organizations. This study was limited in its ability to provide critical analysis with respect to upholding participant confidentiality. There are several ways that this research could be expanded with more flexibility in participant anonymity. For example, considering the intersection of other social identities of women presidents (e.g., race, sexual orientation, age). Further, participants alluded to leadership experiences being influenced by the type of Catholic institution one may lead (e.g., all-women, co-educational), the location of the university, and the associated sponsoring organization and dioceses.

Historically, women have been leading small Catholic institutions however, today, we see more women leading large, formerly all-male, Catholic institutions. There is much to uncover about the differences in their experiences compared to women who are leading formerly all-women's institutions. While I generalized information pertaining to specific institutional demographics to deidentify participants, further research is warranted to analyze the ways in which institutional history and culture can influence the leadership experiences of women at Catholic colleges and universities.

Finally, there was the challenge of recruiting participants who hold significant responsibilities. Through strategic recruitment methods, the sample size for this study, at this time, appears to be one of the largest qualitative studies of women presidents and certainly within the context of Catholic higher education. However, more time with participants, beyond 60 minutes, would have allowed for opportunities for follow-up questions to provide ample data for analysis. Despite limitations, this study provided significant findings to help understand the

experiences of women presidents within Catholic higher education. More importantly, this study also provided critical recommendations to begin to address increasing women's representation and success within the Catholic college presidency.

Conclusion

Women have played an important role in the history of Catholic higher education but hold only a third of the current presidential positions. The literature suggests that there are many gender-based barriers making it difficult for women to achieve executive-level leadership within higher education (Diehl, 2014). Further, gendered organizations that promote authority for one gender over another, present additional barriers for women to access leadership roles. Higher education's long history of male leadership has, in many ways, created an environment today that still inherently prefers male leadership. Catholic higher education, as it is sponsored by the Catholic Church, a patriarchy, is also a gendered organization with various processes that make it difficult, and in some cases, impossible for women to rise to the top. This study focused on the experiences of 16 women presidents of Catholic colleges and universities. The findings of this study suggest that mentorship, professional development, and a personal alignment with an institutional mission are critical for women to be motivated to pursue the presidency. Further, findings suggest that women continue to face barriers rooted in cultural and social gender norms that may impede their success. Despite adversity, the participants in this study have demonstrated their ability to be extraordinary leaders who, with a focus on social justice, were able to revitalize struggling institutions, provide a new image of leadership for notable institutions, and always maintain a priority on delivering a mission-centered education for

students. As the demographic makeup of the presidency continues to evolve more women must be entrusted with the care and stewardship of these great institutions.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
1 8 5 6

06/24/2022

Nicole Giglia
Seton Hall University

Re: Study ID# 2022-335

Dear Nicole,

The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved your research proposal entitled "The Stained Glass Ceiling: Women College Presidents in a Catholic Higher Education Context" as resubmitted. This memo serves as official notice of the aforementioned study's approval as exempt. Enclosed for your records are the stamped original Consent Form and recruitment flyer. You can make copies of these forms for your use.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol, informed consent form or study team must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

You will receive a communication from the Institutional Review Board at least 1 month prior to your expiration date requesting that you submit an Annual Progress Report to keep the study active, or a Final Review of Human Subjects Research form to close the study. In all future correspondence with the Institutional Review Board, please reference the ID# listed above.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mara C. Podvey, PhD, OTR
Associate Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Phyllis Hansell, EdD, RN, DNAP, FAAN
Professor
Co-Chair, Institutional Review Board

Office of the Institutional Review Board
Presidents Hall · 400 South Orange Avenue · South Orange, New Jersey 07079 · Tel: 973.275.4654 · Fax 973.275.2978 ·
www.shu.edu

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Title of Research Study: The Stained Glass Ceiling: Women College Presidents in a Catholic Higher Education Context

Principal Investigator: Nicole Giglia, Ph.D. Student

Department Affiliation: Department of Education, Leadership, Management, and Policy, Seton Hall University

Sponsor: This research is supported by the Department of Education, Leadership, Management, and Policy in the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University.

Brief summary about this research study:
The following summary of this research study is to help you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study. You have the right to ask questions at any time.

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of women who are presidents at Catholic colleges and universities.

You will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute recorded interview conducted via Zoom or by telephone.

We expect that you will be in this research study for the duration of your interview.

The primary risk of participation is minimal. You will be asked questions regarding your personal experiences. Your participation is optional, and you may withdraw or choose not to answer a question at any time. All data collected will be treated confidentially and will be deidentified.

The main benefit of participation is contributing your experience to the field of study on women's leadership.

Purpose of the research study:
You are being asked to take part in this research study because you (1) self-identify as a woman, and (2) currently or have recently, within the last 10 years, served as a college president at a Catholic institution in the United States.

Your participation in this research study is expected to be for one 45-60 minute recorded virtual interview conducted via Zoom or by telephone.

You will be one of 8-25 people who are expected to participate in this research study.

What you will be asked to do:
Your participation in this research study will include:

A one-on-one 45 – 60 minute recorded interview conducted via Zoom or telephone call with the researcher. Interviews will be scheduled to accommodate your schedule. During this interview you will be asked about your leadership experiences on your pathway to and within the role of college president. Questions may include, but will not be limited to:

- What has motivated you to become a college president?
- How would you describe your leadership style?

- What accomplishment as a president are you most proud of?
- How does the Catholicity of your institution intertwine with your role as president?
- What has your experience been like building relationships with various stakeholders?

Following the interview, you will also be given the opportunity to review the interview transcript and provide feedback via email.

Your rights to participate, say no or withdraw:
Participation in research is voluntary. You can decide to participate or not to participate. You can choose to participate in the research study now and then decide to leave the research at any time. Your choice will not be held against you.

The person in charge of the research study can remove you from the research study without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include missing study visits or non-compliance with the study procedures.

Potential benefits:

There may be no direct benefit to you from this study. You may obtain personal satisfaction from knowing that you are participating in a project that contributes to new information.

Potential risks:

The risks associated with this study are minimal in nature. Your participation in this research may include sharing confidential information or discussing potentially sensitive situations. You will be asked to discuss your experiences via interviews, during which you may reveal identifying information including the names of people, institutions, or associations that you affiliate with. You have the option to not answer specific questions. All data will be treated confidentially, with identifying information redacted or generalized in saved documents. Following the interview, you will have the opportunity to review the transcript.

Confidentiality and privacy:

Efforts will be made to limit the use or disclosure of your personal information. This information may include the research study documents or other source documents used for the purpose of conducting the study. These documents may include interview transcripts. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that oversee research safety may inspect and copy your information. This includes the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board who oversees the safe and ethical conduct of research at this institution.

The interview for this study may be conducted via Zoom. Terms of service addressing confidentiality may be removed at: https://explore.zoom.us/en/trust/security/.

Upon receiving interview data, any possible identifiers will be deleted by the investigator. You will be identified only by a unique pseudonym. Your email address, which may be used to contact you to schedule a study visit will be stored separately from your interview data. All information will be kept on a password protected computer only accessible by the researcher. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used.

Data sharing:
Data collected from this study will not be shared with anyone outside of the study team.

Informed Consent Form

Cost and compensation:

You will not be responsible for any of the costs or expenses associated with your participation in this study.

There is no payment for your time to participate in this study.

Conflict of interest disclosure:

The principal investigator and members of the study team have no financial conflicts of interest to report.

Contact information:

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this research project, you can contact the principal investigator Nicole Giglia at nicole.giglia@shu.edu, or Dr. Katie Smith at katie.smith@shu.edu or the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board ("IRB") at (973) 761-9334 or irb@shu.edu.

Consent for Recording

Audio and/or video recordings will be performed as part of the research study. Please indicate your permission to participate in these activities by placing your initials next to each activity.

I agree	I disagree	
_____	_____	The researcher may record my audio and/or video interview. I understand this is done to help with data collection and analysis. The researcher will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the study team.

I hereby consent to participate in this research study.

Signature of participant	Date
Printed name of participant	
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date
Printed name of person obtaining consent	

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Process: Participants in this research study will engage in a semi-structured, open-ended, interview that will last approximately 45-60 minutes. A set of pre-determined questions will guide the interview. The interview questions are designed to create space for participants to share rich narrative details about their experiences as women in Catholic higher education leadership which may provide opportunity for the researcher to use follow-up questions.

Consent Process: The researcher will email potential study subjects requesting their voluntary participation in this study. Once participants indicate their interest, they will be provided the Informed Consent Form to review, sign, and return. At the start of the interview, I will once again confirm verbal consent for participation in the recorded interview.

Interview Session Process: After a confirmation of verbal consent, the researcher will begin the recording and commence the interview.

Interview Script: "Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview today. My name is Nicole Giglia and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Leadership, Management, and Policy program at Seton Hall University. You have been selected to participate in this study as a woman who is (or has been) a president of a Catholic institution.

In order to ensure accuracy in my analysis of our conversation today, I will be recording this interview. Recordings will be deleted at the end of this dissertation process. If at any time you wish for me to stop recording, please let me know. The information provided today will be used for the purposes of this study including any relevant publications or presentations as part of this research process. All identifying information will remain confidential including your name, institution name, and any additional identifying characteristics. You will also be given the opportunity to review the interview transcript following our meeting today. Do you have any questions before we begin?"

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions	Research Question Relevance
What does it mean to you to be a president at a Catholic institution? (edit depending on participant and current role/retired) Tell me about your motivation to become a college president. - Follow-up question: What role did mentors play if any? - Follow-up question: Was there a sense of calling or duty? What were some critical experiences that prepared	1) What motivates women on their pathway to becoming a Catholic college president? *Gain an understanding of motivation & factors that contribute to a woman's career path to becoming a Catholic college president. What themes emerge regarding a calling, mentorship, networking, leadership efficacy, etc…?*

you or opened the door for you to be in this role? What has been a highlight of your professional journey so far?	
Is there a piece of advice you received on your journey that you felt was particularly helpful? Was there ever a time you questioned becoming a college president? How did you navigate that? How would you describe your leadership style? What accomplishment as a president are you most proud of? In what ways has your leadership been challenged, if at all, in the presidency role? By whom? How did you navigate those moments?	2) In what ways, if at all, do women experience challenge on their path to the presidency and within the role? How do they navigate those resistances? *Explore experiences of barriers and challenges for women leaders on their journey to the presidency and within the role. What themes emerge regarding gender barriers, leadership efficacy, gendered organizations, and relationships?*
How would you describe the experience of being hired/recruited/selected for this role? Have you been compared to your predecessor? In what ways? What has that been like? What has your experience been like building relationships with your board? Other stakeholders? What has your experience been working with the local bishop? Sponsoring religious community? What are the most profoundly Catholic parts of the culture at your institution? How does the Catholicity of the institution intertwine with your role as president?	3) In what ways, if at all, does the organizational culture of a Catholic institution impact the leadership experiences of women presidents? *Understanding the ways in which the culture of a Catholic institution/gendered organization influences the leadership experiences of women presidents. Are the themes of a gendered organization present in their experience?*

How do you perceive the role of being a Catholic college president as different from being president at a non-Catholic institution?	
What advice would you give to women who aspire to be in your role? If you could go back, is there anything you would change about your journey? Those are all the questions I had for you but before we close do you have any final thoughts or questions for me?	Wrap-Up *Opportunity for last-minute thoughts or questions.*