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# PERCEPTIONS OF POWER IN A PREDOMINANTLY FEMALE ENVIRONMENT: A CASE STUDY APPROACH

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PERCEPTIONS OF POWER IN A PREDOMINANTLY FEMALE ENVIRONMENT:

A CASE STUDY APPROACH

by

Virginia Russell Curley

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Educational Studies

Under the Supervision of Professor Marilyn L. Grady

Lincoln, Nebraska

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PERCEPTIONS OF POWER AT A PREDOMINANTLY FEMALE INSTITUTION:

A CASE STUDY APPROACH

Virginia Russell Curley

University of Nebraska, 2008

Adviser: Marilyn L. Grady

The lived experience of women and men in terms of how they perceived power within their predominantly-female organization was the focus of this qualitative study. The case study explored the multi-dimensional reality of power as individuals in the same organization experienced it.

The research question that guided the study was: How do men and women in a predominantly-female organization describe their perceptions of power? Other research questions included how power was defined and described by individuals when their gender was dominant or in the minority.

The case study methodology included interviews with 25 faculty, staff and administrators at a Midwestern college focused on the education of women. The core findings of the study were analyzed based on the Interactional Framework of Leadership Development that considers the relationship between the leader, the followers, and the situation when assessing how leadership and power are exercised (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy, 2006).

The primary themes revealed that 1) the mission of the institution to educate women played a significant role in participants' descriptions of a communal form of power; 2) gender was perceived in three distinct ways; 3) the female president's exercise of power contradicted the perception of communal leadership; and 4) the president's agentic style was the determining factor in how power was experienced.

Gender was described by participants as 1) not a factor in decision-making; 2) a factor that may have been attributed to the individual's personality rather than gender; or 3) a determining factor that distinguished men's and women's leadership. In the final case, women attributed positive, communal characteristics to female leadership and hierarchical, agentic characteristics to male leadership.

## DEDICATION

I owe much to my family of origin and those who have joined us along the way. Our navigation of group phenomena has been a source of enlightenment. To my mother, Anne Caldwell Russell, for her very early modeling of what it means to be a woman of wisdom, strength, and faith. To my second mom, Elaine Hess Russell, whose embodiment of womanhood has encouraged me to embrace the feminine in its weaving of strength and gentleness. To my father, Edmund Paul Russell, Jr. for teaching me to change the oil *and* follow the man's lead in dancing. I am so fortunate to have your steady presence in my life. My parents' relationships have been examples of how power shared is power multiplied; how gender need not be a limiting category; and, how encouraging others to spread their wings can reinforce the depths of their roots.

My inspiration to complete this endeavor came from many sources, not the least of which were my children, Adelaide, Julianna, and Jacob. They encouraged me to continue when the price to be paid was their time with me. They have influenced my work more than they know. My husband Mark has been a steady companion and support. We have journeyed many trails together and our partnership has strengthened my conviction that men and women *can* find new ways to share in the experiences of power. I rejoice in our life together; know this accomplishment is shared.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Long ago, a woman welcomed me into this endeavor and she has been present since.

Thank you to Dr. Marilyn Grady for believing in me. She has modeled the role of advisor and educator: sometimes encouraging me to keep moving forward, sometimes saying not a word. I cannot imagine the road to this point without her guidance and support.

I would also like to thank my colleagues and friends for reading drafts, listening to my findings and watching out for my family when I was immersed in this study. My colleagues at Nebraska Methodist College have supported this process in ways I cannot repay. My running partners have lifted my spirits and celebrated milestones. My dear friend Tressa Hoover has been both the voice of reason (I cannot stay awake for days on end), and the voice of hope. Finally, I have been deeply influenced by the circle of women and men who have taught me along the way to pay attention, ask questions, and listen intently.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Purpose and Problem Statement

Literature on power in organizations is plentiful. Researchers have explored power through the lenses of multiple disciplines (e.g. psychology, sociology, social psychology, political science, anthropology, management, gender studies). Much of this research has indicated a variance between how women and men both exercise power and respond to the power of others (Aguinis & Henle, 2001; Bryans & Mavin, 2003; Carli, 1999; Eagly & Carli, 2003; Karakowsky, McBey & Miller, 2004; Madden, 2005; Shields, 2005).

However there is very little research that examines power in the context of an organization that is predominantly female. Studies related to power are frequently theoretical in nature; subjects are provided with hypothetical situations with defined variables and asked to respond to the power dynamics (Keshet, Kark, Pomerantz-Zorin, Koslowsky & Schwarzwald, 2006; Ledet & Henley, 2000; Powers & Reiser, 2005; Schmidmast, Hall & Ickes, 2006). This method is incomplete for two reasons: 1) the constructed environment simplifies power to a presumed set of shared definitions and interpretations, 2) few organizations exist in perfect numeric balance between men and women. Related to the first issue, postmodernist thought maintains that all reality is constructed in a context (Madden, 2005). If that be so, one cannot assume that the response of research participants in a laboratory setting is equivalent to how those same participants would respond in a natural setting.

Related to the second issue, many U.S. businesses are considered “skewed” (Kanter, 1977, p. 208) in terms of gender. Kanter defined the skewed organizations as those with a disproportionate number of one “type” to the point that one group becomes “dominant” and the other “token” (Kanter, 1977, p. 208) with proportions somewhere near 85:15. This imbalance becomes a significant factor when exploring issues of power.

This qualitative study explored the lived experience of women and men in terms of how they perceived power within their organization. Immersed in the qualitative philosophy that “reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6), this study investigated the multi-dimensional reality of power as individuals in the same organization experienced it.

### Context/Background

A survey of research on power as it relates to gender garners predominantly quantitative studies. Those that explore organizational power focus on measuring levels of power or influence, or focus on the identification of an attribution of power to one group or another (Bugental & Lewis, 1999; Carli & Eagly, 2001; Kanter, 1977; Miller & Karakowsky, 2005; Powell & Graves, 2003; Sagrestano, 1992), rather than focus on exploring how power is perceived. The quantitative approach limits the understanding of power to the interpretation of the researcher, as an assumption is made that subject and researcher employ the same definition of power. For the most part, studies that document perceptions of power are done in clinical settings that artificially construct relationships and select an equal number of men and women as participants. (Aguinis & Henle, 2001; Vescio, Snyder & Butz, 2003). This study addressed some of the gaps in this research by

engaging participants in a conversation about *how* they perceived the power in their organization.

### Research Questions

The research question that guided this study was:

How do men and women in a female-intense organization describe their perceptions of power?

“Female-intense” was defined as an organization with 2/3 or more women in part-time and full-time employment. This study was designed to explore power as a concept when it was removed from an environment favorable to men. In other words, because most studies are conducted in environments where men are in the majority or equal numbers, this study was designed to explore if power is experienced differently when women are in the majority.

Other research questions that focused this study were:

1. How do men and women define power?
2. How do men and women interpret the exercise of power in a female-intense organization?
3. How do individuals describe their experiences of power in an organization when their gender is dominant?
4. How do individuals describe their experiences of power in an organization when their gender is in the minority?
5. How do women with legitimate power describe their power?

## Method

The quantitative studies of power in organizations have explored the degree of influence based on gender (Aguinis & Henle, 2001; Carli, 1999; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). In each case, power has been defined by the researcher and explored as a static construct that could be measured or quantified. It is clear that one's perception of power is influenced by sociological, psychological and political influences, as well as gender, previous experience, and situational factors (Hatch, 2002; Madden, 2005). These factors are best understood through in-depth, probing interviews that allow the individual to give voice to the nuances of individual experience.

Qualitative research draws from the fertile ground of an individual's experience in a natural setting (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1992; Morse & Richards, 2002; Van Manen, 1990). If we acknowledge the dynamic of an individual's past experience influencing one's present actions, those actions must be understood in context. As Hatch (2002) suggests, the typical quantitative study sterilizes the environment to such a degree that the results are based on "artificial contexts" (p. 7). Qualitative research acknowledges multiple perspectives and relies upon the researcher's on-going interpretation in an inductive, iterative process of understanding (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1992; Morse & Richards, 2002). To explore perceptions of power, it is essential for the researcher to engage in the process to seek understanding—without a preconception of what one would find (Hatch, 2002).

A constructivist approach to qualitative research presumes the researcher is not objective. Qualitative researchers directly acknowledge the influence of their own lived experience and how this experience may shade their perceptions in the study (Hatch,



2002; Merriam, 1992; Morse & Richards, 2002). It was impossible for me to explore men's and women's perceptions of power without comparing these perceptions to my own experiences. Qualitative research allows the researcher to bracket observations that do not belong to the informant, but influence the researcher's perspective. This process acknowledges the lived experience of the researcher in addition to the informant. The potential danger in this, however, is that I may have been prone to attribute *any* difference to gender.

Powell and Graves (2003) distinguish between *alpha bias* and *beta bias* when conducting any type of research that involves just two domains. *Alpha bias* "exaggerate(s) sex differences. *Beta bias* consists of the tendency to minimize or ignore sex differences" (2003, p. 6). Eliminating these biases is nearly impossible. It is the researcher's obligation, however, to engage in a reflexive process of bracketing personal experiences while constructing with the informants an evolving understanding of the phenomenon in question (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998).

The desire to deeply understand the lived experience of another flows directly from my philosophical perspective and is best researched through the case study tradition. If the understanding of power is to move beyond the one-dimensional interpretation of responses on survey instruments or context-free actions observed in laboratory settings, the researcher must move into the lived experience of the informants. Qualitative research does not presume that there is just one lived experience, but multiple experiences (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1992) that are constructed. By allowing for these variables, the case study "results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). The case study fully accepts the complexity of the phenomenon

under study and seeks not merely to document its existence, but to engage in a dialogue around the phenomenon. Researcher and informant are both transformed in this process of discovery.

Approaching the question from a case study perspective engaged the question in a conversation that recognized the temporal nature of the issue itself. “Power” is not a static construct that can be understood without context. And even within the same context, individuals’ perceptions of power are different. The case study approach supports the multiple realities of this exploration within a bounded system. A qualitative approach allowed me to acknowledge my biases while working with participants to explore power through their eyes.

### Definition of Terms

Much of what has been written about power begins with an assumption that there is agreement on the definition of power (Madden, 2005; Nyberg, 1981). Frequently this definition relies upon negative descriptors to define how power is used and for what purposes, especially as the term is juxtaposed against the term “influence” (Vianello, 2004). Power is often associated with coercion and threat, whereas influence is depicted as the neutral or even positive result of relationships. “One person has *influence* over another within a given scope to the extent that the first, without resorting to either a tacit or an overt threat of severe deprivations, causes the second to change his course of action” (Bachrach & Baratz, 1970, p. 30). This distinction is important to the study because it clarifies the use of power in terms of the interaction between two agents and a perceived or real threat.

The classic definitions of power refer to power as the *capacity* to effect change, or, as French and Raven (1992) defined it, “potential influence” (p. 4). Bachrach and Baratz (1970) frame power in terms of three components:

(a) there is a conflict over values or course of action between A and B; (b) B complies with A’s wishes; and (c) B does so because he is fearful that A will deprive him of a value or values which he regards more highly than those which would have been achieved by noncompliance. (p. 24)

Ragins and Sundstrom’s (1989) definition of power acknowledges the multifaceted dimensions through which power may be realized: “influence by one person over others, stemming from a position in an organization, from an interpersonal relationship, or from an individual characteristic” (p. 51). Because this study sought to understand how participants defined and experienced power, I did not share a formal definition of power or influence with participants.

The other terms that must be defined are sex and gender. “Sex” is generally accepted to be the term for the biological differences attributed to individuals. “Gender,” on the other hand, acknowledges the tremendous influence of one’s social environment on how one understands one’s sex and the social roles attributed to that sex (Eagly, 1984; Goodwin & Fiske, 2001). This study focused on gender.

The final area for definition is the organizational environment. Kanter (1977) defines any organization that has a disproportionate split (approximately 85:15) between any two groups (e.g. based on gender, race, social class) as “skewed” (p.208). In skewed organizations, individuals in the numerically dominant group are called “dominants” and those in the other group are considered “tokens” (Kanter, 1977, p. 208). Tokens are

challenged by the dominant group's assumption that each token somehow represents the thoughts, values, beliefs of each member of their "group" (Kanter, 1977). In this study, men served as tokens in a female-skewed organization. Because the term "skewed" seemed offensive, I chose the term, "female-intense" in my original research protocol and questions to describe an environment with a preponderance of women (two-thirds or more). Based on participant reaction to this term, I have adapted the term again to remove the implication of hyperactivity or emotional focus by identifying organizations as "predominantly female."

#### Delimitations and Limitations

The cultural environment of a study has a significant, though often ignored, impact on the interpretation of the results. One dimension of a society that impacts individuals' perceptions is the *masculinity vs. femininity* scale depicted by Hofstede (1991). These terms are applied to nations based on social norms. Masculine countries tend to focus on earnings, recognition, advancement and challenge. Feminine countries focus on good working relationships with one's manager, cooperation, living in a desirable area, and having job security (Hofstede, 1991). According to Hofstede's work, the United States is more feminine than some countries but still predominantly masculine. Although the insights gained from this study have relevance to other organizations, there are limits to how far the results can be extended, partly due to the delimiting factor of cultural constructs within the United States, and specifically in the Midwest.

In addition to the masculinity-femininity scale was the consideration of power and authority. Hofstede's (1991) *power distance* construct recognizes the status of leaders and managers changes depending on the culture. Subordinates in the United States expect to exert some influence on their supervisors; this is a weak power distance culture. This dimension was important to consider in this study because it established that "theoretically" one individual can expect to influence another individual, regardless of social status. A delimiting factor in this study, however, was that some of the participants held positions of authority that gave them the ability to make decisions that affected others (thus more *positional* power). This was impossible to mitigate. One benefit to a qualitative study, however, was that the individuals were invited to give voice to their experiences, whether from a position of formal power or not.

The selection of a case study approach as the method for this study was a limiting factor. Qualitative research positions "the researcher [as] the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 1998, p. 7). The interpretation of that data relied upon understanding others' experiences to the degree one *can* understand such experiences in a narrative format. One's biases, though bracketed and balanced by member checking and triangulation, could influence how data were interpreted. The selection of some individuals over other individuals to interview held inherent problems related to limitations as well. Due to the skewed nature of the number of men available to interview versus women, I relied upon the men to respond to the interview request at a higher rate than the women. This placed a different type of pressure on both me as the researcher and the interviewee as the co-researcher to accurately capture the individual's experience.

### Significance of the Study

Although this study was situated in a women's college in the Midwest, there are many organizations that operate in gender-skewed environments. Elementary schools, high schools, religious organizations, hospitals, social service agencies, and libraries are just a few examples of predominantly female institutions. Research indicates that men in female-dominated fields ascend to positions of power more quickly and in greater proportion than women do (Williams, cited in Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women are hiring men because they identify something that they correlate with strong leadership skills. Although many studies have been conducted on how men and women describe leadership, there has not been enough research to understand the dynamics of a specific work environment when women outnumber men.

By gaining an understanding of how men and women view power in these organizations, an understanding might develop as to how this translates in ongoing work environments led by women. As of 2007, only 2% of *Fortune* 500 companies were led by female CEOs. Though 40% had women at the middle-management level, only 6% saw those women rise to the top level of management (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Although there are numerous theories of why women fail to lead organizations in the same proportion as men, this study expands leadership literature by eliciting rich, thick descriptions of how men and women described their experiences in a predominantly female organization. Beyond leadership literature, this study contributes to the existing research in women's studies, organizational development, and psychology.

## Researcher's Assumptions

I began research on power as a critical feminist, determined to expose the imbalance of power in organizations based on gender. As I read the literature on power and research methods, my intent shifted. Research in leadership has documented the shifting place of women in organizations. Masculine traits that were considered the gold standard for effective leadership have expanded to include more feminine traits. Whether by increased consciousness or sheer numbers, women's influence has grown in organizations, though still not equal to men in a global or economic sense. I fully acknowledge the continued imbalance of power in organizations and discrimination that limits women's influence. I desire a place at the boardroom table for women that is not out of "obligation," but that becomes a natural part of organizational culture.

For the purpose of this study, I bracketed these desires to understand the phenomenon of power from each individual's perspective within the confines of my study's bounded system. By studying an organization where women are in the majority, I made an assumption that a feminine style of leadership would dominate. My goal was to listen intently to how the men and women in this organization described their experiences so I might gain a more nuanced understanding of power as it was lived in a predominantly female organization.

My assumption was that the men and women who participated in this study would be honest with me, an outsider. Though I documented my intention to maintain confidentiality and employed ethical standards of research, I was an unknown entity for participants. I had to find the balance between accepting what participants shared at face value and probing for deeper meanings or hidden truths. This process could have been

misinterpreted by participants as prying. My hope was that by developing a collaborative communication pattern, participants understood their role as co-creators of the knowledge gained through this study.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Historical Context

This study is firmly planted in the context of the 2008 presidential primary season. For the first time in history there are two viable presidential candidates who represent “the other” in politics: Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) and Senator Barack Obama (D-IL). Although the outcome is not known at this time, the historical context is noteworthy. This study was not designed to examine the political landscape, but the presidential race has exposed the fact that sexism and racism persist in American society, forty-plus years after the Civil Rights movement and eighty-plus years after women gained the right to vote. It also personifies the current feminist generation, termed “third- wave feminism.” A brief history of American feminism will expose how fitting it is that I offer the context of this study in present-day American politics.

#### *Waves of Feminism*

The women’s movement in America was not limited to the 1920s suffrage movement nor the 1960s civil rights era. Concern for equal rights has been present since Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792 (Ruth, 2001). Each generation has sought equal participation in a male-dominated American culture.

The first wave of feminism is considered to have started in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, with the first women’s rights convention (Harlan, 1998). Primarily focused on women’s ability to vote, this wave is said to have ended in 1920 when the Nineteenth

Amendment was passed. Forty years later, Betty Friedan (1963) wrote her expose, *The Feminine Mystique*, in which she revealed that her classmates from Smith College were not experiencing the gifts of womanhood as wives and mothers, but the frustrations of wondering “Is this all?” (Friedan, 2001, p. 15). Thus was launched the second wave of feminism.

1963 – *Time Magazine* had three women on the front cover over the course of 52 issues: Nichole Alphanth, the French Ambassador’s wife was featured as one of Washington D.C.’s great hostesses; South Vietnam’s Mme. Ngo Dinh Nhu who functioned as the First Lady for her unmarried brother-in-law; and an unnamed actress who shared the cover with a male actor behind the subtitle, “Lovers in Polish Film.”

1973 – *Time Magazine* published five of 53 covers with women. Three covers featured women who are “behind their men”: Betty Ford with her husband, President Gerald Ford; Rose Mary Woods, secretary to Richard Nixon and implicated in erasing a section of Watergate tape; and a cover featuring P.O.W. families. Three female entertainers were also featured: Marilyn Monroe and one cover with four music stars that included Roberta Flack and Carole King.

Figure 2.1 *A Time Capsule from the 1960s and 1970s*

Although there has been much critique of Friedan’s work as that written from a middle-class, white perspective (hooks, 2000), it is clear that the book created a space for women to share their discontent in the cultural milieu. The second half of the last century found women organizing in women’s liberation groups, fighting for access to jobs,

reproductive rights, and education, and challenging the assumption that a woman's place was exclusively in the home. This wave persisted until the 1980's when women began to experience, as Susan Faludi (1991) titled her book, a *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women*. The successes of women in the job market and higher education, largely a consequence of the early second-wave feminist accomplishments, began to be overshadowed by a focus on what was presumed to be the negative consequence of more women working: growing infertility, female poverty after divorce, and a "man shortage" for those who postponed marriage (Faludi, 1991). The heightened cultural attention to these concerns essentially ended the second wave of feminism.

1983 –Seven of 52 *Time* editions included women. These ranged from political figures (Margaret Thatcher) and pop culture icons (Princess Diana) to one issue that covered "private violence" with a pencil drawing cover of a woman and baby.

1993 – A significant shift is noted in cover stories and images that more frequently address issues inclusive of women. From anonymous/symbolic portrayals of women as angels and immigrants, to political figures such as Janet Reno, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Zoe Baird (Clinton's first nominee for attorney general), to the coverage of social concerns such as RU 486 (The Morning After Pill), "Sex for Sale," "Kids, Sex & Values," and fighting back from spousal abuse. This year is a clear demarcation from previous years due to the serious nature of the coverage of women and women's issues.

Figure 2.2 A *Time* Capsule from the 1980s and 1990s

It is more difficult to name a beginning point to the third wave of feminism for its beginning overlapped with the second wave's end. Although various strands developed in the mid-to-late 1990's, all converged on a few common themes: a broader, global focus on women's rights; a movement more inclusive of diverse voices, including race and an examination of gender as a social construction; a resistance to the victim stance and movement toward the exploration of oppression; and an openness to the diversity of how women define womanhood (Harlan, 1998; hooks, 2000; Wood, 2007). These themes of third-wave feminism ring true in this presidential primary season. Although *First Lady* Hillary Rodham Clinton spoke at the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Congress on Women in Beijing, China, *Senator* Hillary Rodham Clinton continues her focus on "women's rights as human rights" (Hillary Clinton for President, 2008) in her presidential bid.

2003 – Approximately nine of the 54 issues featured women. Of note is the fact that only two of the issues featured the particular women discussed in articles: "The Real Story of Jessica Lynch" and "Hillary: In Her Own Words." The other covers featured anonymous women to represent articles on diabetes, eating smarter, meditation, SARS, women and heart disease, "When Mom Goes to War," and how your mind can heal your body. Based on covers alone, the 1993 issues appeared to address more substantive social concerns.

Figure 2.3 *A Time Capsule from 2003*

What marks this Democratic presidential primary as especially unique, however, is the reality that those from previously unrepresented groups, women and people of

color, now witness two candidates who “look” like them. And yet hints of racism and sexism remain. The November 19, 2007, cover of *Time* featured Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton with the headline, “What Hillary Believes: And Why She Thinks She’ll Win.” Three weeks later, on December 10, 2007, Senator Barack Obama was featured on the cover of *Time* with his arms crossed and the confident headline, “The Contender.” Headlines and visual cues reflected skepticism of Senator Clinton’s potential success. One week later, talk show host Rush Limbaugh asked listeners, “Will this country want to actually watch a woman get older before their eyes on a daily basis?” (The Rush Limbaugh Show, December 19, 2007). Although this comment generated discussion, it reveals the relevance of this very study on perceptions of power. How do men and women experience power in their own lives? How do women and men perceive the power exhibited in their organization?

#### Literature to Explore

There are four bodies of literature to explore when considering the perception of power in organizations: the evolution of leadership theory to include women; gender stereotyping as it relates to women in leadership; women’s entry in the world of work; and the dynamics of power. All four of these areas have undergone significant transformations in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries that impact how research is constructed and interpreted. Understanding the evolving interplay among these four constructs (leadership, gender, work and power) is critical.

### *Evolution of Leadership Theory*

The 20<sup>th</sup> century's focus on leadership primarily developed through the needs of the Industrial Revolution to provide order and structure to large work environments. Prior to the rise of industry, the United States' economic base was dependent upon agriculture and artisans, independent pursuits that allowed for greater individuation. With the rise of industry, early theorists began to identify the traits possessed by political and social leaders, essentially restricted to men in power. Though these theories were refuted by the mid-1900's, the term "Great Man" theories was indicative of the exclusive attribution of leadership to men (Northouse, 2001).

With the birth of the industrial age came the need to study organizations and construct theories of *management*. Management theory focused primarily on production and how to create consistent, cost-effective systems (Kotter, 1990). Employees were viewed as expense units – the pay required to maintain an employee was weighed against what that "unit" could produce in terms of profit. Theorists focused on how to maintain control of employees, how to standardize their actions, and assumed that employees needed someone to watch over them. Management theories placed their emphasis on the skills of the manager, and assumed very little about the influence of the worker.

Drucker, the father of modern management theory, proposed a radically new way to view employees: as *human capital*, an asset not a liability to the company (Feder, 2005). From this new proposition, numerous theories were developed that explored the relationship between leaders and followers as they interacted in situations that demanded a variety of skills (e.g. Fiedler's Contingency Theory, Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership, Path-Goal theory). Although most of these theories placed a premium on the

role of the leader in meeting *organizational goals*, Burns' pioneering text *Leadership* (1978) coined the term *transformational leadership* to represent a new focus on leaders accepting the responsibility to help followers reach their *full human potential*.

Through each of these conceptions of leadership, the over-arching definition is one of how individuals (leaders) influence others (followers) to act. Regardless of the specific definition, the ability to influence implies a type of power. Therefore, leadership and power are interrelated. For the purpose of this study, I considered influence and power as closely related terms that required interpretation by the participant.

American theories of leadership and organizations are just that: American. Leadership theory has evolved in the United States largely based on economic and cultural events. Due to these influences, one must explore the culture within its own context and understand the unique dynamics that formed the culture. About the time the third wave of feminism was developing, social psychologist Geert Hofstede (1991) identified a method to categorize cultures based on five dimensions: power distance, collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term versus short-term orientation. Hofstede's position was that "Culture is learned, not inherited" (1991, p. 5). With this focus on the "collective programming of the mind" (1991, p. 6), Hofstede cautioned that to know one's culture "does not imply normlessness for oneself, nor for one's society" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 7).

As identified previously, Hofstede described American culture as masculine and this category is evident in leadership, family structure, and public policy. As such, American social norms are from a masculine perspective of neutral. As American women have pursued new bases of power, cultural norms have been challenged. Hofstede's work

is a reminder that the movement of women into positions of influence requires a cultural shift, not just individual adjustment. The programming Hofstede mentions is reinforced over generations and does not shift easily.

On a micro-level, this holds true for organizations as well. Each organization develops a culture unique to that organization based on past experiences and what is reinforced within the organization. Schein (1992) proposes understanding organizational culture by looking at the espoused values, rituals, and artifacts of the organization. Schein's contention is that the culture develops by individuals consenting to these values and norms over time. They are reinforced by each succeeding generation that perpetuates them.

An alternative perspective is raised by Alvesson (2002) who questions this assumption of agreement. According to Alvesson (2002), just because a ritual is repeated, does not mean that members *agree* with it. In the context of this study, Schein and Alvesson offer important considerations. On a micro-level, the values, rituals, and artifacts apparent in the study organization were weighed against the information shared by individuals within the organization. The repetition of rituals and the presence of artifacts alone were not enough to assume uniform agreement within the institution.

On a macro-level, Schein's descriptions of cultural markers of values, rituals, and artifacts are applied to American society and how leadership has been defined and perpetuated from one generation to the next. The description of *Time* magazine covers through various decades is one way to understand how the American culture positions men and women in society. Who is placed on the cover tells a story about who is perceived to be a leader (or at least a person of influence) within the culture.



In addition, Alvesson's caution is well-placed. Analyzing the artifacts of magazine covers does not infer agreement with a particular value throughout American society. Alvesson's caution becomes a reminder that in-depth exploration of bounded systems is essential to understanding the breadth and depth of various cultural norms within sub-groups of a society. It also allows the outliers to have a voice of dissention when the cultural norms imply agreement.

### *Gender Stereotyping in Leadership*

Compounding the myth of neutrality in American leadership theory is the reality that most theories have been developed from a masculine perspective. Male researchers developed studies using male subjects and from the subjects' responses, developed theories that they believed applied to all employees. In this model, "male" was neutral, just as studies in the United States were presumed to hold universal, "neutral" value for other countries.

As feminist scholars have entered the domain of feminist critique, they have sought to challenge the assumption that male is neutral and feminine is either irrelevant or "the other." Feminist scholars in literature, art, and education must place continuous pressure on unstated assumptions and name the sexist interpretations of actions in each discipline, building on one another's successes.

For example, Frueh (1988), a feminist art critic, draws from feminist literary criticism when she states, "Feminist art criticism is significant and necessary because it challenges what feminist literary critic Annette Kolodny calls the 'dog-eared myth of intellectual neutrality.' Such neutrality presupposes the neuter status of the mind; as if gender imbalances did not exist in scholarship" (Frueh, 1988, p. 156-157). By claiming

neutrality and simultaneously ignoring dissonant voices, theorists essentially turn their backs on the possibility that others encounter a phenomenon in a different manner or arrive at different conclusions. There is a pretentiousness in this approach that reveals a steely determination to ignore that which may threaten an existing position of privilege.

As recently as 1978 one of art history's revered scholars stated, "...I have not been able to find a woman artist who clearly belongs in a one-volume history of art," (Janson, as cited in Chadwick, 1988, p. 170). This comment reflects more on the author's view of women than of art. It seems absurd to suggest that, in the centuries of art produced, not one woman meets the standard for inclusion based on *intellectual neutrality*. Something else is at play. In fact, the statement suggests that instead of addressing the "history of art," it should be the "history of male art."

And yet, as I explored these examples of the exclusion and omission of women, I was aware of the risk that feminist scholars face as well. As women seek to define the female position within society, they could engage an equally limiting position of female "intellectual neutrality." The tension in defining an "other" is that we begin to presume that we are not at once a "we" and an "other." Returning to the work of Powell and Graves (2003) mentioned in chapter 1, whenever we reduce the views in a discussion to two wholly distinct categories of male and female, we have immediately placed ourselves in one camp or the other....this seems to leave us open to the risk of over-generalizing or under-valuing the other.

Gender is the social construction of what we expect of men and women. It is not tied so much to biology as psychology. As indicated previously, conclusions have been drawn about leadership from the examination of male leaders; therefore, a

masculine/neutral style of leadership has been described as authoritarian, domineering, and action-oriented (Eagly & Johannessen-Schmidt, 2001). Female leadership styles are considered to more naturally match those of the transformational approach (Eagly & Johannessen-Schmidt, 2001). Feminine leadership is characterized as collaborative, listening, and within-group oriented rather than top-down (Eisler, 1995; Metcalfe & Altman, 2001; Rutherford, 2001). Yet these generalities are limiting as well.

The question of a distinction between female and male leadership characteristics continues to be debated. Yoder (2001) suggests that leadership *is* gendered. Certainly the social roles that individuals fulfill have an impact upon how leadership is perceived (Deaux, 1996). The question that remains seems to be as much about determining if there are inherent differences between men and women as it is about actual leadership behaviors. To explore this question, it is important to consider the influence of one's psychological perspective as it relates to the distinction between self and others.

Bryans and Mavin (2003) recount Simone de Beauvoir's (1953) work that attributed neutrality to men and qualities of the "Other" to women. De Beauvoir's point was that patriarchal societies perpetuate a myth that women are feminine and weak and wholly counter to the psyche of men. This attribution by men is a natural psychological process that seeks to protect individuals from questioning their own experiences. By assuming one's experience and perspective is the norm, we avoid the psychological rigor of calling each of our stereotypes and biases into question. Although this is an efficient system for information-processing, it can lead to unfounded prejudice and discrimination. Whether intentional or not, the ordering of groups according to a social hierarchy relies upon the ability to ignore or discount the strengths of those who belong to other groups.

In 1988, women's studies scholar Peggy McIntosh wrote a piece entitled "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." The piece was an exploration of privilege for McIntosh as she came to understand male privilege through the lens of her own privilege as a white person. McIntosh compared this experience to carrying a knapsack filled with unearned privilege. McIntosh's point was that the first step in fighting racism (and sexism, and ageism) is for those who bear the knapsack to acknowledge the benefits the knapsack provides. Kirkham (1985, as cited in Bryans & Mavin, 2003) suggested that those in minority groups spend more time considering the implications of being a minority than the majority spends considering the plight of the minority. This imbalance of consideration is the precursor to stereotypes and prejudice. Sexism is one result of such prejudice.

The work of Glick and Fiske (1996) placed sexism in two camps: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism is the stereotypical assertion that men are superior to women. Benevolent sexism relies upon a presumption of women's weakness, thereby requiring male protection. Much more common is ambivalent sexism in which case there are directional or paternalistic attitudes toward women. Lest we presume these titles fall squarely on men, Goodwin and Fiske (2001) assert that women participate in and perpetuate these stereotypes as well.

All three forms of sexism demean women. But what is most interesting in the work of Goodwin and Fiske (2001) is the connection between these forms of discrimination and the concept of *fear*. Men fear that if women become too strong and assertive, they will no longer have a place for men, except in the bedroom. And women, perhaps silently acknowledging the benefit they receive by having men ready to defend

and protect, fear the loss of that protection. These fears lead both men and women to reinforce negative stereotypes.

Fiske (1993) states that “stereotypes exert control” (p. 621). Through descriptive and prescriptive beliefs about others, those in power maintain their positions by categorizing the “other.” Recent studies in the areas of violence and self-esteem suggest that those who are violent are more often those with *high* self-esteem rather than the presumed *low* self-esteem (Bauermeister, 1999). This shift is significant in that it supports the notion that a shift in the balance of power is a threat to those with the power, thus causing a negative response.

The cross-section of studies examined in Bauermeister’s work does not suggest that high self-esteem *causes* violence, but rather that high self-esteem, in combination with a threat, results in violence.

In all spheres we examined, we found that violence emerged from threatened egotism, whether this was labeled as wounded pride, disrespect, verbal abuse, insults, anger manipulations, status inconsistency, or something else. For huge nationalities, medium and small groups, and lone individuals, the same pattern was found: Violence resulted most commonly from feeling that one’s superiority was somehow being undermined, jeopardized, or contradicted by current circumstances. (Bauermeister, 1999, pp. 271-272)

The studies reviewed to draw this conclusion support the theory that, though not generally physical in nature, the negative response of men in power to women

demonstrating the capacity for power grows from a sense that one's status is in jeopardy. It is a confirmation of the scarcity model whereby the "pie of influence" is considered to be limited in its supply. One question that arose while looking at this literature was whether women might be prone to these same negative responses in a predominantly female organization. Would women who are typically in power in these organizations demonstrate the same negative responses to the men who appear to threaten or resist their status within the organization?

### *Women and Work*

It is possible that as women increase their power in an organization, they are cognizant of the relationship between their power and others' acceptance of that power. Fiske's (1993) work adds a new dimension to the literature on power by acknowledging that interdependence can be an effective motivator for those with power to recognize the powerless. When one relies upon the "other," one quickly becomes aware of what the other has to offer. This mutuality can grow into a form of respect, but the "power" individual must first acknowledge that there is something of value to be exchanged. This can be difficult when the one with power may have had access to the work of the powerless individual without the need for any exchange. To place this in the context of home and work, consider how women have traditionally been acknowledged for their contributions.

Statistics indicate working women bear the burden of household chores (Bianchi, 2000; Bianchi, Sayer & Robinson, 2000; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006). Women in the workplace continue to earn a fraction of the wages of men, even accounting for years of service and education (Eagly & Carli, 2007; U.S. Government Accounting

Office, 2003; Women's Fund of Greater Omaha, 2007). And women are routinely evaluated more negatively than men for similar work (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). So it is not a matter of unfounded perception that women feel burdened by unfair treatment. It is fact.

Indeed, Carli's (1995, as cited in Carli, 1999) work on perceptions of competence bear this out: female leaders generally fall in one of two camps: "competent, but not likable," or "likeable, but not competent." Men are more often perceived as both "competent and likeable." Yet the male and female leaders in the meta-analysis conducted by Eagly and Johnson (1990, cited in Eagly & Carli, 2003) were not determined to exhibit significantly different styles of leadership. In particular, Eagly and Johnson noted that studies conducted within organizations were less likely to show gender differences in behaviors than studies using other experimental methodologies. The present study contributes to the literature as it investigated how a shift in the "dominant" group impacted the perception of power when studied within the bounded system of a predominantly female organization.

To examine the influence of environment, it is appropriate to employ social learning theory as a lens. Jarvis, Holford, and Griffin (1998) built on the work of Weick to explore the role of sensemaking in learning. As individuals encounter new situations, they struggle to "make sense" of the experience. This struggle is not an individual experience, but a communal one. The social environment then impacts not just *how* we learn, but *what* we learn. This study of the perceptions of power was positioned in an environment that is unique to the research as it explored the shared experience of women and men in a predominantly female organization. The case study approach added depth to

the existing literature on power, gender and leadership as the study's placement in an existing organization allowed individuals to give voice to a particular shared experience.

Eagly and Karau (2002) employ role congruity theory to explain the combination of social role theory (expectations individuals possess of individuals in a specific social category) with gender roles (expectations individuals possess of male and female behaviors). When applied to leadership, women are routinely in a bind between what is expected of them as women and what is expected of them as leaders.

Leadership research up to the 1990's primarily defined leaders as those who demonstrated masculine qualities or, as Eagly (1987, cited in Eagly & Karau, 2002) defined them, *agentic* characteristics - "assertive, controlling, confident" (p. 574) versus the feminine *communal* characteristics - "affectionate, helpful, kind" (p. 574). The perception of female leaders is complicated when individuals are faced with competing expectations, in other words, when there is not role congruity. Women who use masculine leadership characteristics are often less influential than those who use feminine characteristics (Powell & Graves, 2003; Rutherford, 2001). And yet, female leaders who exhibit more agentic qualities (generally rated as positive leadership skills) are rated more negatively by observers because of the violation of female social roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Other studies have explored the impact of women using a male pattern of nonverbal behavior (direct eye contact) and discovered that women are viewed more negatively than men who use direct eye contact (Aguinis & Henle, 2001).

In other words, it seems the leader's influence is not a function of the style alone, but a combination of the style and the follower's expectations for the leader based on the social construction of gender. Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt (2000) propose that



social role theory is a construct that individuals must actively counteract when presented with conflicting evidence. Based on their research, individuals will actually ignore information that is contradictory to the stereotype they hold of others and will reinforce the information that affirms their stereotypes. This subjective process of data registry is one system that perpetuates the social roles ascribed to men and women.

Women have worked since time immortal, so to discuss women's *entry* into the workforce is naïve. However, the positions held and prominence of some positions changed based largely on social needs. As women entered the male workforce during World War I and World War II, Rosie the Riveter became an iconic symbol. Her exaggerated biceps boldly positioned her not as the woman of passivity in the expected social role of homemaker, but as a contributor in the male-dominated world of production. This new role required a social paradigm shift. When men returned from war and sought paid employment, women were again portrayed in the media as wives and homemakers, consumers of the products men produced.

Related to the shift in *where* women work is the shift in how this affects male-female relations *at* work. In leadership, power, and gender studies, considerable time is given to the identification of interpersonal dynamics when men and women work as colleagues. Building on previous discussions of the assumed neutrality of the masculine definition of social norms, this study explored individuals' perspectives when men are not neutral, but "tokens" in a predominantly female organization. The term "token" is borrowed from Kanter (1977), who assigned the term to groups who represent 15% or less of an organization. Though the study institution had 20% male employees, the term was easily understood by participants and had support in the literature.

For the past twenty years, the scarcity of women in top management positions has been attributed to a *glass ceiling* after a *Wall Street Journal* article in which the authors proposed there was an invisible barrier that prevented highly qualified women from ascending to positions of power. Eagly and Carli (2007) suggest this metaphor is out of date and instead propose the metaphor of a labyrinth. Signaling a shift in feminist mindset, Eagly and Carli state a labyrinth:

conveys the idea of a complex journey toward a goal worth striving for. Passage through a labyrinth is not simple or direct, but requires persistence, awareness of one's progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead....The metaphor acknowledges obstacles but is not ultimately discouraging. (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 64)

With a labyrinth in mind, women who prepare for the inevitable roadblocks and develop strategies to work around the obstacles eventually find success.

#### *Dynamics of Power*

French and Raven published their now-classic description of the five bases of power in 1959. Based on the work of Kurt Lewin (Raven, 1992), French and Raven expanded Lewin's theory of *power fields* to explore the potential influences of social power. Beginning with coercive and reward power, French and Raven went on to identify legitimate, expert, and referent power as socially dependent bases of power (Raven, 1992). In other words, these bases of power were completely dependent upon the existence of others' presence. The presence of coercive power is irrelevant if there is not another to coerce.

The relationship between the influencing agent and the target of influence is an area of continued study (Fiske, 1993; Raven, 1992b). What determines what base of power one uses in a given situation? Which bases of power are considered acceptable within the organization and which are taboo? How does the target of influence determine how to respond to the influencing agent? (Powers & Reiser, 2005; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989).

A decade after the Non Discrimination Clause of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law for Women, Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) published her seminal work on women's role in the paid workforce. Not surprisingly, with just a decade under their belts as equal players at the boardroom table, women held little status in most organizations. Kanter's work identified gender-skewed organizations and how sheer numbers can influence how power is distributed. Once a group identifies that it is no longer the minority, it begins to identify new sources of power.

Drawing from sociology and social psychology, we see that humans share responses based on their position within a society. For example, Bugental and Lewis (1999) document the reality that powerless women switch to less effective speech patterns when they feel their power is in jeopardy. This is in the same ratio as men who feel they are powerless. Perhaps due to the social response to women's lack of power within organizations, women historically found themselves in low-paying, low-prestige, low-power departments (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). These results cannot be explained exclusively by lack of experience or education. There was another dynamic at play that deserves exploration.

Carli's (1999) meta-analysis of the relationship between gender and power documents repeated themes of variance between how men and women are perceived related to competence, power, and influence. Women are perceived as less competent than male leaders, evaluated negatively if they exhibit masculine leadership traits, and are expected to be humble about their accomplishments. These attributes are not limited to men evaluating women, but women evaluating women as well. As role congruity theory suggests, the combination of one's expected social role and one's expected gender role can have a dramatic effect on how one is perceived.

Though the research shared thus far is critical to understanding the research questions, one critique is that studies are frequently conducted in the context of a contrived experimental study with college students. Subjects, presented with information on fictional individuals, make judgments about competence, leadership, and likeability. Yet the power and gender role literature affirms that women rely upon referent power and, in fact, are rated highly when they work from this source of power (Eagly & Mladinic, 1994). Is it possible that by relying upon these contrived, anonymous research protocols, we have removed the source of women's power and influence? Is it possible that the methodologies of the studies themselves have skewed the results of these studies? Gilligan (1993), in an update to her 1982 book, *In a Different Voice*, suggested that intentionally including women in research, "changes the voice: how the human story is told, and also who tells it" (p. xi). The results of the present study would support the notion that there is much to be gained by immersing oneself within an organization to explore the internal dynamics from as many perspectives as possible.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction – Qualitative Research

Much of the research conducted on power has been quantitative in nature (Kanter, 1977; Keshet, Kark, Pomerantz-Zorin, Koslowsky & Schwarzwald, 2006; Ledet & Henley, 2000; Powell & Graves, 2003; Powers & Reiser, 2005; Schmidmast, Hall & Ickes, 2006). The method to these studies implies that power can be measured or quantified, or its dynamic in a social environment can be explored as a static construct. Although quantitative data offer important contributions to the literature on power, one's perception of power is influenced by sociological, psychological and political influences, as well as gender, previous experience, and situational factors that are difficult to capture in the one-dimensional responses of quantitative research (Hatch, 2002). The complexity of factors related to power is best understood through in-depth, probing interviews that allow the individual to give voice to the nuances of individual experience.

Qualitative research draws from the fertile ground of an individual's experience in a natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1992; Morse & Richards, 2002). If we acknowledge the dynamic of an individual's past experience influencing one's present actions, those actions must be understood in context. The typical quantitative study sterilizes the environment to such a degree that the results are based on "inherently artificial contexts" (Hatch, 2002, p. 7). Qualitative research acknowledges multiple perspectives and relies upon the researcher's on-going interpretation in an inductive, iterative process of understanding (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1992; Morse & Richards, 2002). Therefore, I designed an interpretive case study

approach to the question of how men and women experience power at a predominantly female institution. Interviews were conducted with men and women, faculty, staff and administrators who had worked at the institution for six months or more to explore the phenomenon from as many perspectives as possible.

### Case Study Research Design

An interpretive case study is conducted to “develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering” (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). Approaching the question from a case study perspective engaged the question in a conversation that recognized the temporal nature of the phenomenon of power as well as the pre-existing knowledge of the phenomenon that the researcher brought into the environment (Yin, 2003). “Power” is not a static construct that can be understood without context. And even within the same context, individuals’ perceptions of power are different. A qualitative, constructivist case study approach allowed me to acknowledge my biases while working with participants to explore power through their eyes.

This study was a case study exploration of individuals’ experiences with power in a bounded system: a predominantly female institution. I was not interested in assessing participants’ ability to be powerful, nor was I interested in a numeric rating of others’ power. I was most interested in how they *experienced* power. The only way to elicit this perspective was through an open conversation that was attentive to the variety of experiences that exist within the bounded system. That being said, I could not ignore the influence of my own experience with power as a factor in how I listened. Kvale (2006)

suggests that the researcher must be open to surprises so less is taken for granted. The qualitative researcher engages in the process to seek understanding—without a preconception of what one will find (Hatch, 2002; Stake, 2005).

Though this position of suspended judgment was the ideal, stating a position of objectivity would deny the essence of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers directly acknowledge the influence of their own lived experience and how this experience may shade their perceptions in the study (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Morse & Richards, 2002). It was impossible for me to explore men's and women's perceptions of power without comparing these perceptions to my own experience working in a predominantly female organization. Although there are differences between the two organizations, I was very aware of my own experiences in a predominantly female organization while interviewing, coding, and analyzing data. Merriam (1998) summarizes the interplay between researcher and participant by challenging the assumption that there is one reality to be explored.

Reality is not an objective entity; rather, there are multiple interpretations of reality. The researcher thus brings a construction of reality to the research situation, which interacts with other people's constructions or interpretations of the phenomenon being studied. The final product of this type of study is yet another interpretation by the researcher of others' views filtered through his or her own. (Merriam, 1998, pp. 22-23)

Mazzei (2007) suggests that the qualitative researcher must be cautious about the tendency to ascribe "normalcy" to oneself when engaging with another in research. In this study, therefore, there were two "others" to attend to: men and women as they

describe working with the *other* sex, and my ability to listen to *another* as individuals shared their experiences within their organization. As an employee of a predominantly female institution, I have personal experience with the focus of this study and therefore was cautious of drawing conclusions from my own experience rather than the participants' experiences.

Qualitative research allows the researcher to bracket observations that do not belong to the informant (Hatch, 2002; Stake, 2005). This process acknowledges the lived experience of the researcher in addition to the informant, thus allowing the researcher to more fully discover “what is essential in order for the phenomenon *to be*” (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 147). I selected a case study design so I could engage with participants and clarify their understanding to be sure I was not imposing my own biases upon their interpretations.

### The Role of the Researcher

Before interviewing, during interviews and during analysis, the qualitative researcher names the internal thoughts that may skew how one views the data set. This process of naming the internal thoughts allows the researcher to continue to construct *with* the informants an evolving understanding of the phenomenon in question (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998). As a counselor, I was very aware that my biases could have a negative impact on both my ability to listen to the participant and the way I interpret their motivations and actions. It was incumbent upon me to identify any barriers that may have prevented me from listening to participants with an open mind.



Just as in ethnography, researchers, "...enter the field with an open mind, not an empty head" (Fetterman, 1989, as cited in Bryant, 2004, p. 63) when conducting case study research. Scheper-Hughes (cited in Oleson, 2005) refers to this as "'the cultural self' that all researchers take into their work" (p. 250). Scheper-Hughes (1992) states that this "is not a troublesome element to be eradicated or controlled, but a set of resources" (Oleson, 2005, p. 250). I was pleased with the degree to which I could bracket my experiences while listening to participants and I give credit to my experiences as a counselor in developing this ability. I had just one experience with a participant that compelled me to document my internal struggle to listen without judgment. Once the documentation was complete, I found myself better able to engage in the interview and analyze the interview without negative attributions to the participant.

Although my skills as a counselor served as foundation for the interviews, it was impossible to ignore my experience as a woman when conducting this study. Gender "is central to the way we perceive and structure the world and events in which we participate" (Jarviluoma, Moisala, & Vilkkko, 2003, p. 1). My gender inspired me to conduct this study. In addition, my role as researcher was influenced by my experience attending an all-girls high school and working in a predominantly female institution. As participants described their commitment to the mission of the institution and the development of women, I realized I was personally identifying with this philosophy from my own history. Personal identification itself is not troublesome for the qualitative researcher and, in fact, it has been argued "If the researcher is sufficiently reflexive about her project, she can evoke these resources to guide gathering, creating, and interpreting her own behavior (Casper, 1997; Daniels, 1983; J. Stacey, 1998)" (Oleson, 2005, p. 250-

251). In truth, the same process of acknowledging the impact of experience must be exercised by the quantitative researcher when designing instruments, identifying subjects, and interpreting data. I worked to reduce the tendency to affirm my experience in gathering and interpreting the data primarily by triangulation, member-checking, and “pattern matching” (Campbell cited in Yin, 2003, p. 26; Hatch, 2002).

Case studies rely upon participant engagement and willingness to disclose information. My philosophical approach to interviews is best matched with Hatch (2002). My goal was to structure each conversation in such a manner that the participants were comfortable. This was primarily achieved by employing my counseling skills to ask open-ended questions; follow questions with relevant probes; pay attention to body language and non-verbal cues; and ask for more information (Hatch, 2002). An unexpected benefit of conducting this study was that I thoroughly enjoyed each interview as ends in themselves. I found myself naturally responding to participant comments and probing for more information because I was fascinated by participant experiences.

While this standpoint was a benefit, I was also aware that I could not overidentify with participants (Hatch, 2002). Though I was a nonparticipant according to Spradley’s continuum (as cited in Hatch, 2002), I brought my own experiences of working in predominantly female organizations. My experience with one predominantly female organization was that women, though generally chairs of committees and primary decision-makers, tended to abdicate their power to the men rather quickly when men offered their ideas. Throughout this study, I sought to gain the perspective of individuals in a different organization rather than affirm my own biases.

### Data Sources: Population

The location of this study was a predominantly female organization in the Midwest. The definition of a predominantly female institution was adapted from the work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter in her 1977 book *Men and Women of the Corporation*. As one component of the work, Kanter sought to name the phenomenon of proportion within organizations. Kanter's term "skewed" was used to describe organizations in which there is an 85:15 distribution between two types (1977, p. 208). The type that encompasses the majority of individuals is then termed "dominant" (p. 208), and the others are considered "tokens" (p. 208). As I designed this study of power, the use of Kanter's term "female-dominant" seemed to imply dominance as an exercise of power, rather than proportion. Therefore, while using her definition of proportion to locate the study site, I changed the term to "female-intense" to describe the environment to participants. I later changed the term again to "predominantly female" based on participant feedback.

I chose the study site initially based on the criteria of an institution with three-fourths or more women. Once a number of possible sites were identified, I selected an institution that was large enough to allow for anonymity of participants while small enough to suggest a shared cultural perspective. Because I had worked with an administrator in the organization at another institution, I met with this administrator to discuss the possibility of conducting research within the organization (Hatch, 2002). Upon receiving her support, I submitted proposals to the Institutional Review Boards for both UNL and the organization. The protocol identified that the administrator would provide a list of full-time and part-time employees who had worked at the institution for six months or more, were age 19 or older, and were not currently students at the

institution. (The UNL IRB approval letter is in Appendix A.) Once both institutional review boards sent letters of approval, I secured a list of employees that met the criteria. The list included over 150 employee names, phone numbers, email addresses and departments. By recruiting a cross-section of employees to interview, I hoped to triangulate the information I received so it was not limited to issues around positional power. A few of the individuals I contacted responded that they were not eligible due to their status as new employees and others were eliminated because they were primarily on another campus.

My assumption was that it would be relatively difficult to acquire the desired number of participants (20) for this study because participation required a one-hour, in-person, tape recorded interview. Due to that fact, I solicited participants by sending individual emails (Appendix B) to each employee on the list requesting their participation. As employees responded, I confirmed their status as fitting within the study protocol and arranged an interview time (Appendix C). Once a time was established, I sent a confirmation email (Appendix D) with a copy of the Informed Consent (Appendix E) and the institution's "Rights of Research Participants." Within two weeks, twenty participants had interviews scheduled and more had responded that they were willing to participate. At this time, I reviewed the list of participants who had completed or scheduled interviews. Though the participants fit in all desired categories of my purposeful sample of faculty, staff and administrators, some departments within the institution were not included. I had also concluded that the interviews I had conducted with men had not led to data saturation.

The intention of purposeful sampling is to select informants who have specific qualities or experiences. Patton’s definition (1990; cited in Merriam, 1992) clearly identifies the need for “*information-rich cases for study in depth*” (p. 61, emphasis in original). While qualitative studies are not concerned with representative samples, Stake suggests “leaning toward those cases that seem to offer *opportunity to learn* [emphasis in original]” (2005, p. 451).

At this point, I determined that the study would benefit from an extension of the number of participants to allow for more individuals from groups that were not yet included or did not yet have data saturation. I submitted a request to both the UNL IRB and the IRB of the study organization. Both institutions granted an increase in the number of participants to thirty. Seven more individuals were contacted to establish interviews.

By the end of the study, 27 individuals were interviewed. Female participants numbered 19 and male participants numbered eight. This distribution is roughly equivalent to the distribution of men and women in the institution. The Administration classification included Associate Deans, but not program directors. Program directors were included with faculty as they maintain a faculty position with teaching responsibilities.

Table 3.1 *Gender and Role of Participants*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Administration</b>	<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	0	6	1	7
Female	6	7	5	18
Total	6	13	6	25

Though I established interviews without knowing the employment tenure of participants, I was pleasantly surprised to find a strong cross-section from the population.

Table 3.2 *Employment Tenure of Participants*

<b>Years of Full- or Part-Time Employment</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Less than one year	7
1 year – less than 5 years	6
5 years – less than 10 years	3
10 – 20 years	4
More than 20 years	5

Although qualitative research is primarily concerned with saturation, not representation, I was able to explore the experience of power from diverse perspectives within my purposeful sample. Comments made by respondents served as a form of triangulation as various segments within the institution could be compared to other segments.

#### Data Collection: Interviews

Participants were invited to select a quiet, confidential location. Twenty-one of these interviews were conducted in participant offices, three interviews were held in a library study room, and three interviews were in the institution's coffeehouse. Though the quality of the tape recordings in the coffeehouse were adequate, all three participants demonstrated occasional nervousness before making an unpopular or controversial observation while in the more public coffeehouse setting. Two of the coffeehouse

interviews were with men and in both cases I sensed that they were wary of inviting me to their offices for the interviews. Both men indicated in their interviews that as men in a predominantly female environment, they needed to be cautious about how their actions are interpreted. In future studies, I will insist on a location that allows for confidentiality and that protects participants from accusations (such as reserving a study room with a glass wall).

After an initial explanation of the purpose of the study, participants signed a copy of the Informed Consent. The Informed Consent included permission to audiotape, transcribe and use the interview material for the purpose of this study and future publications and presentations. Interviews were recorded on two mini-audio-cassette recorders to protect against accidents. Informants were told that this material will not be published with identifying characteristics and every effort will be made to ensure anonymity. Transcripts and field notes tracked the gender and employment category of the participants (faculty, staff, administrator), but did not include names. If a third party was identified within an interview, the appropriate employment category was assigned to the individual in the transcripts before using the data. If a specific department was named in relation to an individual experience, the department name was generalized. Participants were not paid to participate or given any incentive to participate.

### Interview Questions

Prior to this study, I had completed a small pilot study at my own institution that was important for two reasons: 1) I discovered it would be impossible for me to conduct the study within my own institution due to my institutional biases, and 2) I determined

some of the questions I had designed were not effective in eliciting thick descriptions from participants. The revised open-ended, semi-structured interview moved from background questions that established rapport between me and the participant to descriptive, structural and contrast questions of personal experiences with power and gender within the institution (Hatch, 2002). Dilley (2000) suggests the interview protocol serves as a “guide to the journey” (p. 133) for the participant. It is essential that the questions are built from the literature and offer participants an indication of the “landmarks and markers they think are important for us to understand and map the journey” (Dilley, 2000, p. 133). The open-ended questions were a mixture of “hypothetical, ... ideal position, and interpretive questions” (Merriam, p. 76).

While I began with an interview guide that was consistent for all interviews, each participant directed the interview in unique ways. The ability to respond to each participant’s experiences was an essential component of the research design. In the spirit of constant comparative method, each interview was used to explore emerging themes or triangulate data from previous interviews (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998). The process of conducting data analysis while engaged in data collection is well-supported in the literature (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003).

As interviews were conducted, I was aware of my “outsider” status and worked to generate trust between the participant and me. One way I did this was to allow participants to omit the names of individuals within the institution when the participant seemed reluctant to share this information. What I realized during data analysis was that such omissions made it difficult to triangulate some data because I could not be sure that two individuals were referring to the same person. In fact, even job titles did not



guarantee uniformity, as several key positions had had turnover. In the future, I will ask participants to name the individual but assure them that the name will not appear in the written transcript or any product of the study (e.g. presentations, articles). This experience affirmed for me the value of multiple perspectives and the ability to confirm data through various sources. It also reminded me that anonymity is important, but sometimes a hindrance to data analysis.

Another discovery during data collection centered on the use of field notes. After some interviews, field notes were taken to make note of particular features of interviews. This is an activity that I would do more consistently in future studies as notes on office décor and nonverbal behaviors would have been helpful during data analysis.

Two transcriptionists were hired to transcribe tapes. One transcriptionist was known to the researcher, signed a confidentiality agreement and was paid to transcribe the first twenty tapes. The second transcriptionist was referred to the researcher by another researcher. This transcriptionist agreed to transcribe the final seven tapes and signed a confidentiality agreement. After much delay and inadequate contact, the second transcriptionist completed three tapes and the first transcriptionist finished the last four tapes. I reviewed all transcripts against the taped interview, editing words and filling in gaps in the transcripts where needed. Transcripts were sent to participants for verification before analysis.

Initially, transcripts were emailed to participants and they were asked to make any changes within ten days or the transcript would be assumed to be accurate. Participants were reminded that they could refuse to answer any question and could withdraw from

the study at any time. After sending copies of the transcripts to participants, two participants decided to withdraw from the study.

### Withdrawal of Participants

Both participants who withdrew shared relevant observations of the institution. An unforeseen factor in this study was the possibility that participants would discuss their interviews with other participants or colleagues at the institution. Both of the individuals stated they wanted to withdraw to avoid potential repercussions because they had been recently reprimanded by their supervisors. The tapes and transcripts were destroyed.

Although confidentiality was maintained by the researcher, participant interactions cannot be restricted. I had not considered the potential harm participant interaction could have on contaminating the data. After I removed the two individuals from the study, I immediately ceased all recruitment of participants. Though I had been approved for 30 participants, I ended interviews with 25 active participants. I determined that sending transcripts via email may have led to participant concerns about confidentiality or increased the likelihood that they shared their transcripts with others who encouraged them to withdraw from the study. From that point forward, I used the postal service to mail transcripts to participants for member-checking and requested that they sign and return a confirmation form if they had no changes to make. In future studies, I will consider ways to conduct member-checking that do not raise concerns for participants and discourage participants from sharing the content of their interviews with others at the institution.

## Data Analysis

My initial plan was to use The Ethnograph software to code transcripts. I loaded the software on my computer and began to walk through the tutorials provided. I imported my first verified transcript and began to practice the process of coding sections. Not far into this process, however, I abandoned that plan and returned to the less-technological process of using paper copies. The reason for this shift was important in terms of how I understood my role as researcher. As I was practicing the coding, I realized that the data reflected multiple dimensions. Often, one section of data represented several possible codes or, later, themes. I realized that, as a novice on this particular software, it would be best for me to have the transcripts literally in front of me. I wanted to be able to handle the codes, move them around, re-name them, and see them next to other transcript segments and other codes. All of these factors, at least at this point, required that I not use software.

Therefore, once transcripts were verified by participants, I made several copies of each transcript, using a different color and/or font for each participant. Male participants were copied on pastel colored paper and female participants were copied on ultra bright colors. I then coded each transcript.

The majority of transcripts were coded in three days. The remaining three transcripts were coded within the next week. I appreciated this focused allocation of time to coding and thought it allowed me to remain more consistent in the codes I assigned. Miles and Huberman (1994), however, suggest that “coding all at one time tempts the researcher to get sloppy, resentful, tired, and partial” (p. 65). I acknowledge that I found myself bored by transcripts that were not thick but thin in their descriptions or by

participants who wandered off from the topic at-hand. I stayed attentive to my own reactions and allowed myself to take breaks, put transcripts away for a period of time, and return to a transcript if I thought I had coded it in a compromised state of mind.

Initially, the codes were descriptive and “entail[ed] little interpretation” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 57). As I moved through more transcripts and became more comfortable with the data, I began to assign more interpretive codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By having several copies of the same transcript in front of me, I was able to assign the same section of transcript with multiple codes. This method was more in line with the method suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990, cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994), whereby the researcher maintains a focus on the intent of the study, but does not come to the coding process with a pre-determined set of codes. Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994) refer to “filling in,” “extension,” “bridging,” and “surfacing” (p. 62) when coding. Because I conducted the interviews within a relatively short timeframe and was able to code the transcripts shortly thereafter, it was possible for me to draw from my experiences in the location to identify codes and revise where necessary.

Some sections of transcript were coded with the question that sparked the response. For example, one question asked participants to define the term “power.” The segments that included participant responses to that question were always coded with “Power Defn.” so I could compare responses. Some of those answers merited additional codes because of how the participant elaborated on the answer or mentioned other aspects of the study. Whenever possible, I used *in vivo* codes to capture the words of the participants.

The process of analysis was an iterative process of coding transcripts, cutting apart the transcripts and arranging segments by codes, reviewing the segments under each code, and re-coding where necessary, either due to “bulk” or “decay” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 61). Once I had a sense that all segments were in place, I literally took a step back and scanned the room of codes. In this physical process of moving from one section of the room to another, making note of what fell under each code (by jotting notes on the code cover sheet), I began to note patterns and themes.

In some codes, I counted the number of participants who fell under the code, making note of the saturation of women or men. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), “There are three good reasons to resort to numbers [in qualitative research]: to see rapidly what you have in a large batch of data; to verify a hunch or hypothesis; and to keep yourself analytically honest, protecting against bias” (p. 253). Frequently, I found myself relieved that the number of participants identifying a particular code supported my focus on that code. Equally often, I was surprised by the lack of support for a particular conclusion I had drawn. The numbers themselves did not determine whether a code was significant or not; they did, however, serve as a way to stay true to the informants.

Frequently, my walk around the room resulted in the discovery of links between *child* codes and *parent* codes. This process led to moving codes around to form clusters of codes. I asked myself, “How does this code relate to that code?” Or, due to the nature of the study, I would ask whether men and women responded similarly to the same question. As I answered these questions, I began to see the connections of various themes and variables through the lens of the Interactional Framework of Leadership

Development (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2006). This model explores the leadership experience through the leader, the followers, and the situation.

The danger in identifying this model relatively early in the data analysis was that I would artificially impose the model on the data. Aware of this concern, I outlined the themes as they matched with the Interactional Framework and then worked to assess for quality. Miles and Huberman identify three common mistakes made by qualitative researchers. These include, “the holistic fallacy,” “elite bias,” and “going native” (1994, p. 263). The first two of these posed the greatest risk. According to Miles and Huberman, the holistic fallacy happens when researchers begin “interpreting events as more patterned and congruent than they really are” (1994, p. 263). Because I saw the Interactional Framework of Leadership Development as a strong organizing structure for the study, I had to be especially aware of the potential for fitting all data into this model. Outliers became a litmus test for my findings as I sought to listen to their comments without prejudice.

The second fallacy is the elite bias wherein “articulate, well-informed, usually high-status informants” (p. 263) are over-represented and “less articulate, lower-status” participants are under-represented (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 263). While I recognized the tendency to select the most vivid quotes, even if they were exaggerated, I worked to mitigate the impact of this tendency by carefully reading each segment to select quotes that best represented the informants within that code. The qualitative researcher must interpret the case study by using what Stake (2005) calls “naturalistic generalization” (p. 454). Rather than selecting quotes that matched my own experience or affirmed my biases and were drawn from one encounter with a subject, I developed themes that sought

enduring meanings and came from the naturalistic environment. “Enduring meanings come from encounter, and they are modified and reinforced by repeated encounter” (Stake, 2005, p. 454). By engaging in an iterative process of coding, theming, and revisiting codes, I was able to engage with the data from multiple perspectives and affirm the interpretation of codes through this repeated engagement.

The movement of codes and development of themes led to 20 parent codes (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 *Parent and Child Codes*

Parent Codes	Child Codes
1. Mission	Issues at all-female college (role models, male hires), student characteristics, classroom environment, tag line, small size, growth, student focus, leader, voice, offend
2. Work Environment	collaborative-collegial, family, peer support, culture of scarcity, respect, flexibility, work-life balance, support for professional growth, mentors
3. Why this institution?	Previous experience before or at study site
4. Male (environment and style)	Minority, isolation, stereotype, males who leave
5. Female (environment and style)	Focus on process and discussion, get job done, feminism
6. Longevity	Turnover, fire
7. Power (definition)	
8. Power (experience)	
9. Power (people with it)	Young professionals, power (outliers)
10. Informal vs. Positional power	Resources (financial, low pay, previous financial crisis, and others), committees, hierarchy, silos, levels, Enrollment dept.
11. Gender no influence	
12. Personality vs. gender	
13. Decision-making (including disagreement)	Risk/Fear/Threat, Yes people, Alternatives to confrontation (play the game, salute, go around the system, leave), trust



Table 3.3 *Parent and Child Codes - continued*

<b>Parent Codes</b>	<b>Child Codes</b>
14. Information	Be prepared
15. Communication (conflict, rumors, expectations)	Listen
16. Trust	
17. Confidence and Knowledge	Competence
18. President's style	
19. Best interest of college	
20. Religious organization	

As I explored these parent codes in their relation to each other, I began to see that they could be further grouped to form seven themes through data reduction (Table 4).

Table 3.4 *Themes developed from parent codes*

Theme	Parent Codes
1. Mission-Driven Institution	Mission
2. Why Work at this Institution?	Why this institution?
3. Gender is Not an Issue	Gender no influence
4. The Personality Disclaimer	Personality vs. gender
5. Women are...Men are...	Male (environment and style), Female (environment and style), Work Environment,
6. Power Is...Making Decisions	Power (definition), Power (experience), Power (people with it), Informal vs. Positional power, Decision-making, Information, Communication, Trust, confidence, competence and knowledge
7. President's Style	President's style, Best interest of college, Religious organization

The qualitative researcher is caught in a constant state of self-critique as codes become clusters, clusters become themes, and themes become findings. “What if,” the researcher asks, “none of this is real or relevant?” Stake (2005) reinforces the idea that the case study does not *need* to produce theory. Studying a case for its own uniqueness has a value of its own. “Damage occurs when the commitment to generalize or to theorize runs so strong that the researcher’s attention is drawn away from features important for

understanding the case itself” (Stake, 2005, p. 448). As I was analyzing data and making sense of this specific organization, I found myself having to remind myself that outliers, voices of dissent, and framing a theme as an initial finding were all appropriate. In the end, Stake’s (2005) simplification of the case study method is the best advice: “Place your best intellect into the thick of what is going on.” (p. 449).

### Verification

“Good case study research follows disciplined practices of analysis and triangulation to tease out what deserves to be called experiential knowledge from what is opinion and preference (Stake, 2004)” (Stake, 2005, p. 455).

With this quote as a warning, qualitative research depends upon the ethics and transparency of researchers. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend three ways to verify the quality of findings: “(1) checking for representativeness; (2) checking for researcher effects on the case, and vice versa; and (3) triangulating across data sources and methods” (p. 263).

### *Representativeness*

Though all employees who met the criteria of the study were invited to participate, there was a risk of bias in the method of self-selection. Given that the topic of the study was publicized, potential participants may have opted out of the study because they felt powerless or as if their views were not of the majority. In an institution with a strong culture, going against the tide can be a risk. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend the researcher “assume you are selectively sampling and drawing inferences from a weak or nonrepresentative sample of ‘cases’” (p. 264-265). After establishing

interviews and beginning to meet with participants, I noticed that early responders were primarily male and female faculty members. Because I was finding such rich descriptions in the interviews and I wanted to have room for late-responders in other roles, I made a request to the IRB of the study institution and UNL to increase participant numbers to 30. Based on responses to my request for interviews, I would have had more than enough volunteers to fill this number if the participant contamination mentioned earlier had not been a concern.

### *Researcher Effects*

In any research that relies upon participant interviews and/or observations, there is a risk that the observed is not the typical. Certainly, when arriving in a participant's office with two tape recorders and an official informed consent form, participants likely have second-thoughts about their participation. Though I started each interview with "warm up" questions, participants knew that my goal was to understand power in the organization. All of these factors could have led to inaccurate or skewed interviews.

Because I wanted to enter the institution as an unbiased outsider and not have potential participants confuse me for a "plant" of the administration, I went through the institutional IRB, but did not ask that the institution send any formal notice encouraging employees to participate. Due to the topic of the interviews, I thought a position as an outsider was likely better than to appear connected to the administration. I learned in interviews that some participants asked their supervisors or colleagues if I could be trusted and if they should participate. My assumption is that the topic of the interview caused some to not respond to the invitation. The reality is that participants had to be fairly confident in themselves and be willing to take a risk with an outsider. I did heed

several of Miles and Huberman's (1994) recommendations to reduce this effect by eating lunch in public spaces, using the library between interviews, affirming confidentiality with each participant, and asking the participants to choose the site of the interview so they could be comfortable.

I also tried to avoid having the study location affect my interpretations by inviting participants from throughout the institution, thereby avoiding the "elites," and listening closely to the outliers. Once I knew I would make my initial goal of 20 participants, I was more selective in the order in which I scheduled interviews. My intention was to be sure I was hearing from those who might not otherwise have a voice. Miles and Huberman (1994) encourage including "dissidents, cranks, deviants, marginals, isolates" (p. 266). While I did not know who these individuals would be, I found their transcripts the most challenging and rewarding. The women who spurned feminism, the men who were perfectly happy, and the individuals who found fault with the system all offered much more than their own perspectives; they offered a counterbalance to my tendency toward over-generalizing that which could not be supported.

### *Triangulation*

Cautioning against an over-stated assumption about the value of triangulating, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that,

triangulation is not so much a tactic as a way of life. If you self-consciously set out to collect and double-check findings, using multiple sources and modes of evidence, the verification process will largely be built into data collection as you go (p. 267).

In addition to interviewing a wide variety of employees and making note of their years of experience and roles within the institution, I also solicited the assistance of individuals who served as informants or “confidants” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 275). Two individuals familiar with the institution were sent initial drafts of the findings to assess for trustworthiness. A third individual familiar with the body of literature was given a draft to provide feedback on how well the argumentation was supported. Based on this feedback, I made appropriate editorial changes, though through the use of “thick descriptions” the overall findings were supported as trustworthy (Stake, 2005, p. 450).

#### Plan for Narrative

The chapters that follow present the findings from this study. Since Fiedler introduced the contingency model in the 1950s and Hersey and Blanchard introduced the concept of situational leadership in the 1960s, scholars have explored the reality that leadership does not happen in a vacuum and is not entirely the function of the leader. Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy (2006) describe the interplay between the leader, the followers, and the situation as the Interactional Framework for Leadership Development. These models recognize the role that circumstances (situations) play in how leadership is exercised. They also acknowledge that the followers have a significant influence on a leader’s ability to exercise leadership. Once this interplay is identified, leadership is no longer a static set of skills one puts into action, but a judgment by the leader in terms of *how* and *when* to exercise skills. Similarly, the models expand the significance of the followers as active agents in the leadership dynamic.

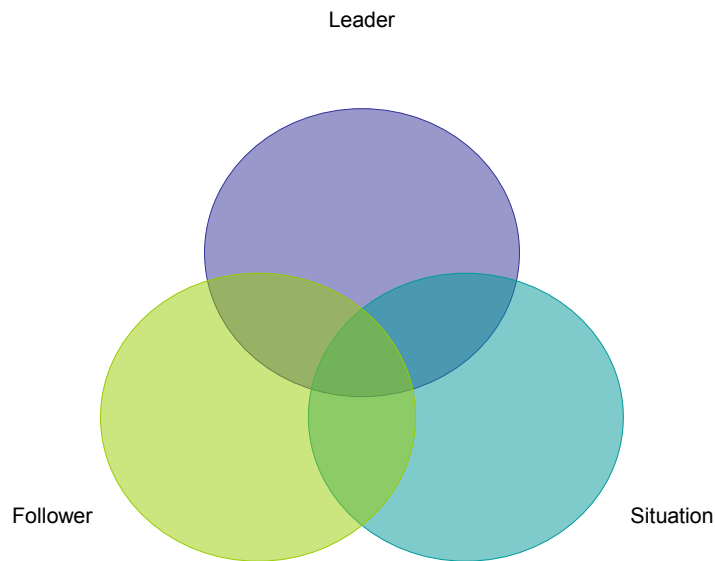


Figure 3.1 *Interactional framework of leadership development*

Using the Interactional Framework to organize data for analysis allowed for a more complex treatment of the site and themes that emerged. I began by studying each section of the framework individually and then considered how the section interacted with the others. This process honored the iterative nature of qualitative methodology. The findings of this study are therefore organized according to the three areas of the Interactional Framework: chapter 4 explores the situation, chapter 5 looks at the followers and chapter 6 is a study of the leader. Chapter 7 considers how the interaction of the three areas is influenced by various factors, most significantly by the leader.

Relevant research is presented at the end of each chapter to tie research findings to the body of knowledge that exists.



## CHAPTER 4

## THE SITUATION

## Situation: A Mission-Driven Institution

This study took place in a small, Midwestern college that is focused primarily on the education of women. Although men are allowed into the graduate programs, the primary mission of the institution is the education of women. For approximately 20 years, the college allowed men into specific undergraduate programs. The institution went through a period of financial crisis in the 1980s and 1990s, and the current president was hired in 1996. The president led the institution in claiming its focus on women as one response to a saturated educational market. “We have to have a niche and this is a niche. There is nobody else like us. Let’s be unique and let’s do something out of that uniqueness.” The revised mission statement was developed to state:

Committed to the works, values and aspirations of the [religious affiliation], [the institution] is a Catholic college dedicated to the education of women in an environment that calls forth potential and fosters leadership. This mission inspires us to:

- Academic excellence, scholarship, and lifelong learning
- Regard for the dignity of each person
- Attention to the development of mind, body, and spirit
- Compassionate service to others

(Retrieved April 22, 2008 from website)

Though participants commented that this focus was positive, several acknowledged that the shift was not easy. “It took about three years for people to say, ‘Oh, yes.’ . . . they weren’t all convinced that we should be a women’s college.”

Sixteen participants spoke directly about the role of the new mission in the institution’s current environment; a point that affirms the role of the mission in focusing faculty and staff. As one participant stated,

It clarified, rather than being somewhat defensive about being all women, it turned it around into the phrase that I liked was, we’re not—it’s not an *absence* of men, but a *preponderance* of women. And then getting involved like with the women’s council [*sic*] and doing some more visible things that gave meaning to being a women’s college.

Evident in the mission statement was attention to the holistic development of women that goes beyond an academic focus. One participant spoke with enthusiasm about how the mission statement was more than words on a wall:

And I think that, as I said before, it’s trying to pull out of them what they didn’t see they had. *That’s* my goal. To create these young women that, they’re not going to know everything about the [work] world – they can’t. They don’t have enough experience. But have I given them the tools so that they can navigate that new world? Can they stand on their own? Can, do they have the self-confidence to say, “Well, I may not know it all, but I can learn it,” and “I can help you make these decisions.” You need to make *that* the focus of what we do.

When I asked one participant to describe the environment, she focused on the impact of the mission on a shared understanding within the institution.

I think we all have the same purpose in mind. I think we really are mission-driven—which you hear that at a lot of schools, and I don't think they are as much. But in every meeting that I'm in and every classroom that I'm in, we talk about the mission. We---I think we really live up to it.

For one participant, the mission played such a significant role in the institution's environment, that she cautioned potential employees to understand its implications. "I would say, probably say to anyone, men or women, that they really need to look at the mission. They really need to look at the fact that we're a student-centered agency."

#### Student-Centered Agency

The focus of developing women was discussed in a number of different ways. Like any private institution, student tuition was essential for institutional survival. One participant drew the connection as, "They're our job security. They're not here. We're not here." However, 18 participants specifically commented on the importance of students from a philosophical commitment. One stated, "They basically are committed to the development of the students here, and the way that we define that in terms of service and holistic growth and things like that. So I guess I would say that's probably a shared belief system."

This belief system was modeled by the president who was known for her relationship with students.

She'll talk to them in the hallway. She'll probably know where they're from, who their parents are, what they're majoring in and stuff. She remembers everything because she cares about it. I think that's part of it. Which is good. Isn't that what you want? Somebody in charge who does that?

This focus on the mission of assisting students had two implications. First, it affected how students were viewed when needing assistance. One administrator commented that "I don't have to convince [staff] that we ought to try to help a student. It's not that. It's a matter of, does this make good financial sense for the college and what is the risk for the college?" Participants uniformly discussed students in a positive light.

As a fellow college instructor, I was struck by the absence of grouching about "students these days." Not one person complained about student behavior in a manner that indicated anything but a positive student culture. I recognize that participants may have edited their words for the purpose of this study. However, it spoke to the norms of the institution that talking about students in a positive vein was expected. In addition, the omission of negative comments was paired with enthusiastic descriptions of the unique role the institution played in the education of women. This last fact seemed to guide how the participants viewed even troubling situations: they were an opportunity to serve the mission of the institution by redirecting the students.

Because faculty, staff and administrators had a shared belief in the desire to help students, a second implication was also discussed: How far do you go? An administrator posed this implication frankly:

We don't necessarily embrace *everyone*. If you're not ready for that, if you're not ready for that step, we're not going to baby sit, I guess. We're going to, we're going to set our standards high. But at the same time do it through a compassionate, caring process. We love you as an individual, here's what we want you to do to perform. If you can't perform there, that doesn't mean that you're a bad person. It doesn't mean we don't love you. It just means that at this point, that's not where you should be going. So helping them understand that too. Giving them permission to be something else.

This approach to struggling students was consistent with the positive focus on student development and the mission to help women develop their full human potential.

Although the passion for assisting students was clear, three individuals addressed an issue that will recur in the chapter on decision-making. The consequence of empowering individuals is that they then have minds of their own. When I summarized this sentiment with one participant as "we want you to be powerful—but not in my classroom," the response was simply, "Yeah, that's right." Those who addressed this concern phrased it in terms of ensuring that students were listened to – attentively.

### The Environment at an All-Female Institution

Three participants qualified their statements with the comment that gender alone does not explain differences in the educational environment. "You cannot take one woman and put her in both a coed environment and a women-intense environment at the same time and say, does she learn better?" This comment acknowledged one inherent

dilemma in research done on gender: it is not a variable one can change in a natural setting. In addition to the subjects' gender, other factors are at play, including race, academic preparation, and personality.

Of course when there are no men there that, that makes *somewhat* of a difference. But of course that's not the only reason that students participate or don't participate, or speak their mind or don't speak their mind in class. You know, some are just more naturally extroverted and some are more naturally self-conscious.

Once these disclaimers were given, participants made comments about the general atmosphere in the classroom and on campus. Comments in this area fell under two main observations: the dynamics of a single-sex classroom and the high expectations set for students.

*Dynamics of Single-Sex Classroom: Free from Distraction*

Participants commented on the ability of students in an all-female environment to focus on their education. I selected the comments of one female faculty member and one male faculty member as representative of those who identified students' ability to *focus* as a benefit to the single-sex environment. A female faculty member stated, "I think it really *empowers* women. That all those distractions that a co-ed situation can bring about aren't present in their daily experiences." A male faculty member stated,

They're not worried about [if] the guy over there thinks I'm cute or doesn't think I'm cute....It's just we're friends. You know, we're comrades in this class and we can joke around and we can learn and we can have fun.

Although his comment was reflective of others' observations related to a lack of distraction, it hinted at the stereotype that other informants said is made about the female college: an all-women's environment is where, as one informant stated, "cute little girls go and play." Though none of the participants held this view, several mentioned a social stereotype of women's education as less rigorous than men's education.

### *High Expectations and Academic Excellence*

In contrast to the stated external perception, administrators, faculty, and staff indicated that there was a standard of academic excellence at the institution. A male faculty member stated,

One of the things that really was—exceeded my expectations—was just the overall quality of the students. The willingness of the average student to work hard on assignments. I mean people were really, for the most part, doing their work and taking their academic life seriously.

An administrator suggested that the focus of the institution likely contributed to its expectation: "Because we're committed to women's development doesn't mean we expect less. Actually we probably expect even more." In partnership with the expectation for academic excellence, the institution had high expectations for personal growth.

### *Leadership Development*

When participants described their expectations for leaders, they addressed a number of different aspects of leadership including a focus on the accomplishment of tasks as well as the ability to express one's ideas. Although a few informants indicated

that leaders must be “willing to take the reigns at a task,” others suggested that leaders are sometimes quiet in a group. The majority of informants focused on the ability of an individual to act as a leader by being a role model, taking action, or developing character.

A consistent thread throughout responses was the need for confidence. One female faculty member stated,

They need to be able to evaluate a variety of information that’s brought to them. They have to be able to think critically and then make a decision, communicate it well, and yet stand by it. They have to be, there has to be resolve in the decision.

In a variety of ways, this sentiment was stated over and over again as the mission’s focus on the development of leadership was discussed: “[Good education] really should call the person forth as a person and so therefore, they find their own voice. They have the confidence in what they believe. They understand how to present what they believe.”

“Voice” was a term used with great frequency.

### Voice

Participants identified a need for women to develop their own voice as it relates to developing independent thoughts. One female administrator described it: “They learn how to really find their voice and figure out what they truly want and not just what they thought they wanted or what someone told them they should want.” These comments were frequently paired with observations about women losing their voices in the presence of men. By developing confidence and the ability to voice one’s thoughts, graduates were prepared to engage in mixed-gender organizations. A female staff member stated,



I would hope that when they go out there, they would just treat men as any other person. And maybe not be tarnished by mistreatments or harsh words of instructors who would treat men differently than females. They haven't been exposed to that.

A handful of participants indicated that the skills developed must include the difference between aggressive and assertive techniques.

At least 15 participants applied this concept of developing a voice to their own or others' experiences within the institution. The comments ranged from a discussion of a time when the participant voiced a concern that was met with acceptance, to a suggestion that the institution is grappling with how to "hear" the voices of men in addition to women. This apparent dichotomy between women finding their voices and men being heard seemed to have roots in the same issue: How do "out-group" members gain status within an organization?

One staff member was an outlier in her responses to questions about women's leadership and the mission of the institution. She questioned the limits of women's leadership as:

I don't think women should be submissive, but I think they should be respectful of men, and they should, you know, be able to contribute and have the leadership qualities when they contribute educationally to conversations and help lead the household, but I don't think they should be the absolute leader.

She knew this perspective was in contrast to the majority of faculty and staff, and her contradictory views caused her to feel disconnected from the institution as a whole. "It's

not what I believe so I don't feel as attached, like I feel it would be really easy to quit my job and move on." This contradictory example affirms that the focus on the mission of the institution is pervasive—pervasive enough that an individual had considered leaving because she could not support it fully.

Four of the 7 men indicated that, as a minority on campus, they were concerned about offending others in their language. Two of the participants framed their concern as a gendered response to the comments. For example, one male faculty member stated, "I guess your whole life people tell you women are more sensitive than men. You know and that they're more...what's...you don't want to take the chance to offend anybody." The other two described their concerns in terms of awareness that language can be divisive. "I, I never ever, I don't do this in my own life—I never make gender jokes in the classroom." The only woman who mentioned the potential to offend others with her speech was the woman who voiced concern about women as leaders. Her comments were more directed at wanting to "be a people pleaser" in her interactions with students than a concern about gendered language. No other women indicated a concern of offending others. Although the focus of our discussions did not linger on language, an important dynamic I explored in the interviews was the role of men in a college largely for women.

### Role Models

Male and female participants grappled with the balance of female and male role models on a women's college campus. Women's comments were frequently around the positive experience of working in a primarily-female environment led by an all-female leadership team. One administrator commented, "I remember at one point looking

around the room and just being struck by the fact that the only two men in the room were - worked for food service and were serving our meal...that was a very unique experience to me.”

Largely unable to describe the role of women on campus beyond the symbolic level of wanting female role models for students, one participant acknowledged the chemistry that develops in single-gender environments, both male and female. As this administrator described her own experiences in predominantly female social organizations and friendship groups, she tried to name the dynamic that had gone unstated by many participants.

And we know something different happens, or there is a kind of chemistry or freedom or whatever it is that happens in those situations, that is assistive, you know. And potentially energizing in different ways. But we don't, I don't think we know how to talk about it.

This participant acknowledged that having a predominance of women established a positive working and learning environment on campus. Yet she was very supportive of a visible male presence on campus as well.

Both men and women commented on the importance of having female role models for the female students. “I think that the emphasis is on women, and it's supposed to be on women,” stated one male faculty member. Although a strong female presence was assumed to be essential in a college focused on women, a female administrator stated the dilemma the institution faces when she made this comment:

I would feel like it was wrong if our whole leadership team was men.

Because I think part of our role is not only do our job well, but be a good example to these women. I also don't think we *all* need to be women.

The alternation of each sentence's focus is an indication of the strain participants were voicing between these two desires. Another administrator stated, "I love being in an environment with primarily women. Now, I will say that the men that work here, faculty and staff, are great. And they are just as focused on the success of women as the women are." Embedded in this comment was an assumption that women in the institution are inherently supportive of the focus on women; yet, the female participant mentioned earlier was attempting to find a balance between supporting the development of women and her sense that this sometimes meant pushing women ahead of men.

A female faculty member stressed the fact that the mission is not to prepare women for exclusively female environments. "I think it would be a detriment to our students if there were no male faculty on the campus at all." In fact, one male participant acknowledged that if a woman didn't "want to interact with men, that's a place to go. You don't have to interact with a lot of them." Perhaps due in part to this concern, the positive male presence was identified as important. When referring to the men on campus, one female staff member stated, "The expectations of their behavior and such, I hold to pretty high standards because the young ladies here are going to learn a lot from them about role models – male role models." In this sense, male behavior was assessed as representative of men in general, not just the man in particular. Kanter's (1977) caution of how tokens are perceived addressed this exaggerated attribution of significance to male behavior that was not attributed to female behavior.

Discussions of the balance between male and female leaders in positions of authority seemed to be especially salient due to the recent shift to an all-female leadership team. One administrator suggested,

I think somebody might misconstrue that there's bias. You know, that quote that we'll only hire women. And I don't think that's the case. I think every effort will be made to find a quality candidate and if that candidate is female, all the better. But I think first and foremost, is who is the best person for the position, whatever that position is.

A male faculty member in support of both male and female leadership stated,

I have been on a lot of job searches and almost always we're never given to look for one gender or the other. All that's ever said, and I agree with this 100%, all else being equal, if one of them was male and one of them was female, I'd probably, we're in an all-female institution, give the nod to the female.

The challenge with this preference was that it led to a gender-skewed environment.

### Small College Environment

Eleven individuals referred to the benefit of a small institution, both for students and employees. A female faculty member observed, "I don't know whether it's the size or whether it's the more change-oriented culture. This college is pretty comfortable with change, I think." Men and women held a variety of formal leadership positions and the general sense was that leadership was welcomed from those who were interested. A female administrator thought, "There's a lot of opportunity to move into leadership

positions. It's encouraged." One female participant stammered a bit before she posed a question about whether men felt the same opportunities as women: "Or is it that these guys are really, they...this is sort of not, this is a----this is not a career-building position for them." The hesitation in the language was indicative of the uneasiness she felt in expressing a sentiment that suggested the opportunities for women were not equally available to men. It also suggested that men looking for advancement might not remain in the institution. If options for male advancement appeared limited to some in this institution, the ability to work in a flexible environment was seen as positive.

Participants frequently named flexibility and autonomy as benefits to their work environment. One male staff member indicated that autonomy was a selling point in his taking the position because his supervisor "lets you run your own show." Faculty commented on their ability to design courses and a male faculty member stated, "You have a lot of flexibility in how you teach the courses." The traditional role of faculty supports a level of autonomy in the classroom environment and work schedule.

Three of the 5 female staff members interviewed commented on the level of flexibility in their work environments. "Not that I don't have a lot of autonomy, I do. I have a lot of autonomy, but within certain parameters," stated one staff member. Staff members are frequently in service positions that require offices to be open during specified hours. Acknowledging this constraint, one staff member proposed, "I would like the college, as an all-women institution, to explore the possibility of more female-friendly options such as flex time and job-sharing and things like that." Another female staff member suggested the college was "stuck in the 80's or 70's or whatever. Where, you know, 8 to 5 is the rule." The distinction between positive faculty comments on

flexibility and neutral-to-critical staff comments about dealing with structured work hours is typical in higher education. Yet it also mirrors the power differences within organizations and how those might be exacerbated by gender.

### Why Work at this Institution?

Because the mission was such a strong influence on the situation, I wanted to explore if individuals who worked in the institution had intentionally selected the institution for employment. Twenty-one individuals explained why they chose to apply to the institution: 13 indicated that the *position* was the most significant factor in their application, not the mission of the institution. “It [the all-female environment] didn’t really enter my mind.” Two additional participants indicated that the overall *environment* was attractive, but it was not necessarily the mission of educating women. One participant stated, “I like the smaller institutions and being faith-based, by being able to share faith in the classroom.” Others responded to the focus on teaching: “The teaching purpose was primarily what the faculty were here for.”

Some participants indicated that they would not have considered applying if someone had not contacted them about the job. “It was offered to me. I didn’t seek it out. I would have never applied on my own because the school’s Catholic, I’m a Protestant and a guy.” For many, the reputation of the institution was important as they saw academic and athletic success as an indicator of the institution’s success.

Seven women indicated that the mission of educating women was a significant draw to the institution. One woman summarized her enthusiasm for her position by stating, “It’s about serving women and helping women to improve their lives.” Other

participants indicated that the value of the mission grew as they got to know the institution. “I loved the *somewhat* feminist attitude. I loved the opportunity to watch women grow and develop. So that certainly pulled me.”

Regardless of why individuals came to work at the institution, there was an almost universal enthusiasm for the work to be done. As indicated previously, only two participants spoke with reservation about their roles. These were not divisive comments, but more neutral in terms of their prospect of long-term employment. The vast majority of participants spoke with energy about the vital role of the institution in meeting its mission of educating women for leadership.

My analysis of the “followers” (employees at levels lower than the president), was that the empowerment of women was not the sole reason they sought employment at the institution, yet they were dedicated to this mission. Gaining clarification on the motivation to work at the institution led to a richer exploration of the research questions related to power that motivated this study.

### Research Questions

The grand tour research question that framed this study was: How do men and women in a predominantly-female organization describe their perceptions of power?

Other research questions that focused this study were:

1. How do men and women define power?
2. How do men and women interpret the exercise of power in a predominantly female organization?



3. How do individuals describe their experiences of power in an organization when their gender is dominant?
4. How do individuals describe their experiences of power in an organization when their gender is in the minority?
5. How do women with legitimate power describe their power?

The coding of transcripts led to 74 codes. These codes were then combined to create 20 parent codes. The parent codes were clustered to create seven themes for the dissertation (Table 4.3).

Table 4.1 *Themes and parent codes*

Theme	Parent Codes
1. Mission-Driven Institution	Mission
2. Why Work at this Institution?	Why this institution?
3. Gender is Not an Issue	Gender no influence
4. The Personality Disclaimer	Personality vs. gender
5. Women are...Men are...	Male (environment and style), Female (environment and style), Work Environment,
6. Power Is...Making Decisions	Power (definition), Power (experience), Power (people with it), Informal vs. Positional power, Decision-making, Information, Communication, Trust, confidence, competence and knowledge
7. President's Style	President's style, Best interest of college, Religious organization

The first two themes of mission and why employees work at the institution were discussed in the first portion of this chapter. The findings that follow were framed in terms of five themes:

1. Gender is Not an Issue
2. The Personality Disclaimer
3. Women are...Men are...
4. The President's Style

## 5. Power Is...Making Decisions

For ease of presentation, I grouped the findings related to followers and gender in chapter 5; chapter 6 explores the third facet of the Interactional Framework of Leadership, the leader, and the findings related to the president's style. The findings related to power and implications for the Interactional Framework are in chapter 7.

### Summary

Based on these interviews and observations made on-site, the mission of educating women as future leaders permeated the organizational environment. From women's history posters and artwork in the hallways, to the availability of restrooms, women were the predominant gender visible on campus. Symbolic of the central, and sometimes countercultural, role this played, I was especially struck by the chapel mosaic. In most Roman Catholic churches, a crucifix with Jesus on the cross is the dominant image on the altar. If a depiction of Mary is visible, it is generally in relation to the adult Jesus, and on a side altar. Although Mary is revered within the Church, traditionally she holds a position of honor due to her obedience and maternal qualities. The role of women in the Roman Catholic Church creates debate but has consistently returned to a position of women as helpmates to roles held exclusively by men (e.g. deacon, priest, bishop, pope).

In the chapel at this institution, the blue, wall-sized mosaic was primarily of Mary, Mother of God. Its size and vibrant colors almost obscured the fact that Mary was holding a very small, child-Jesus on her lap. Clearly, Mary was the focus of the mosaic. The choice of a religious symbol in the institution that reinforced the central role of the

woman behind the Savior-Child was significant. Caught in the tension between a church hierarchy that prohibits female contributions to “upper management” decision-making and a college mission that calls forth women to be leaders in their homes, workplaces, and communities, this depiction seemed particularly fitting. Jesus’ presence gave credibility to Mary’s presence behind the altar. Mary’s stature gave credibility to the women who sought more than spiritual fulfillment in their roles as helpmates in the church.

#### Relevance to Previous Research

When I began this study, I did not anticipate that the mission-driven nature of the organization would play such a large role in the findings. I entered the environment interested in the interpersonal dynamics of those employed at the institution and did not give much consideration to the influence of the mission itself on how individuals viewed their work. Though participants stated that they did not come to the institution for the mission alone, it clearly played a role in the level of commitment to their work and their energy.

Research supports the suggestion that the development of a strong culture, as identified by the mission or institutional practices, results in a stronger commitment on the part of employees. Deal and Kennedy (1982) suggest “If employees know what their company stands for, if they know what standards they are to uphold, then they are much more likely to make decisions that will support those standards” (p. 22). As this study progressed, the subtle but significant influence of the mission became clear as a shared focus for faculty, staff and administrators. The president’s decision to promote the

mission as a defining feature of the institution had a fundamental impact on how employees saw their role within the institution, beyond their specific job responsibilities.

As an institution dedicated to the development of women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, the social implications for the mission require attention. The questions raised by participants related to leadership roles and hiring are significant. What does the gendered make-up of the executive team say about men and women working together? What are the unintended consequences of hiring women three times more often than men? How does an institution with a focus on the development of women not ignore the development of male employees? The mission was affirmed by participants as a positive organizing structure for employees. Participants also raised questions pointing to the ways social norms have changed. Participants were committed to the mission of strengthening women, but hinted at questions about how to include men in the process. . The role of the mission in predominantly-female environments deserves more research.

## CHAPTER 5

## THE FOLLOWERS – THE FINDINGS RELATED TO GENDER

## Overview

Participants expressed three main themes related to gender and power. The first of these was “Gender is not an Issue.” It presumed “blindness” to gender and suggested that gender was not a factor in how power was cultivated or expressed within the institution. The second theme was phrased in terms of a disclaimer, “I don’t know if it’s gender or personality, but....” In general, the disclaimer was followed by a characterization that maintained the gender stereotype without attributing it directly to gender. The final theme made no apologies for using gender stereotypes, but instead boldly stated, “Men are this way and women are that way.”

## Gender is not an Issue

Seventeen individuals stated that gender did not have an influence on individuals’ access to power within the institution. Comments related to this were similar to the following:

- “It should be that people are people. And I don’t see men being dominant over women.”
- “They just happen to have a Y chromosome in my mind. It doesn’t make any difference to me. I hope that they feel valued here. I hope they don’t feel as though they’re outsiders.”
- “I don’t think about making *women* leaders. I think about making people, you know, that are of quality.”

- “I see it getting better or changing. I see us starting to look at each other as individuals and I’m excited about that. I think we need to do that all the way around: skin color, individual differences.”
- “I don’t see gender.”

When asked how gender influences access to power, the most frequent response by women was to suggest that gender was not a factor at all. A number of women indicated that they did not notice the institution was predominantly female until I approached them about the study. As members of the dominant group, their attention to the dynamics of difference did not revolve around their gender. In fact, men almost became invisible to some participants. One participant commented that when she teaches in a predominantly female classroom and men are present, she “sometimes find[s] [her]self unintentionally leaving them out of the conversations. Certainly not on purpose. But sort of the dynamics of the room and the conversation.” This honest recollection points to the ease with which the dominant group can begin to ignore members of the minority group.

Another example of the unforeseen consequences of a minority group arose when interviewing a male participant. He stated that the health insurance plan at the institution was very expensive. After discussing this with colleagues and human resources, he realized that because the institution was primarily women who were presumed to be on their husbands’ insurance plans, the premiums were very high for participants. Though he understood the reason for the expensive plan, he also suggested that this might be a burden for male employees. He did not mention that the plan would be expensive for single women or women whose partners were without insurance.

Overall, there seemed to be a continuum of consequences for not noticing gender at all. On one end, participants supported the notion that individuals should be judged by their performance, not their gender. On the other end, not noticing gender led to not recognizing that men might offer a unique perspective in a predominantly female environment. One participant recounted an experience of preparing with colleagues for a presentation on teaching in an all-female environment. The question was raised of whether a man should be asked to join the presentation to give his perspective of teaching in this environment. The responses by the women ranged from, “Why?” to “We don’t need it” to “Even if they have a different perspective, why does it need to be brought up?” These responses reflected the larger issue of not noticing or appreciating how gender may influence one’s experience.

One male spoke in sync with the female comments of not noticing gender. He distinguished his perspective by saying, “They see gender as some defining major thing and I don’t, I don’t see gender that way.” His comments consistently focused on his belief that gender, race and other facets of humanity should not serve as predictors of success or access to power. A subtle difference in language was used by the four other men who made comments related to gender’s impact. The four men were more likely to comment on how gender was not a *factor* in the treatment of men or how conflict was approached, but they did not suggest that gender was not visible or present as the first male participant did. One male participant clarified, “I do not see any challenges because there are more women than men,” Another male suggested, “I’ve never gotten any vibe from the women who have been administrators here that there’s an anti-male [perspective] or things like that in terms of power.” These men acknowledged that gender



was present and a *potential* source of discrimination, but also indicated that the discrimination had not been exercised.

One female was an outlier when addressing the impact of gender on power and decisions. She did not deny the influence of gender and spoke with the most complex understanding of gender of all those interviewed. “Gender matters and it’s more than just biological,” she stated. “We don’t talk about it very well because we get into stereotype language. It’s our language that’s limiting.” Her suggestion that we are limited by our language was a significant observation. Though the individuals who appeared in this section stated that gender was not an influence and was not even noticeable, the same individuals reappear in the next two sections that state a connection between gender and behaviors. Each of the participants who were quoted above also made comments that attributed distinct behaviors or belief systems to men and to women based primarily on their genders. Individuals who wanted to avoid stereotypical language, yet attributed a behavioral difference to gender, frequently fit in the next theme, The Personality Disclaimer.

### The Personality Disclaimer

This theme emerged as individuals were asked about how power was exercised in the predominantly female organization. Phrased in various ways, participants were asked to consider if gender had an influence on how work was accomplished, who participated in committees, or how decisions were made. Fourteen of 25 individuals explored the question by pondering the relationship between personality and gender. One male participant named the reality that personality is influenced by one’s gender. “Maybe

somewhere along the line because they were female they were treated this way, or because they were male they were treated this way, and that of course influences who they are today.” Although he acknowledged that experiences based on gender can influence one’s personality, he did not suggest that individuals were limited to acting from those experiences. “I have been treated great by both, and I’ve been treated poorly by both. And so I don’t know if it’s a trait of a woman or a trait of a [man].” This participant was much less likely to ascribe stereotypical behaviors to gender, though he acknowledged the benefit of an all-female environment for women’s academic success.

The remaining participants shared observations that moved back and forth across the question of whether personality could override gender. Frequently, within the same section of transcript, the participant was (a) naming a stereotypically gendered behavior, (b) suggesting that personality was more the impetus for the behavior than gender, and then (c) returning to a stereotypically gendered comment. An example is as follows:

A participant was describing the contrast between her previous male-dominated institution and the current predominantly-female institution. In section (a), the previous institution was described as having a lot of “maneuvering” in terms of a culture built on a lack of trust. In the current institution, she acknowledged that “the ways that I try to figure out how to get things done certainly are manipulative. I mean I am not saying I don’t act manipulatively. I do.” But she stated that there is a shared desire to help students that builds trust within the current institution, and she had connected that shared belief to the fact that the institution was female-dominated.

In section (b), the participant began to back-track from her distinctions between predominantly-male and predominantly-female institutions by stating,

I don't have a lot of different experiences with male-dominated institutions. So I think in many ways, that institution was influenced by the president as well, who I didn't have much respect for. So you know there's a different president there now. Would it be different? I don't know. I don't know how much of that, -- I'm sure that's a significant influence.

Section (b) began to suggest that the personality of the president was a stronger determinant of the level of trust in the organization than the gender of the leader.

Interestingly, the president's gender was male. If left at this point, the comments would appear to have left the question of gender's influence at a resolution of "personality *overriding* gender." However, one of the final comments made by the participant was the following: In section (c) the participant stated, "It would be very, very hard for me to ever work in a male-dominated institution again. It would just, I am not sure I would tolerate it well." This closing comment clearly stated that, though personality could be a factor, gender would trump personality.

Another participant used a similar pattern when asked to discuss the differences in how male colleagues use power. She began by describing a faculty member's pattern of giving the wrong information to colleagues as a representation of the male use of power. She then stated, he was "just kind of underhanded. Which I think was maybe just his issues (laughter) but I, I see, I guess, my experiences with women are [women] are more likely to talk about it than males are." Her quick attribution of the negative behavior to "his issues" hinted at an acknowledgement that gender could not explain every behavior.

Yet her conclusion rested on a positive gendered understanding of her own group, women.

A female participant suggested that, regardless of the numerical balance of power, organizations develop cultures that influence interactions. As she explored the institution's decision-making practices, she started with a comment suggesting a positive female norm of participatory decision-making. The participant described the environment as, "There is a strong sense of trying to get people's input before decisions are made rather than decisions just being, coming down from the top. You know, so I think the fact that it is more of an all-women's institution..." After drawing this positive conclusion about predominantly-female organizations, the participant added an addendum.

"Although, I do know of some work on, anecdotally, in the corporate world that sometimes, that sometimes powerful women are not very helpful to other women." This addendum acknowledged that gender alone does not explain all behaviors; personality and cultural norms of organizations play a role as well. The participant's inclusion of unhelpful women was similar to other disclaimers peppered throughout her transcript that suggested a positive assessment was "certainly not true of *all* women but..."

Another participant described very different experiences with colleagues' willingness to help her based on the colleagues' genders. Her general assessment was that women were helpful and men were not. She concluded her account by stating, "And again, [it] may be just the personalities and not men versus women, but [it is] something I've noticed." In transcripts such as these, it was clear that individuals were sensitive to stereotypical characterizations that limited individuals to their gender identity. There

were hesitations, pauses, uncomfortable laughter and retractions throughout the transcripts when individuals recognized that they made a generalization based on gender.

The hesitation to rely on stereotypical descriptions of behavior based on gender quickly dissipated, however, when individuals were asked to discuss a “female” or “male” style of leadership.

#### Women are...Men are...

Participants shared a variety of conclusions related to men’s and women’s styles of leadership. Although the two previous themes of “Gender is not an issue” and “The personality disclaimer” were attempts to move away from umbrella descriptions of gender’s influence on individual behavior, the theme of “women are...men are...” relied upon responses clustered around gender. Generally, women’s leadership was described in a positive vein and men’s leadership was described across the spectrum of negative to positive.

Two participants stated they preferred to work for men because men were “easier to work for” and they “take the emotion out of everything. They can make decisions without getting emotionally involved in decisions.” For these two staff members and a female faculty member, the prospect of working at a predominantly female institution was almost enough to not take the job. One female staff member stated, “I had always thought I’d rather work for a man than a woman, because usually they’re easier to work for. But I haven’t found that true here where I’m at.” The female faculty member suggested that women have had to learn how to work together in larger numbers over the last thirty years. She admitted that she “actually avoided all female audiences because of

the dynamics of predominantly female groups.” After coming to the college and doing more research, the faculty member “realized, oh, you just can’t lay a template over predominantly female groups.”

This participant’s conclusion echoed what other participants seemed to be grappling with. Initially, they stated that gender was not a consideration in their daily interactions. Yet when providing examples of various experiences, they spoke in wide generalities about how women and men lead differently. These comments ranged from assessments of leadership skills to the generalization that, as one female participant concluded, women were “naturally more huggers.” The most consistent description given to the predominantly-female institution was in describing the environment as “collegial” and “collaborative.”

#### *Women are... Collaborative*

Statements built upon a theme of collaboration by using phrases such as “It’s a family atmosphere,” “People will help anybody on campus,” colleagues were described as a “team” and a “community,” and the environment was “open.” Several participants noted that there was a generally positive feeling toward colleagues that “really care about each other and will help,” and there was a “spirit of collaboration.” As participants mentioned these experiences of a collaborative environment, they made connections between their ability to do good work and the sense of support they found in the workplace. “I think we all bring different strengths to the table,” stated one participant. Recognizing diversity of thought was a benefit to the organization, another participant stated, “You can bring your ideas forward without being squashed pretty easily.”

One faculty member expressed her experience of collegiality in terms of the informal networks that develop. Her work environment was one where “you know people’s doors are open, they’re willing to talk, they’re willing to share information.” Another faculty member described the environment as “we really work together as a team.” Male participants also described the environment as “homey. It’s a family atmosphere.” Another male faculty member stated that he could “go to some of my colleagues and ask for assistance” when he faced a new obstacle. Each of these comments contributed to an overall depiction of the predominantly-female environment as one that works collaboratively.

*Men are...Hierarchical*

When participants wanted to describe the environment based on a contrast, they made statements such as “I haven’t felt any kind of jockeying for power,” the institution was “not as egocentrically-oriented or bottom-line oriented,” people were not “on an ego trip,” and the environment was “more collegial instead of controversial.” A general contrast to typical academic environments was made by one participant. “Academia can become excruciatingly political and ‘I’ll get to what I need on your shoulders if I have to, whether you volunteer them or I climb on top of you.’ And I don’t feel that here.” Although this participant identified internal political struggles in some academic environments, another participant suggested that women were particularly adept at avoiding organizational politics.

You really need to have a collaborative effort with faculty. And so, to me it’s a good fit for women to be in because I think they work well in that.

I’m not saying that men don’t, but overall, I think my experiences –

sometimes men work better in the, “We understand our roles, we each play a role.” Where sometimes I think women are more about getting work done and not worrying about the roles.

This participant’s comments attributed a collaborative atmosphere to the influence of women and a hierarchical environment to the influence of men. An administrator suggested that a previous male-dominated environment was “hierarchical and sort of [focused on] suspicion between divisions and territorialities.” One participant suggested that being predominantly female allowed the institution to “more naturally foster collegiality. Whereas, I believe a male-dominated institution, because it is engrained in that gender, is going to be more competitive.” This question of a hierarchy within the organization was reinforced by another administrator who stated, “I think women tend to see their work as a shared collaboration so there’s less distinction between administration, faculty and staff. Because what we’re after is the furthering of the mission of the institution and we’re all in this together.” Again, the mission of the institution served as a yardstick against which to measure expected behaviors.

A different perspective was offered by a male faculty member. His assessment was that, although the interactions appeared “softer,” “If I was talking to an outsider, I would probably say, ‘Don’t be fooled by the softness of the atmosphere because the bottom line is still the bottom line and the power is there and will be used as it needs to be used.’” His comment revealed a potential contrast between how work is talked *about* and how work is *conducted*.



*Collaborative to What Degree?*

An administrator attributed some of the differences between theory and practice to the realities of time. “Sometimes time forces us to take action quickly and it can offend someone without getting their input. But, overall I think there’s a good sense of respect and less need to, I guess, play the games.” Another participant suggested that “the hardest part [of collaboration] is working with people that don’t respect the rules.” Her comments focused on the fact that when a workplace relies upon collaborative work, all employees must be engaged in this effort.

If an employee is really a detriment to the team or the institution, isn’t following the rules, won’t listen to reason, you know, won’t change his or her behavior, then I think it’s time to go beyond a verbal warning, and a written warning, to say maybe this just isn’t the right place for you.

Every organization must determine how much dissent is allowed within the organization before the dissent becomes detrimental. When an organization prides itself on its collaborative spirit, the relevance of the question is heightened.

A faculty member noted that committees were developed with cross-campus representation to “really mix people together.” One administrator said, “We are truly looking for people who are, who are collaborative. Who are good communicators. Who have a strong work ethic. Who are very focused on the mission of the college.” A staff member applied this idea of collaboration to her department when she stated, “I don’t necessarily say I answer to my peers, but I do feel a responsibility to them.” The sense of mutual accountability varied according to the situation and the person. One participant suggested that some faculty members have left because “they wanted to run their own

show. And, no, you have to be able to work within the environment that you're placed in." In other words, performance was measured by the process used to accomplish tasks in addition to the final product. The reality of this study environment was that it operated under what it considered to be a collaborative model and therefore, expected faculty, staff and administrators to engage in this model.

Specifically related to collaboration between men and women, phrases such as "equal partners," "on level with," "We are equals and we feel we're equals," "It's a work *with* attitude versus a work *for*," were sprinkled throughout the interviews. These phrases revealed the consistent message that the institution focused its attention on the development of women at all levels: students, faculty, staff, and administration, and that men would be expected to hold the same focus.

#### *Men Adapt...or Leave*

Though the institution was numerically dominated by women, one participant stated that the institution had "men who have positions of influence and...men who are seen as informal leaders as well." When the contributions of men were spoken of with favor, they were frequently mentioned because they had adopted a style that matched that of the women at the institution or, as one staff member described it, "They kind of blend in well." One faculty member observed that "*most* of the men who teach here are really comfortable with that style of decision-making and leadership and interaction." Several female participants identified the collaborative environment as a female characteristic and determined that successful men would have to adapt to that style of leadership. An administrator suggested that,

The men that are successful here in their positions are men that have many of the same qualities and values that the women leaders do here too. We have had men come and go here who come in with a much more traditionally male hierarchical power, talk down, and they don't last. Because this is not the environment for them.

A female faculty member surmised, "For men who have worked in a very traditional setting, I'm not sure this would be that comfortable....I don't think men would have the traditional kinds of power that they might have in other settings." Another faculty member suggested that:

Males find themselves forced to work in a more collaborative environment than they might find elsewhere, and I think if they cannot, they leave. They have to be ready to not just come in, give directions, make a decision, say it's a go. They have to be willing to sit on endless committees and task forces and take time. Of course, academia takes time for everything anyway.

This issue of time and the amount of time it takes to make a decision was a point of distinction for a number of the participants. These participants suggested that the male timeline for decision-making was much shorter than the female timeline.

#### *Women Discuss...Men Decide*

A consistent theme across interviews was the conclusion that women spent more time focused on the process of a decision and group cohesiveness than men. A female staff member stated, "I see men as a lot more task-oriented and women sort of more maintenance-oriented. So I just wonder if they've had to be less —eh-eh-eh, you know,

and a little more nurturing.” This question was supported by a female faculty member who summarized her experiences on committees by noting:

Committee work anyway, tends to be a lot of discussion and hashing through. I do see there’s a *few* of the men that would just like, “Okay, let’s just get it done, let’s just get it over with. We’ve talked about it, okay, let’s just act on it.”

One faculty member summarized the distinction between male and female faculty participation by assigning quick decision-making to men. “There might have been some gendered styles of communicating, let’s make the decision now. Without getting input—sort of the masculine style of communicating.”

In each of the examples, participants shared the qualities of men who remained with the institution and appeared to be well-adjusted, as well as those who decided to leave. The men who left were, based on one staff member’s perspective, “frustrated” because “things weren’t going the way [they] wanted them to go.” A faculty member suggested, “They were leaving because of the way that decisions are made and things like that.” Others suggested, “Men struggle in the women’s college environment by---just not having the same kind of support system. Women are so familial, you know, relationship oriented...maybe there’s a feeling of disconnect or something uncomfortable in that.” In each of these comments, participants acknowledged that the environment demanded specific behaviors and rejected other behaviors. Without interviewing those who left, it was impossible to determine if men left because of the communal environment, if they left because their voices were not heard in the decision-making process, or if they left for

other reasons. Chapter 7 will explore the decision-making process within the institution.

Over and again I heard the comment that if men cannot “fit in,” they leave.

### The Minority as Suspect

For a number of participants, the nature of having just a few men on campus made them more noticeable. Though few in number, one participant noted, “At times, depending upon who’s been in the leadership positions, like administrative levels, that some of us who’ve been around for awhile have sensed that there’s been a little bit of an old boys’ network. It’s like a subculture [of men].” Another staff member questioned the impetus of these gatherings: “Sometimes I see males, male staff members and male faculty kind of congregate together. But I don’t know if it has to do with their gender, or if it has to do with personality traits.” Regardless of the reason for the gatherings, the participants noted gatherings of men.

Another faculty member surmised that the remote location of the men in the math and science department made the group “a little suspect.” Affirming this comment, a faculty member suggested that the physical distance was a symbol for an interpersonal distance between the predominantly male faculty in one building and the predominantly female faculty in another building. “There’s a separateness there that has, it’s created a sense of distance, you know, for them. And us from them, too.” In each of these responses, the participants drew a connection between a visible minority on campus, men, and how that minority connected with others within the same group. None of the participants suggested that the men were “conspiring,” but their comments revealed some uneasiness around the fact that men clustered at specific points.

In contrast to the comments by women, the men failed to identify an informal network of men. One male staff member agreed with the comment of men being isolated as he said, “There is kind of an island.” A male faculty member stated that, though he is “more likely to chat with the other male faculty members,” he has “not noticed any sort of informal network of male employees...it could just be that I am left out!” he joked. Men talked about connecting with one another out of a sense of being familiar with one another’s experience as one of the few men, but did not indicate that there was a shared perspective or an intention to develop such an alliance.

The advice one staff member gave to potential male hires was to “make sure that they’re always very careful.” When asked to clarify this statement, she indicated that the risk of being accused of sexual harassment was higher for men and they should take steps to prevent accusations. This was especially true because of a sexual assault perpetrated by a non-employee that occurred a few years ago.

Although participants identified the suspicion of men as sexual predators as external to the institution, one participant suggested, “They’re not always understood. I think sometimes that they are falsely accused of---um, that their motives maybe aren’t always up and up.” An administrator recognized that the dynamic could be awkward for men when she said, “There is some weirdness about, well, I’m married and I got kids so I shouldn’t be having lunch with all these women over at the dining hall.” Another participant described the informal rules that guide interactions in a business setting. In describing a typical business interaction, she said, “Guys walk in there and they put their business cards all on the table.” Though women could do this too, “What if your wife finds somebody’s business card in your pocket?” I found these comments to be

interesting as they clearly implied that male-female friendships or professional relationships were difficult to establish or maintain. And they also suggested that wives would be suspicious of their husbands: a comment that reflects a degree of insecurity and resistance on the part of women to accept other women in professional roles.

### Men are...Leaders

Though participants made distinctions between cultural stereotypes of men and how they perceived men to engage in the study institution, they also acknowledged that some of the cultural stereotypes were at work *within* the institution. Asked what obstacles men face, one staff member offered “I think our society in general unconsciously expects men to be in the position of power and to not be *submissive?* *Obedient?* You know, to follow the direction of a predominantly-female organization.” Her comment revealed that, though the institution was supportive of female and male leadership, the men within the organization potentially faced an additional cultural pressure to lead. An administrator named this pressure as a burden. The administrator recounted her experience with a male employee at a previous institution who later shared with her that he was receiving negative pressure from his family about having a female supervisor.

Sometimes with men I had to spend more time understanding a little bit of that burden that they carry because that’s a burden for them too. The force of ego on them. You know, the force of “You’re supposed to be the man; you’re supposed to take charge.” Helping them understand there is not a power here. It’s get the job done.

As she shared this story, she stated that the employee's negative behavior stemmed from the external pressure he was receiving. She cautioned that it was not always possible to know what was causing the negative behavior. "It's usually a third straw man that's out there causing the issue." This administrator's depiction of the external forces that influenced an employee, gave some latitude to men who exhibit negative work behaviors, latitude not generally granted by other participants.

### Men are...Not Engaged

When questions moved from abstract queries about gender to more specific questions about male engagement in the institution, participants made a significant shift in assessment. A recurring theme in responses revolved around a lack of engagement on the part of men in the institutional work of committees and special projects. One faculty member suggested that the lack of male participation in committees was intentional: male faculty members demonstrated incompetence and then they were not asked to do more work. "They just kind of do their job and don't take on additional responsibility and just, and then they're kind of left alone. Not asked to do any more either." The participant was asked what the response was when these faculty members were asked to engage more deeply. "They don't do it. Or they're not as effective in their leadership role and, of course, these are big generalizations. Or in the past, maybe they were more combative almost." The perspective that men refused to participate was reinforced by another faculty member who stated, "You know, [they've] turned [it] down when they've been invited to participate on projects. They might claim workloads, but they've done that."



Another administrator concluded, “I see the men not following through, not taking minutes, not doing the little tasks that need to be done with the committee, ‘someone else can do that.’” Each of these descriptions pointed to a deliberate choice on the part of men within the institution to disengage from the work not directly related to their roles.

A slightly different perspective was shared by a female faculty member when asked to consider if there were specific expectations of men in the institution. After a significant pause, she stated,

There’s a few men at some of the meetings [who] will say some things and people just kind-of go ‘*what?* Where did that come from or what does that mean or why would you even *say* that?...I don’t think it’s that they’re *dumber*, I mean, I know how that kind of sounds.

The implication was that the expectations for male contributions to discussions were minimal; their contributions were sometimes so off-base that they were viewed as irrelevant. Clearly this comment was restricted to “a few men,” and she added that “It’s not like it’s every day,” yet she considered it significant enough to share it in the context of general observations about expectations for male participation.

In contrast to this, a female staff member recounted an experience with a particular male committee member who would not engage in the meetings. However, when she asked him to conduct work outside of the meetings, the work was “beautiful, wow, I’m really impressed by this.” This story led to a question of how men and women communicated their expectations of one another and adjusted their work styles.

One faculty member suggested that “women faculty come in with the idea that they’ll just give and give. Hours, whatever it takes. We’ll support everything the students are doing.” The comment about women giving “Whatever it takes” raised the issue of how women responded to concerns that they had too much work. Did men advocate for themselves in a manner that allowed them to turn down projects they thought would be too time-consuming? Did women take on too many projects? Failing to do one’s job is not acceptable, however, did this example hint at a deeper issue of how men and women responded to stress? A female faculty member shared an example of a time she had to turn down a request twice because she knew she was already over-extended. Yet other female participants talked about the problem of “wearing lots of hats,” being “stressed,” or being asked to do more with less. In some aspects, men and women were responding to similar stresses with different coping mechanisms.

Along those same lines, a female faculty member shared that she had noticed a “double-standard” that favored women. She recounted a story of when a male employee acted in a negative, unprofessional manner. The female faculty were “disparaging” of that. Not long after that, a female employee exhibited similar behaviors and was met with laughter. She responded by asking her colleagues,

Why is this okay when it’s coming from this person and it wasn’t from this other person? They didn’t know what to say....They didn’t have a response. I thought, we can’t play that card. It can’t be alright just because it’s a female.

This faculty member’s experience demonstrated that the expectations for men and women were not always consistent. It also pointed to the fact that it was not always the

*behavior* that was the issue, but sometimes *who exhibited* the behavior. This point supported the developing theme that, though various behaviors were described, more often than not, it was the gender of the individual that determined the response.

Members of the in-group (women) were given more latitude than members of the out-group (men). This observation supports the research of social psychologists who identified *categorization* and “cognitive economy” (Rothbart, as cited in Fiske, 1998, p. 362) as efficient, though inaccurate, systems for the brain to process information about individuals by relying upon stereotypes (Fiske, 1998). In essence, these theories conclude that there is an “outgroup homogeneity effect” (Fiske, 1998, p. 367) in which those who view members of the outgroup see them as “less variable than average...and [view] the ingroup as reliably more heterogeneous than average” (Fiske, 1998, p. 367). In this study, the women viewed men more often as a unified group and rarely categorized women in the same manner.

An administrator suggested that the minority status of men elevated the expectations of men. “I think when you are in the minority, you do have to work a little bit harder; especially if you have other people in your group who are not pulling their weight.” She added, “When you hire a guy and it’s not a good hire, then that just makes everybody like, see, we need to hire a woman.” A staff member suggested that because there are so few men, their voices are not heard as well. “It would be uncomfortable not being able to have more of a voice of what’s going on. Pretty much the only guys that stay around are the ones that are in leadership positions.” This comment suggested that men needed to have a formal status within the institution to exert influence.

And yet, as I asked about the status of men from the perspective of being a minority population in the institution, one participant cautioned,

There are very strong males in that [minority] so I would hope that somebody wouldn't presume that they're not strong. That they're being, you know, I don't want to talk about hen-pecked husband, but I can't think of the wording I want to use...that they're being female-dominated.

Because they flex their muscles as well as we do ours.

The choice of descriptors used in this statement, "hen-pecked husband" and "flex their muscles," served as a window into the stereotypical gender references with which participants seemed to be grappling. Another participant dismissed the suggestion that the small number of men may result in an imbalance of power by stating, "they don't look oppressed at all."

Though a direct connection between gender and voice within the institution was not drawn, participants referred to various ways that men were assessed based on the ability to match the organization's value of collaborative, self-sacrificing work.

### Men Who Stay

Despite these inconsistent descriptions of male and female standards of behavior, there was a consistent pattern when female participants were asked to describe the men who did well in the organization. In contrast to the discussion of committee work, women described men with longevity as those who "demonstrated a commitment to the vision, the mission of the college." Men were frequently referred to as "gentlemen," "gentle," and "contributors." They were considered "very kind" and "very collaborative." In

contrast to the terms used to describe the mission of the institution in educating strong, articulate, capable women, the frequency of the use of the term “gentle” when describing successful men was telling. Each of the terms used in this section alluded to an inferior status within the organization that belies the stereotypically masculine characteristics described in other sections. In fact, the participants used adjectives such as “meek” and “passive,” terms not generally associated with members who do well in organizations. There was a stark contrast between the general discussion of gender’s influence in the organization (non-existent or neutral), the specific discussion of male engagement in the institution (negative), and the description of men who have longevity in the institution (positive and passive).

### Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the ways the followers described gender in their environment. The themes developed around three main perspectives. The first perspective centered on statements that concluded gender is not an issue. Participants described how, from their perspectives, gender was not considered or not even noticed when decisions were made or individuals worked together. The second perspective was identified as the personality disclaimer. This theme appeared to be a way to navigate around gendered language to arrive at a gendered conclusion. Rather than attributing behavior to an individual’s gender, participants suggested that the behavior could be attributed to a factor of personality; yet the behavior was consistently matched with a stereotypically gendered action. The final theme consisted of the richest data. Participants simply stated conclusions about how men are and how women are. This theme took

numerous paths, but all returned to general observations that relied on just one characteristic: gender.

#### Relation to Previous Research

The results reported in this chapter are rich with connections to the literature. The initial finding of women not seeing gender, supported the critique offered by literary critic Annette Kolodny of those who claim “intellectual neutrality” (Frueh, 1988, p. 156-157). When women suggested that gender did not enter their thinking, they were speaking from the majority status which offered them isolation from the experience of being a token or minority. This supports Kirkahm’s (1985, cited in Bryans & Mavin, 2003) conclusion that the majority group spends very little time considering the life of the minority group. When participants discussed their suspicions of men occasionally gathering together informally, they were making note of the few gatherings...rather than making note of the many times “they” (as women) gathered together.

This feature of an environment comprised primarily of women exposed an interesting twist to the typical assessment of organizational culture. Because most studies of power have been conducted in environments with men in the majority, “entering the ritual life of a culture [has been presumed to be] a hurdle women and minorities have to overcome” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, p. 78). In the case of this study, the preponderance of women shifted the balance to the degree that the warning is consistent, but the target population has shifted: “A company cannot get the best work from anyone who is an outsider looking in....Unless the barriers that keep women and minorities out of the cultural mainstream of corporate life can be overcome, there will be no way for the

company or society at large to benefit from the huge reservoir of untapped human capital” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, p. 78). One could argue that, for the study institution, *men* faced barriers that left their human capital untapped.

Carol Gilligan wrote in the preface to the 1993 edition of *In a Different Voice* that she continued to discover the meaning of “voice” even after the first edition was published in 1982. Gilligan suggested that to understand voice, one must understand the connections between the physical, emotional, and cultural.

And voice is a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds. Speaking and listening are a form of psychic breathing. This ongoing relational exchange among people is mediated through language and culture, diversity and plurality. For these reasons, voice is a new key for understanding the psychological, social, and cultural order—a litmus test of relationships and a measure of psychological health (Gilligan, 1993), p. xvi).

Gilligan’s words are a reminder that being heard is critical for individual and collective health. Ironically, her work was a groundbreaking call for women’s voices to be heard. Just 15 years later, the women in the study have found their voices but do not hear the unique voices of men. Gilligan laments that “When I hear my work being cast in terms of ... who is better than whom, I know that I have lost my voice, because these are not my questions” (Gilligan, 1993, p. xiii). Her concerns are relevant to this study as well.

Without naming the style as *transformational*, women described women’s leadership in the institution with the associated adjectives: collaborative, listening to one another, collegial. Women also described male leadership with the agentic behaviors of

authoritarian, domineering, and focused on action. Such stark descriptions belie the lived experience of participants in this study who portray men and women in absolute contrast, yet witness a female president who exhibits the agentic behaviors attributed to men.

As the themes in this chapter were developed, power's influence in the descriptions of leadership behaviors were called to mind. Gaventa (1980) explored power in a political science context and raised the possibility that power was at work, not only in decision-making, but also in the culture of the organization or system. Gaventa proposed that when A exerts power over B,

Over time, the calculated withdrawal by B may lead to an unconscious pattern of withdrawal, maintained not by fear of power of A but by a sense of powerlessness within B, regardless of A's condition. A sense of powerlessness may manifest itself as extensive fatalism, self-deprecation, or undue apathy about one's situation" (1980, p. 16-17).

As male participants described their impressions of the organization and as female participants described their impressions of the men who stayed at the organization, Gaventa's proposal seemed worthy of further exploration. The terms used to describe men, "gentle," "meek," and "passive," are all terms that the powerful might use to describe those who have adopted the stance of powerlessness. Though this information appears to support the literature, we will revisit these assumptions in chapter 6 when we discuss the style of the female president.



## CHAPTER 6

### THE LEADER

#### Overview

As indicated in the discussion of the situation in chapter 4, the president of the institution was hired during a period of significant financial and institutional crisis. By all accounts, she transformed the institution by defining its mission and developing innovative programs that served that end. To achieve this goal, she made difficult decisions related to programs, personnel, and the budget. A consistent description of her leadership was that she focused on data-driven decisions at every level of the organization to best serve students. In addition, participants described her decision-making emphasis as one that did not focus on building relationships or consensus, but on the quality of the decision itself. Because participants had so uniformly described the predominantly-female environment as “collaborative,” it was this contrast that led me to develop a line of questions that pursued the model of decision-making exhibited by the president.

As will be discussed in chapter 7, the power in the organization was ascribed to those with positions of authority, access to resources, and an ability to influence others through relationships. When I placed these descriptions next to those summarized in chapter 5 on gender, there was a significant gap between how participants described women’s leadership and how they described the leadership of the female president. Though the president was praised for listening to employees when they disagreed with decisions, it was clear that there was also a degree of consternation for those who believed she was too intimately involved on a day-to-day basis with lower-level

decisions. The focus of this chapter is on how participants (followers) perceived their president (leader) within the context of the situation.

### Transformed the Institution by Raising the Bar

The president made significant changes that focused the institution more intentionally on the mission. (Read exploration in chapter 4.) A male faculty member recounted how the new president was greeted when she began at the institution.

When the president came in originally, a number of years ago, she came in and discussed her philosophy with the faculty. There were many that were very unhappy about some of the things that were going on, but she stood her ground and said, “This is the way it’s going to be, and this is the way I see it.” And some of the people left and some of the people decided to get on board and drive the train with her.

When asked a follow-up question about how individuals decided if they should leave, the faculty member responded,

She didn’t come out and say [anything about firing], but from her actions and what she did say, it was...pretty straight forward that either you were going to push the train forward, or the train was going to run over you.

In other words, it would not be possible to continue at the institution if you were not prepared to adapt to new requirements. For example, the president sought to increase the reputation of the institution by increasing requirements for faculty to have terminal degrees. These efforts were seen as “raising the bar about what [she] believed the

institution could accomplish, and that frustrated people.” The inertia of institutional history made these changes difficult for some members.

In addition to the institution’s reputation in the community, one of the president’s early tasks was to restore financial solvency. An administrator noted,

When you come into a college and there are financial issues, it usually takes a very strong president to, to tighten them. And you’re not going to like it. But they really have to for the survival, when you’re in survival mode.

A shift such as this required the attention of the president at every level of the struggling organization. The participant suggested that typically, once the organization makes strides toward recovery, “You’ll see maybe the president loosening up a little bit, but you probably will still sense those hands that were down [in the organization]. You know, it’s not going to completely go away.” This observation put the president’s involved style in a larger context of behaviors that are necessary for leaders who are challenged to shift an organization’s momentum.

Understandably, faculty and staff who were present during the turn-around had a range of responses to the shift. “Although [she] was looked upon as sort of the great white knight, to use one image, I think after [she] was here for a couple of months people thought, ‘Oh, my God, she’s going to kill us.’” Higher expectations and a tightening of the budget left employees wondering if the institution would be able to pull through. The shift in expectations led some individuals to leave the organization. As one participant noted, “It’s the people you have on the bus that make all the difference.” This participant

sympathized with the president's difficult situation when stating, "Those were some of the hardest decisions that [the president] made. And she was right."

When organizations make such dramatic shifts, it raises the question of whether the same person can both turn the organization around and lead it through a maintenance phase. Reflecting on whether the president's style had changed since the early years, a participant commented, "You get to *know* the people that are around you, and so you probably would not operate that way ten years hence." Yet, some in the institution suggested that the president's style had not shifted dramatically from the internal focus necessary for institutional turn-around. A variation one participant noted was that "If you looked at these previous presidents...one of the major distinctions you would make is that they really focused externally and she focuses so heavily internally. It's hard." This participant's comments highlighted the new direction the president would have to move if she was to become a more "traditional" president. One could argue, however, that the president's focus on internal operations was precisely what saved the institution from the damage done by previous presidents who knew too little of the internal struggles. Although participants occasionally voiced frustrations with the decisive style of the president, generally, they voiced praise for her leadership.

Participants associated a range of qualities with the president. The majority of comments fell in three categories: the president's approachability; the president's work ethic; and the president's reputation.

### President's Approachability

Based on participant comments, the president's style seemed to be one of down-to-earth practicality. Participants did not share stories of lavish parties or executive privileges. The president ate in the college cafeteria and was noted as "not a president in her office. She's out---everywhere." An administrator described her, "She's very much of the people." Her open door policy meant that faculty, staff and students had ready access to her. When a male faculty member was asked about the assets of the institution, he stated the president "is the biggest asset, I think. She is friendly, approachable. The president sets the example by being friendly." This assessment of friendliness and accessibility was affirmed by a participant who commented on her experience as a new faculty member. "[The president] immediately knew who I was. Called me [by my first name], which I appreciate. And then every time I saw her it was, you know, 'How's it going?'" The president's approachability caused one participant who was new to the institution to describe her as "compassionate and tangible."

Though her approachability was viewed as an asset, some participants acknowledged that her unremitting presence had a downside. "It does make people nervous. But you know, I think she means well." As will be discussed later in this chapter, the president was known for getting involved in decisions that were several levels below her. This engagement, although frustrating, also led to participants' respect for her work ethic.

### President's Work Ethic

The president's style was summarized by one participant as, "She knows what she's talking about and she gets the job done." Her ability to get the job done was largely through her work ethic. A staff member commented, "I don't think our president ever gets stressed out; I don't know where she gets her energy (laughing). You know, she thrives on it...I think it energizes her." As this participant discussed the president's focus on the institutional demands, another participant was impressed by her ability to look beyond the present moment and maintain high standards. She stated that she was "a president who is visionary, charismatic, a task-mistress. She holds herself to a higher standard than she does the rest of us. She doesn't make all of us do what she does....But she expects you to do your job." The president's high expectations led the organization out of financial struggles and continued to challenge faculty and staff to "work smarter."

### President's Reputation

For some participants, previous experiences with or knowledge of the president gave them the desire to work in the institution. "When this opportunity came up, I thought, I would *love* to work under her. I think she's a strong leader." This reputation for skills in leadership included a reputation for being decisive. The participant divulged that the president's reputation in the community suggested her style may create challenges in a work environment. "People warned me when I was interviewing. They're like, 'Oh, she's very, you know, likes to get her way.'" Liking to get her way alone was not enough to dissuade this participant from accepting a position. What was most important to her was, "Does she do it respectfully, professionally, and is it for the right

reasons? And they're like oh, yeah, yeah, yeah." With the assurance of the president's professional demeanor, the participant remained eager to work under the president's guidance.

Similarly, another participant identified the importance of having a president to be proud of in the community. "I think she is fantastic. She's the kind of person who I want to represent us." Another participant was impressed by her "amazing mind. She keeps track of everything." Others described her as "a very strong woman and a strong leader, and her influence is felt throughout the campus certainly." One reason her presence is so widely felt is that the president is engaged with the entire college community. "I'll hear in the hallway her talking to one of our students, say, 'Oh, I remember you had mentioned something about your family back in Memphis. How's everything going?' And you're like, how does she remember all this stuff?" The most intriguing part of this description of the president's interaction with students sprang from the knowledge that the president's strengths were in data and analysis, not the fostering of social relationships.

A participant recalled that the president shared her Emergenetics profile with the college faculty and staff at a meeting a few years ago. She warned them that due to her having "about 40-some percent analytical, another 40% conceptual and...very little green and red...4% social," they would have to stop her and pointedly say, "Be interested." This non-apologetic disclosure of her style was repeated by many participants. Based on the number of times participants referred to the president's focus on data and analysis, it could be concluded that the vast majority of employees understood the president's style as a fixed force within the organization. Aware of her style, the president may have altered her interactions with employees; however participants did not express an

expectation of the president adjusting her style to fit the organization. When asked if the president's style was collaborative, one participant responded, "Um...she's collaborative, but probably more because she needs to be. I think she's fine making decisions on her own."

This chapter is dedicated to the exploration of the president's leadership style. If one acknowledges the exercise of leadership as an expression of one's personality, the president's insistence on data-driven decisions can be understood. A participant provided an example of how the president's high expectations transferred to how she responded to relatively minor errors. "Because her big thing is, she's like, 'If I find one little problem, there's tons more out there I didn't see in this area.' That's really her philosophy.... 'Well, what else is out there?'" By drilling down to lower levels, the president sought to avoid future mistakes. Though this participant understood the intention, other participants occasionally defined the president's actions as intrusive.

Other participants responded to the president's engagement as something to avoid. "There's also the perception there of, don't really get too close because she'll give you some work." The pursuit for data left one participant wary of conversations that might otherwise have been seen as the president expressing interest. "In any type of formal or informal encounters, [she] is questioning what's going on in your area, expects immediate answers and remembers everything that's said." From this participant's perspective, the president's informal conversations are infused with the desire to effect change at every level of the organization.

Throughout the interviews, participants switched between accounts of their involvement in decision-making and accounts of the president's frequent engagement in



decisions at a much lower level than her position. The disconnect of organizational distance made it difficult for participants to know which issues the president would decide and which issues were left to departments or individuals.

I guess what is surprising to the people under her are the decisions that she chooses to make by “let’s all vote” and kind of take a community feel, versus the ones she just arbitrarily makes. *That* I think is what’s surprising, because sometimes they are little tiny decisions.

The confusion voiced by this participant was echoed by others who were unsettled by the sense of lower-level involvement on the part of the president and others. “What I think happens is she wants to know all of the details and so then her direct reports—her [administrators]—turn around and pass that on down the line, which makes their job very stressful...It’s just passed down the line.” As the demand for more information was perpetuated, faculty especially noted a continued day-to-day engagement by the president. “I have to assume it’s fairly unique. Only to the size of our institution...I don’t think [the chancellor at a state university] has discussions with anybody at the program level regarding developing their program or increasing enrollment, that kind of thing.” Due to this focus of the president at the department level, participants echoed one faculty member’s comments, “I hear people who say we need a VPAA who can get between us and [the president].” The sentiment expressed was primarily in terms of the president’s engagement with decision-making throughout the institution.

## Making Quick Decisions

In addition to being very aware of what occurred at each level of the organization and dealing “very directly” with what she learned, the president was seen as a quick decision maker. One participant described it as, “She is very efficient in making decisions. You don’t spend a lot of time with her. You have a half-hour appointment, but you are done in 10-15 minutes.” A male faculty member admired the fact that she moved to a resolution quickly. “Rather than waiting and waiting for a decision, she doesn’t spend a lot of time making decisions.” Though the efficiency was appreciated, there was some concern that she made “decisions way too fast.” A staff member agreed that her decisions are made “sometimes too quickly, maybe. Which she may want to change.” The advantage of such efficient decision-making from this staff member’s perspective was, “If you want a decision, you won’t get anything wishy-washy. You will get a yes or a no, or a do this, which is important again. You don’t feel like you’re leaderless or rudderless, because she does [make decisions].” A male participant cautioned that the efficient timeline should not be confused with effectiveness, “She’s just as likely to get some things wrong as anybody else.” Yet a female staff member noted, “She’s usually pretty right.”

Due to the president’s reputation for having firm opinions on what should be done and not be done, participants saw value in running ideas past her before investing significant time and effort in initiatives. An administrator reflected that before her division undertakes significant study of an issue, “I have a conversation with her and say, ‘Well, this is kind of what they’re thinking. Is this something that you would even consider?’” If she is given at least initial openness to the idea, she proceeds with her

staff. The combination of engagement in decisions at lower levels and the perceived need to run ideas past the president before exploring them further raised the question of how the organization explored innovative programs or areas beyond the expertise of the president.

#### Focused on Data

Throughout the interviews, it was interesting to note how often women suggested data-driven decisions, or task behaviors, were a natural habit for women. It was clear that the president's single-minded focus on this, and likely the demonstrated success of the financial turn-around of the institution, had the effect of causing others to value this stereotypically-male (or agentic) process as well. Not all participants suggested that this approach was their own strength. As one participant stated, "I'm not near as analytically-driven as she is. And that's been a challenge for me to respond to that need of [the president's]." As the participant discussed her contributions to the organization, she shared,

I'm much more, I think of a peace maker than she is. And that's probably helpful, in terms of maybe attending a bit more to the feelings of how, how, people are buying into the ideas. And not just full steam ahead. And you gotta have that buy-in along the way.

Her comments were interesting as she was identifying the maintenance role of Lewin's task-maintenance behaviors. Both task and maintenance behaviors are essential for effective group process. As individuals within the organization shared their perspectives, it became clear that the president's primary focus on task behaviors left others to attend

to the maintenance behaviors. This was simply stated by a female faculty member who summarized the president's group role and then commented, "And maybe I just need to accept that and not expect anything else."

This faculty member's final statement revealed a split between the expectations of a leader (specifically, a woman leader) and the actions of the president. Another participant acknowledged that the president did not give attention to maintenance roles when she clarified, "She's not, you know women—I guess, traditionally, tend to socialize and gain ground support and lobby and do all that." This participant's distinctions reinforced the conclusion that, though participants were pleased with the overall performance of the president, they noticed a gap between what was expected of the president and what was expected of a woman leader.

The split between expectations of a female (or communal) leader and the reality of the president's acknowledged agentic style brought to light the strong influence of gender roles in this predominantly-female environment. The end of this chapter includes a discussion of social role theory and its explanation for the dissonance for some participants between the president's gender and her leadership style.

### Gendered Leadership

As an institution focused on the education of women, the appointment of a woman president was seen as positive. A male faculty member recalled, "When she was first appointed, I was absolutely delighted...I think it's important for the students to have that leadership." A female administrator said, "I think they're very much okay with it

being a women's college and having a woman president because I think they feel like that's living that mission."

When a male faculty member was asked about the predominantly female environment as a more collaborative workplace, he responded, "Don't misread, you know, when I said the atmosphere is different. There is nobody at this institution that doesn't look at the president and know she is well in control." This statement seemed to crystallize the dichotomy between participants' descriptions of the collaborative, maintenance-based, communal environment and their descriptions of the president's focus on task, agentic behaviors. As another participant explained, "The personality characteristics that I've described are not necessarily typically female characteristics. And so I think there may be a feeling of just, people may have a feeling of disconnect with that." Again, this participant's summary pointed to expectations of the president based on her gender, not based on her leadership skill-set. Although the president's leadership of the institution was described in a positive light, her exercise of power did not fit participants' expectations of women.

Language was a way to gain insight into how participants viewed power and leadership exhibited by the president. A female participant noted, "You know, sometimes people are intimidated by [the president]. I think it's just that some people are intimidated by strong women....Her personality traits in a man would be viewed differently than they are in a woman. That's just the way it is." Admittedly, these statements were subjective conclusions. However, they support the notion that the president offered a "counter-cultural" example of female leadership. This is not to suggest that women embraced the president's style.

A female staff member stated that she had not heard her male colleagues complain about the president, “It is mainly the women that are negative about her.” Although the proportion of women in the institution supported one explanation for hearing women complain more than men, the participant drew another conclusion.

[Women] get really kind of offended with her because they take that cut-and-dry decision making as stubborn and personal, and just cold. And, so I guess when it’s coming from a woman, it’s just like unexpected and so people read into it a little bit more.

This staff member’s conclusion was consistent with other participants who surmised that the president’s stereotypically “masculine” behaviors were subjected to a different standard of effectiveness because they were embodied in a woman. More typical of a male leader, or agentic style, the president did not attach emotions to her decisions. As one participant observed,

Rarely do you get an experience that she has her feelings hurt or that she’s, just, that those kinds of things don’t bother her that way. And since I think, in many cases, women struggle with that, that may be sort of unusual for men to see that. I think it’s a wonderful role model.

Indeed, the role modeling was both for men and for women as the president was in the midst of a predominantly female institution exhibiting more agentic behaviors. Lodged between the conflicting expectations of being a woman and a focused, action-oriented leader, the president expanded the possibilities for female leadership beyond the bounds of the institution. An administrator described the president’s ability to negotiate

with men on the board and in the community as an example of her ability to navigate a male-dominated environment.

You could see where some of the males were positioning themselves to, to take her on, if you will, on certain things. And she just comes right through. She's ready. And part of that is, she's very bright. She's very, very bright.

This administrator was clearly impressed by the comfort the president exhibited working with both men and women.

#### Open to New Information

The president's preference for making decisions and moving forward did not prevent her from listening to her constituents. Instead, one participant noted,

There's a humbleness about [the president] in that, even though she states her opinions very clearly, and usually is pretty sure she's right, she's always willing to look at it again. And if there's a predominance of evidence to say let's do this different, there's never a feeling of, "But I said it this way, so I can't back down."

A male faculty member added, "What she decides is the decision, and that's it, and there are no questions involved. But that's not meaning that she won't listen." Though it sounded like a contradiction, the faculty member's point was that, though the president was assertive in her decisions, she was also willing to discuss the decision with those who disagreed. Affirmed by many participants, the president was clearly open to hearing additional information and would change her position on an issue if the new information

cast a different light on the situation. One participant stated, “I’m really okay with going back [to the president] and saying, ‘I don’t agree with that decision. And this is how it’s going to affect people and this is how they’re going to be upset.’” Based on her experience, the president would listen to her without judgment.

A female administrator noted, “The fact that she’s really, she rarely attaches emotion to, I mean not that she doesn’t experience emotion, of course she does. But she doesn’t usually attach emotion to somebody wanting to revisit something.” Again, this comment reflected a gendered expectation of a female response to conflict. As an example, a staff member shared an experience of discussing a difficult situation with the president. Rather than the president becoming angry or walking away,

She sat at the table with me and sort of heard me and asked questions. And you know, she walked out and I thought to myself, “Well, at least she sat at the table.” You know, at least she was willing to talk about it instead of, I mean, I’ve had managers or bosses who’ve done everything under the sun to avoid having the conversation.

When asked if comfort with addressing concerns with the president was widespread, the staff member suggested that “they have misperceptions of the president. I don’t know. I think they have a false sense that that’s just taboo. You just don’t do that.” An interesting finding was that the majority of participants responded with a similar distinction: *they* would approach the president but sensed that *others* would not. This finding supported the accessibility of the president, despite a conflicting perception that such an approach was “taboo.”



The president's openness to new information and ability to change her mind did not appear to affect her credibility within the organization, a trait not often found in women who are described as "wishy-washy" or those who "vacillate." A male faculty member described the president's demeanor as, "She's a very strong woman. Extremely strong woman. But there is still a softness about her." It is possible that the combination of the agentic behaviors of confidence and independence with a communal behavior of being attentive to others' concerns allowed the president to exhibit a more complex personality than expected through stereotypes.

#### Explanation for Divergence between Gender and Style

This chapter has detailed the ways in which the president exhibited leadership behaviors that were not stereotypically "feminine" or communal. Despite the fact that the president enjoyed favorable descriptions by faculty, staff and administrators in the study, it was clear that her definitive style was contradictory to the predominant description of the organization as collaborative and communal by participants. In this study, the discussion of gender was constructed around three themes: (a) gender is not an issue, (b) the personality disclaimer, and (c) women are...men are. In each of these themes, behaviors were largely explained through gender. In other words, though participants stated that personality was a potential reason for a particular behavior, the behavior they selected fit the stereotypical description for the gender exhibiting the behavior. The tension in this institution between gendered definitions of leadership and power became apparent when trying to apply gendered expectations of behavior to the leader, the president. By all accounts, the president did not lead in a stereotypically feminine,

communal, manner. The result was that power within the organization was cultivated in harmony with the president's agentic style. Those with power were confident, knowledgeable individuals who addressed issues assertively and based decisions on information, not emotion. The hierarchy of the organization was maintained rather than flattened.

Because participants described successful men in the organization as "gentle" and those who "fit in," I determined there was significant internal pressure to exhibit a stereotypically feminine range of behaviors. Interestingly, the president did not meet this expectation, nor was she disregarded for her behavior. To better understand this dynamic and to answer the research question of how individuals described their experience of power when their gender was dominant or in the minority, I explored participants' reactions to the president's decision-making. One consistent theme arose from the analysis of these questions. Though the president made decisions quickly and decisively, participants justified this *agentic* behavior as in the best interest of the college.

#### Best Interest of Students and College

After describing a collaborative work environment and then describing the president's agentic style, an administrator acknowledged the dissonance by stating,

In my view it works for me, because I know that any decision she would make is completely in the best interest of our students and the college. So

I'm okay with it being more, I guess, autocratic in some ways.

A female staff member elaborated on this by offering her observations related to the president's actions.

An interesting thing that I've noticed here is everyone that I've noticed, everyone is willing to go along with what comes down from the top. There is really no question. When there's a question about how something's going on or what's happening and it's stated that it's come from the president's office, everyone just kind of nods, and says "Oh, okay, I understand." You know, there's really just an acceptance that what's in our best interests or everyone's best interest: students, staff, faculty alike.

"Oh, okay, I understand, that's okay."

A female faculty member had a similar perspective on the president's decision making by saying, "I just have no doubt that everything she makes a decision for is for the best of the institution, what she really *believes* is for the best, even if I might not personally agree with it." An administrator shared that the president's tendency toward involvement at every level of the organization could even be described as "always for the good of the institution. And it's always for the good of the students. And I think people are well aware of that." Another participant explained the president's agentic decision-making style by stating, "She does what she thinks is best for the college."

In each of these responses there was a stated tension between what the participant viewed as a desired decision-making process (collaboration and consensus) and how the president actually made the decision (independent or with less discussion). In each case, the president's decision was ultimately supported because she was seen as working for a selfless goal of helping students and the institution progress, a more communal quality. One participant acknowledged, "I never have any worries that something she's trying to move forward is for *any* reason other than to help our students and help the college be

stronger. No ulterior motives in there.” This assignment of selflessness was reflective of participants’ descriptions of feminine leadership.

When describing how men approached their work, a female participant stated that men seemed to look out for their own students or department first. If a decision positively affected others as a by-product, that was fine as well, but not something men were primarily concerned about. Described as “institutional thinking,” female participants were especially focused on this as a characteristic of feminine leadership and selected examples of men who did *not* exhibit this perspective when discussing differences between male and female leaders.

As described above, participants ascribed institutional intentions to the president’s authoritative decisions; therefore, the decisions were viewed as appropriate because they matched the expectations of feminine leadership as other-focused. Based on these examples, I conjectured that the president’s agentic decision-making style (typically described as a negative trait) was overshadowed when it was in combination with the president’s communal focus on institutional priorities.

### The Development of Trust

Participants stated that the president came to the institution when it was in crisis. The reputation she established at that point was one of being decisive and able to make tough decisions. She had clearly developed a sense of trust within the organization through “her reputation” from the early days and her ability to make decisions that were “maybe not to their total liking.” In the end, employees recognized that “the changes that were being made were more positive than negative.” Because she had rescued the

organization, she was viewed as competent. In many ways, the early days of sitting at the brink of closure crystallized the president's role that she was, as one administrator described it, "responsible for keeping the mission of the institution alive....[It was] her responsibility to keep the institution going."

The president's ability to make difficult decisions had been tested and reinforced numerous times since the early days of her tenure. As an example, a male faculty member stated that when the president had to make a tough decision related to a campus speaker, "I think our president handled things very well." He gave the president credit for navigating a difficult public issue. A female staff member spoke of that incident and concluded, "I just continue to see decisions made that reinforced my belief that things are as they should be."

Although participants expressed an overall sense of trust in the president's intentions, two potential risks were identified with a culture of decision-making based on trust that reduced the likelihood of questioning decisions over time. The first risk related to a trickle-down effect of the administration's decision-making style and the second risk related to an assumed intention that hindered questions. In the first case, one participant suggested that the president's style was supported by and repeated by the administrative team. Her belief was that the administrative team made decisions that, "Ultimately they have the right goal in mind. It's not a personal goal, I don't think it is. I think it's for the college and the students." Although this was a positive model to follow, it had a risk as well. A faculty member with a number of years of experience in the institution cautioned, "I think because there's so much, there's similarity in that belief that [the administrative

team is] doing what's best for everybody, that they're not challenged from within there.”

This faculty member clarified,

It's a distinction between having the best interests of the institution at heart as an institution, and the best interests of the people who work here in the work environment at heart....I think that's difficult in all kinds of work places to make that bridge sometimes in doing that.

Her point was that because the administrative team seemed to be of one mind when it came to “what's best for the institution,” it would be possible to ignore what might *not* be best for individuals. This point was an important distinction and caution to make that separated the impact of decisions on the institution from the impact of decisions on individuals. It is possible that the president's style was appropriate for the global decisions she made, but perceived as less appropriate for lower-level decisions made by her administrators.

A second danger in this approach was that it became a closed style of decision-making. When the proviso was offered that a decision was made because it was “best for the institution,” some participants suggested a cultural norm developed that did not support questioning those decisions. In the analysis of the data, a contradiction developed wherein participants described the president as being open to discussion about decisions, and also described the way they accepted a decision because it was framed as “in the best interest of the institution.” Based on the previous discussion of the president's openness to new information, participants were more likely to use the “best interest” perspective when they did not have a personal stake in the outcome of the

decision. They discussed feeling in a bind when they had to weigh the risk of raising questions with the reality of their location within the lower levels of the institution.

These two risks were not presented as naïve statements about the need to run the college as a democratic institution. As one faculty member stated, “She cannot make everything on a decision based on ‘let’s all take a vote.’ We wouldn’t survive as an institution that way.” Certainly, the president’s role is to make decisions that support the mission of the institution and are not always favored in the short-run. A participant acknowledged that “From a business perspective, I understand that the CEO had the right to do that and has to do that. Their job is to look over, to be looking over everything.” The challenge is to both create a focused approach to decision-making with the second tier of the organization, the vice presidents, and to encourage open dialogue. Although the administrators spoke of a sense of freedom to voice their opinions in meetings, the faculty member’s caution remains to develop a culture where the questioning of decisions is encouraged throughout the organization.

#### A Different Cause for Involvement at Every Level

As participants shared their perceptions of the president’s engagement in decision-making, I heard an alternative explanation for her behavior. Although there is not enough evidence to state that it is a solid theme, it offers a unique lens through which to view the president’s decision-making. This unorthodox perspective is tied to an administrator’s comment about the president offering solutions to problems. Based on a comparison between previous male colleagues and the president, the participant identified that when she shared a concern with either male colleagues or the female

president, “they tried to fix all my problems. I don’t want any advice; I just want to get it off my chest.” As another administrator noted, if you ask the president what she is thinking, she will tell you. A male faculty member observed that “yes, she is decisive --- she is decisive and she does get herself involved in a lot of things, but she only does if you let her.” This perspective suggested that individuals who sought advice from the president, *got* advice. It also suggested an assumption that individuals were expected to follow the president’s advice. Based on other examples, it was likely that the president was less concerned about individuals taking her advice than she was concerned about having a rationale for the decision that was ultimately made.

When discussing the president’s role in decision-making, one participant suggested that the president viewed herself as offering *suggestions* rather than *solutions*. “I think she sees herself as having some ideas to put forward. Not that that’s the end all. Just that, I think she sees herself [in that manner].” This participant realized that the president liked innovation. In an effort to support innovation, the president likely viewed her role as “just trying to be the catalyst. Let’s get going. Let’s be thinking about this. Let’s look anywhere.” Yet, from this participant’s perspective, this invitation to engage was sometimes perceived as a directive to take a specific action.

A male faculty member noted “most people, in my opinion here, are way too cowardly and will not think for themselves and not make a decision and just do something without first going to the president.” From his perspective, this faculty member saw a repeated theme of faculty doubting their own ability to make decisions and relying upon the president to make these decisions for them. Though the president had a



reputation for dictating decisions, his perspective was that the people had the process backwards.

If you go to the president, *a priori* ahead of time and she gives you her view, and then you're kind of locked into that narrow view. But, I also know that if you just go do something, and, it's in the best interest of students here on campus, she might say, "Well, you know maybe it should have been done this way," but she'll be okay with it.

From this faculty member's perspective, college employees developed a dependence upon the president as the ultimate decision-maker. Like a parent who becomes accustomed to making all decisions, the president had developed a role that reinforced this imbalance of power.

### Vocation

When discussing the president's power within the institution, six individuals commented on the positive influence of her religious vocation. Though the discussion of this influence was not strong enough to appear as a major theme, its relationship to the paternalistic response of "it's in the best interest of the institution" demanded at least initial attention. Overall, the participants who mentioned her religious order described the women in the order as "edgy," "*all* strong women, ...they're strong in their own ways and different, ...most of them are powerful." These descriptions conveyed a sense of respect for the religious order and those who dedicated their lives to it.

Of particular interest was when a faculty member placed the significance of the president's vocation ahead of her gender when she stated, "There are a lot of Catholics

here...I think a lot of people respect her out of that, first of all, and then maybe secondarily the female is part of the influence.” A male faculty member affirmed this combination when he recalled the president’s appointment: “Not only was she a woman but she was a [member of the religious order].” Those who mentioned this connection did so with respect and suggested that the affiliation represented more than a connection to the institution’s founding.

A staff member shared that when the president wanted to move her to a new department she was initially reluctant. “Then I said to [her], wherever you want me, I’ll go and I’ve been totally happy here.” Though she was not a member of the religious community, her perspective of the order was, “They know what they’re doing is right, they know what the mission is.” One area to explore in the future would be to consider how vocation affects how others view the president. Is it possible that Catholic participants responded to the president out of “duty” and assumed trust more often than non-Catholic participants to the president’s requests?

As one participant tried to put the president’s influence in the context of other predominantly-female environments, she summarized, “I really believe a lot of our environment is influenced by our president. And, and so I don’t know how much of what I experience here would be common.” Her uncertainty pointed to the importance of understanding each aspect of the Interactional Framework (leader, followers, and the situation) to structure the analysis of this study.

### Relevance to Previous Research

This chapter served as a test for much of the literature written about male and female leadership styles. The president exhibited agentic behaviors in her assertiveness, desire to control situations, and respect for confidence. Though Eagly and Karau's (2002) work suggested that such behaviors frequently result in negative assessments of female leaders, participants spoke highly of the president. It is possible that the conflict in participants' expectations of gender roles was mitigated by Eagly and Karau's role congruity theory.

Because she served as the president of the institution, participants expected her to hold a more dominant, official stature. Eagly and Karau's work is based on environments where women are in the minority, thus their conclusions are largely based on male-dominated norms. This study challenges the conclusion that agentic behaviors exhibited by female leaders are always viewed as negative by men and women. Participants in this study who indicated frustration with the top-down management style of the president, also praised the outcomes she had achieved and her dedication. From this initial study, it appeared that other women in the organization who sought influence used a balance of agentic and communal behaviors to create support for their initiatives, much as the president did.

An area worthy of further study is what Eagly and Johnson (1990, cited in Eagly & Carli, 2003) discovered in their meta-analysis of leadership styles: when studied within an organization, male and female leadership behaviors were not significantly different. Partnered with the possibility that the followers exert at least some influence based on their gender role expectations, it is possible that the president influenced the environment,

the environment influenced the followers and the followers influenced the president. By noting this as an almost cyclical process, it is possible to see the leader-follower-situation dynamic as truly that, an interactional framework that is dynamic (see Figure 5).

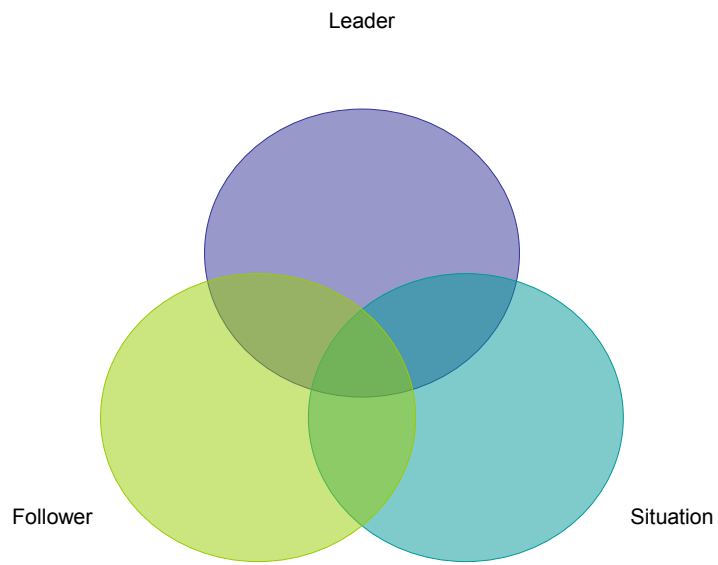


Figure 6.1 *Interactional framework of leadership development*

## CHAPTER 7

## THE INTERACTIONAL FRAMEWORK - FINDINGS RELATED TO POWER

## Overview

The significance of this chapter cannot be understated as it unites the chapters on the situation, the followers, and the leader. Chapter 4 located the study in a mission-driven institution focused on the development of women. Although participants were committed to serving the mission, they did not indicate that the mission was what drew them to the institution. Chapter 5 explored the influence of gender for those who work in this institution. It revealed that participants saw the influence of gender in a range of three themes. These themes, though distinct, are related in that they are framed by the perspective of the dominant culture of women. Generally, the predominantly female population worked from a “female as neutral” perspective, with male contributions ranging from unseen to suspect.

Chapter 6 explored the role of the leader in the organization, the president. The president’s agentic leadership style was in contrast to participant descriptions of female communal leadership, yet the president held great respect within the institution. With this shared female-centric perspective of female leadership and the counter-example of the president, the study question of how power is perceived became a litmus test for the influence of gender.

### Power Is...Roles, Relationships and Resources

Of all questions posed, participants answered the research question of how men and women define power with the most consistency. One participant's response served as a strong summary as she defined power as: "In a position of making decisions that would influence other people. Often, I think it's associated with money or control over resources." The three themes in this response that other participants repeated were having the ability to make decisions (roles), having influence (relationships), and having resources.

#### *Power Develops from Roles and Hierarchy*

Over and again, participants referred to power as the "ability to make a decision" and used phrases such as "a person who is in a decision making position," "someone who is *the* decision maker or can influence the decision maker," "the one who gets to call the shots," and "the *authority* to make those decisions." Positional power was often used as a way to describe the *ability* to make decisions. One participant phrased power in terms of "Who gives you the authority in a position." Another participant indicated, "There are all levels of power" and described the distinct power available to administration, the faculty, staff, and individual instructors. These descriptions generally placed power within a system that allocated more power to those at the top of the hierarchy.

#### *Power Develops from Relationships*

A related theme in the discussion of power revolved around the distinction between or relationship to *influence*. One participant defined "power" as "the ability to

influence others.” Another participant suggested that her power is tied to the ability to influence others “because people trust me and because they have confidence in what I’ve been able to do here. I think it’s an earned thing.” These definitions shifted the focus from a strict *ability* of an agent to cause others to act, to a *relationship* or persuasion that motivated others to act. One male participant questioned whether leaders can rely upon power alone. “I don’t think there’s too many organizations anymore where the president is a dictator. I mean it’s not really the way the world works anymore.” Based on this observation, the participant suggested that leaders must employ interpersonal skills to affect long-lasting change.

For a different participant, the term power conjured up negative images of power over others. She then recognized that power can also be “power over ourselves.” Though other participants used the term *influence* synonymously with *power*, when asked if “influence” was a less-negative term, she responded that “influence is almost nothing.” Her reluctance to describe her own experience with power was similar to others who initially resisted the suggestion that they had been powerful or had experienced personal power. This resistance may have been related to the connection of power to resources, or to an interpretation of power that was based on the social roles of women.

#### *Power Develops from Resources*

As the initial definition suggested, participants frequently tied power to resources. One participant’s definition of power was simply, “using one’s resources to accomplish things.” Another participant suggested that the resources “could be information, people, [or] things.” Money was used as an example of power but not often connected to the



institutional sources of power. Overall, participants recognized that the institution had limited financial resources so, although money was certainly a desired resource in scarce supply, it was not raised as a significant source of power within the institution.

Participants discussed the financial crisis that the institution survived once the current president arrived. Before her arrival, “Budgets for a number of years had been put together on *hope* in terms of revenues, rather than on data.” When the new president arrived, she addressed the budget concerns first and required data to drive decisions. At the time, “there was a very dysfunctional culture within the institution.” One participant “would characterize it as a culture of scarcity. In other words, when there are scarce resources, people do funny things, or strange things.” By changing these practices, the president brought the budget process into the light and demanded a realistic budgetary process that worked from past data, not hoped for revenues.

In some ways, by shifting the financial focus to one where departments had to demonstrate a clear need and could not overrun their budgets, the president shifted the power focus to individuals who could do more with less. A number of participants stated, “If you come to work here, you know you’re not coming here to get paid well.” That reality had a significant implication. It created a culture of acceptance for the overworked-underpaid mentality of employees.

One administrator said that when trying to justify creating a new position, the response to a department that was relying on over-extended faculty was “everybody’s tired and overworked [in the institution].” Based on participant responses, it was clear that low-pay was an accepted reality in the organization and individuals did not work for

the money, but “for the mission.” One participant questioned whether this mentality had an unintended consequence for men in terms of their engagement in the institution.

I don't know if that's a function of being the main bread winner and, you know, teaching doesn't pay very much. So they may need to have an outside income to support a family. You know I'm lucky, you know, I have a husband who has a nice job.

Though this was a sexist comment that presumed that a husband was the “main bread winner,” the implication of this observation could have a direct impact on the ability of men to garner informal power within the institution. The previous chapter included observations by some women that women were the ones to put in extra time. Though the focus on mission, not money, seemed to satisfy individuals and served as a sign of dedication, it had the potential to impact access to power. As one participant summarized, power is dependent upon the situation, reflecting the variation in roles, relationships, and resources. I discuss the power that flows from relationships later in this chapter, but if relationships are built on a reputation for going “above and beyond,” those with personal financial constraints could be at a disadvantage when it comes to putting in extra hours on the job. Participants who did not “need” their jobs because they were confident they could find new jobs, took different risks than those who depended upon their positions.

### Personal Experiences with Power

Participants were asked to describe a time when they felt a sense of power. The ability to make decisions played out as program directors stated they found power in the ability to “decide what classes are going to be held. Which electives we're going to offer?”

Who's going to teach them and at what times?" Faculty responses also clustered around the ability to make decisions. "You feel empowered in your classroom," stated one participant. She said she sensed, "There's a lot of---I hope it's trust in us as faculty that generally speaking, we're going to do our job." Another faculty member supported that sentiment by stating, "We're given a lot of latitude, a lot of freedom, so I feel powerful in that I'm the one that chooses my textbooks. I'm the one that designs the syllabus....So from that perspective, I'm very *empowered*."

Although the faculty members identified the freedom to make decisions as a source of power, they did not connect this power directly to students. One faculty member clarified that from a faculty member's perspective, "I wouldn't say there's a tremendous sense of power as much as there is a sense of like, moments where you have a sense of fulfillment that things are going the way you had planned." Another faculty member suggested that there is "kind of a fine line" because faculty "need to have the power in the classroom and you need to, it needs to be collaborative and open." This balance reflected the difference between having a position of power in the classroom (role) and recognizing that the positional power was limited in some ways when the goal was student learning, as learning occurs predominantly through the self-motivated engagement of the student.

A staff member suggested that her power came from "having an opportunity to set up some programming." Other staff members said their power was not always in the final decision but in the ability to contribute to the decision. One staff member stated, "They definitely want input and want to know what I think about everything." Another staff member stated that she had "been in positions before where people have trusted me

and therefore listened to me and done something.” Participants shared experiences with knowing they were influential when they were trusted or heard in a decision. Staff members shared similar experiences with power when they said, “It’s all about trying to get a group of people to do what you want them to do.” There were times when participants acknowledged the balance of power between roles and relationships weighed more heavily toward the roles.

Both faculty and staff participants without positional power were given responsibilities for gathering data from those with positional power. “It’s a real contrast,” summarized one participant. Though she had the authority to request data, she was not able to demand it because her position was at a lower level in the organization. “I don’t have the pull to do that.” This example crystallized the difference between wanting all employees to feel empowered and the reality of positional power within the structure of the organization. As stated in the literature, various forms of power take shape in organizations, and some of those require formal positions within the institution that provide access to resources.

### Not Everyone Wants Power

Although most participants shared experiences with personal power, four of seven male participants and several female participants expressed a lack of interest in or experience with power. One female participant stated, “Power is something that a lot of people desire, but---I don’t.” A male participant stated, “I don’t know that I have the time to influence the power structure here, nor the ability.” He added that his position within the institution was “not the kind of job you take if you’re looking to build yourself

up into a position of power.” Another participant stated, “I’m not interested in moving up.” When asked to describe her personal experiences with power, a female administrator resisted:

I don’t know that I’ve ever really conquered or succeeded at anything without support. If I have, it’s not been really that big because I think when we do things independent, and individual, we *don’t* accomplish much. But if you do it as a group, the “*we---*.”

In these examples, the participants acknowledged that power affected the organization’s outcomes, but they did not identify themselves as people with tremendous sources of power. Of particular relevance to the study, was the male participants’ desire to distance themselves from an expressed pursuit of power.

### People with Power

When men and women described characteristics of individuals within the organization who had power, the first response was to name the titles of individuals who held formal positions of authority. This response was especially interesting because this line of questions occurred after individuals had defined power as “the ability to make decisions” and after they had described their own experiences with power. Because the participants consistently made connections between their own decision-making and their sense of power, I anticipated that they would name personal characteristics, not organizational roles, as characteristics of people with power.

Typical responses to the question: “Can you identify common characteristics of people with power in the organization?” included the following responses:

- “Hmm. Well, people that I know [who] have power would be the president and the vice president that directly supervises me.”
- (pause) “Well, I think a lot of people with power here have positions of power or titles of power.”
- “Other than the president?”
- (long pause) “I need to think of who holds power the most, you know, you’ve got your division chairs and you’ve got your vice presidents, and your president as your really powerful one.”
- “I don’t really see any of us as having a whole lot of *power* power.”

In each of these responses, participants frequently stammered or hesitated and then resorted to hierarchical power within the organization. This finding answers the research question of how men and women in a predominantly female organization describe their perceptions of power. Men and women were equally likely to refer to positional power in their descriptions of those with power. From administrators to staff members, participants identified positional, or role, power as a significant characteristic in those who were seen to have power within the organization.

#### Formal versus Informal Power

Once participants identified those in the institutional hierarchy as individuals with formal power, they began to identify those with informal power. One administrator concluded, “I would tell you there is not enough *informal* power, in my opinion.” Her assessment indicated that “There’s leaders at all levels and just because it’s not in your title or in your job description, it doesn’t mean you’re not a leader.” Ironically, after

naming positional power as a common characteristic of those with power, another participant observed that relying solely on one's position was not wise. "The person who leads only from position authority normally does not survive an extended period of time." When asked what qualities outside of positional power were common characteristics of individuals with informal power, *longevity* was consistently named.

One participant described the power that comes with longevity as, "There's something about that stability of someone. Understanding the college and really believing that they care about the college and have the best interest at heart." Others described those with longevity as "they have the knowledge base as far as the organizational history to back them up." Another participant suggested that power can come from "if you get a very good individual who is not only smart but has good common sense." As others recognized the knowledge the individual accumulated, "you have a heck of a lot of power...and you'll have a lot of influence with what's going on." This factor of developing trust and connections within the organization supported the second leg of power, relationships.

As corroboration for this perspective of longevity bringing power, several participants identified that being a *new* employee limited their ability to have influence. An established faculty member observed that "they haven't been around long enough to feel like they have a lot to say." A new faculty member stated, "I haven't been here long enough to know." Another faculty member with two years of experience at the institution stated, "I don't have all the information, you know, that people that have been here a long time have, so just, you know, maybe a little uncertainty of how things should be done." When another participant was asked about integration in the institution, the

participant stated, “I think I’m getting there. I am still pretty new; this is my third year.”

These statements affirmed that individuals perceived themselves and others as gaining influence within the institution with the accumulation of years of experience. The combined factors of roles and relationships, however, did not exclude others from positions of power or influence within the organization.

### Knowledge and Confidence

Because participants defined power as the ability to make decisions, I developed a line of questions that asked participants to describe those within the institution who seemed to influence decision-making. Responses clustered around a similar theme of “they’re knowledgeable. They’re confident. They’re assertive. Not overbearing but in other words, they will say, ‘It has to be this.’...And they’re willing to stand their ground and make that stand in front of the president.” Other participants used phrases such as “hard workers,” “well-educated,” “a person who can see the big picture, but also has the ability to pay attention to the details,” “taken seriously,” “action-oriented,” “quiet charisma,” “dedication and passion, but it’s not necessarily worn on their sleeves,” and “an absolute conviction that what they are doing makes such a difference.” With each description, participants described interpersonal skills that conveyed having the information necessary to make a decision and the conviction to stand behind that decision. This pattern of personal strength and communication skills reflected a premium that was placed on rational decision-making and assertiveness.



Interestingly, participants used similar words to describe those with power in the organization and how the institution develops students as leaders. One participant described the goal for student leadership as building confidence.

It's more about teaching you to have confidence in yourself. To do what you feel in your heart is right. And when you do that, be confident. Stand.

And when you do that, you often will have people that follow.

This same participant recounted times when she had proposed actions that were denied by the president. Rather than assuming the “no” was a final answer, this participant used the denial as an opportunity to gather more facts. “I think, again, she told me no just because she didn't know if I thought it out enough. And I think the second proposal was much better than the first. So, you know, I certainly appreciated her wisdom on that.” As this participant described other experiences, she spoke with confidence about her own knowledge and was open to improving her performance. These seemed to be key ingredients in the individuals who held power within the organization: competence and confidence with an ability to revisit decisions.

### Power Is...Making Data-Driven Decisions

Because one of the research questions revolved around how men and women interpret the *exercise of power*, it was important to explore the decision-making process with participants. Participants largely defined the powerful within the institution as those in positions of power, those with longevity in the institution, and/or those who exhibited knowledge and confidence. When asked to describe how decisions were made,

participants consistently discussed the importance of data-driven decisions. A female faculty member commented,

I do think that *most* people who are decision-makers here, if you view those with power, are fact finders. They're concerned about information. Sometimes I think they may filter or find what they're looking for with information, but they do *view themselves* as being data-driven in their decision making, rather than feeling.

This focus on data over emotions was another consistent aspect of decision-making. An administrator took exception to the assumption that a predominantly female organization would prioritize emotion over logic.

I think that there is a misnomer out there that women, women decision-makers, aren't as credible because we all know how emotional and hormonal they are and that's where their decisions come out of. And I think that's erroneous. I think that's definitely, that's not what's operative here.

Another administrator commented that "to make a decision without enough data is dangerous." This focus on having adequate data also meant that decisions would be delayed if necessary to gather more data. She suggested, "If it's a big decision and we don't have to make the decision right now, let's take some time." From her perspective, this focus on data established a different paradigm for women.

At this school we're saying, no, you have to intelligently think. Use your mind. It wasn't just given to you to shut off. And so we're encouraging women to think and to process. Not just to, I mean to work it with

feelings, and, yeah, you can make great things happen then. But to have the emotional intelligence to understand, “Is this an emotion, or is this based on data?”

Because decisions are said to be made based on information, participants identified the importance of having accurate information. A faculty member stated that when a shift occurred in her area, “communication and information flow was cut off” and that negatively affected her ability to engage in decision-making. An administrator stated that it was critical to have correct information, therefore “you try your best not to be surprised” and to be sure “you’ve kind of done that homework and talked to the people you need to, prior to having more of a public discussion.” In fact, a faculty member shared an experience when she did not have the information she needed.

I didn’t realize when I was brought into this particular meeting that it was going to go the direction that it went. And I was also told I needed no background information, I didn’t have to bring anything with me... Well, I should know better that you always come into a meeting full of facts.

An administrator echoed this conclusion when she commented, “People need to come organized and come, you know, they need to come prepared. I’d say doing your homework is probably the biggest thing I would say. Don’t come to a meeting unprepared.” All of these comments reinforced the premium placed on a command of information.

Of note, however, is the absence of comments by men on this issue. When coding responses, I identified excerpts that mentioned the role of information in decision-making. The six male participants who had transcripts in the category of information

discussed information in a rather dispassionate manner. For two, there was acknowledgement that due to “privacy issues” one does not always “know all the facts” when it comes to personnel issues. Another expressed his satisfaction with the result of sharing information to encourage a different outcome, but did not focus on how information guided decision-making. A third stated that his program director “keeps everyone in the same loop. He doesn’t hold information and is quite flexible.” A fourth participant conceded that he somewhat actively avoided acquiring new information and that he could be more active in building informal networks. The final male participant shared that “as long as I get the opportunity to try to voice my concerns and fight my battles, and I’m not punished for it, I deal with it.” When asked about how others dealt with decision-making on campus, he stated, “They’re all afraid” to share their opinions that are contrary to the administration. This point is worthy of further study.

Perhaps the only conclusion to be drawn from this observation was that the focus on data-driven decisions rested primarily with the women in the study. It was the women who promoted an atmosphere of data-driven decisions and discussed the implications for the workplace.

### Listening

Based on participant comments, it was clear that the power to make significant decisions rested largely with the administration. Perhaps due to the small size, however, a faculty member observed employees were “pulled into a lot more committees, a lot more decision-making than you would maybe in a larger institution.” One participant noted, “The president really strives to do as much from the faculty up because they’re her eyes

and ears out here.” As such, one participant noted that it was almost the other extreme of “I don’t think there’s a lot of times where you can make decisions completely independently.” Noting the interrelatedness of departments, a participant stated, “I’m trying to be better at considering all the different stakeholders that are going to be affected by this.” As participants described their perceptions of how decisions were made and what they did when they disagreed with a decision, they shared a focus on the importance of listening to all perspectives.

A faculty member recalled the practice of a previous administrator who “strolls the halls, and he’ll poke his head in, and he doesn’t ask for a meeting with you, but you know you’re being asked important questions when he’s here.” It was evident from other participants’ comments that the act of listening and sharing information was essential for long-term buy-in when decisions were made. A staff member shared, “At least, even a decision you disagree with might be more palatable if you understand where that person is coming from; if the rationale is fully communicated.” For many participants, listening was essential when they wanted to re-visit a decision.

An administrator shared, “Sometimes they present me with enough information that I have to say, ‘You know, that’s new information, I didn’t realize that.’” Her willingness to listen to new information was a consistent model across the institution. A second administrator stated that listening required more than an initial hearing. Instead, she acknowledged, “Most people, when they talk, they process through the feeling to the fact. And so many times...when we’re talking, we’re processing, and we’re cut off at that feeling and we never get to the facts.” She found it important to give her department the space they needed to work from feeling to fact so they could make a more data-driven

decision. This model of being open to future information was practiced throughout the organization, including the president's level.

One participant identified that the further removed an individual was from the front lines, the more difficult it was for him/her to listen. "You have to get down in the trenches once in a while and *really* listen to people and examine where they are and what they believe..." From her perspective, leaders in the organization sometimes believed they had communicated, "but the communication return and feedback doesn't indicate that we listen to you." A consistent theme throughout the interviews was a focus on effective communication.

#### Effective Communication

A number of participants discussed the importance of assertive communication and mentioned that this was especially important for an all-female environment.

I think it is very much a danger in women-intense environments....It is, I think, people can get *so* interpersonal that they, and all the literature tells us from Carol Gilligan on, all the literature tells us that we don't like conflict, or that we are not as comfortable with conflict, and sometimes we even perceive conflict when there isn't any.

An administrator talked about the importance of teaching students how to communicate assertively.

They're either on the passive side of just not being, not being brave enough to say what they want; or allowing other people, often men, to tell them what they want. Or they are on the aggressive side of thinking that to

get what I want I have to be in your face and rude. And so, my whole goal is to teach them another way.

Another participant identified common disclaimers that women use when in a conflict situation.

I think they need to learn to say what they think and not couch it. Not say, I'm, you know you hear women sometimes saying, "Well, I'm sorry," or, and then they say what they think. Well, you're not sure whether to say you don't have to be sorry or to agree with your statement....And it could be "I'm just being honest." You know, cut all the editorial and say what you need to say, but say it, ---there's got to be some gentleness.

This focus on saying what you mean was repeated by other participants who espoused a direct style of communication. One participant suggested, "For either men or women, just be aware of dynamics of working with a predominantly female staff --- that people do sometimes take things more personally and so it is important if you say it that you meant it." A tool mentioned by a number of participants was the institution's Declaration of Open Discourse. A staff member described it as a way to help students and employees determine "How do you respond respectfully when you disagree with someone? You know, how do you tactfully and diplomatically and assertively state your opinion or your disagreement but still remain positive?" The reference to this declaration and the comments made about direct communication reinforced the attention given to acknowledging the influence of primarily women in the environment, but not allowing that influence to determine the type of communication that was expected in a stereotypical sense.

## Conflict

The focus on communication did not eliminate the conflicts that naturally arise in an organization. A female faculty member stated that when faced with a difference of opinion, her response was to “express my opinion, if it’s whatever, accepted or not accepted, and then you just have to move on.” The ability to state one’s opinion was consistently valued by participants. Another female faculty member stated, “I don’t think there is avoidance of conflict generally....They’re not afraid to state their positions. People...feel pretty comfortable expressing a divergent viewpoint.” For another female staff member, the key is to keep talking.

I can deal with anger and disappointment and all that as long as somebody’s willing to talk it through. You know, it’s when people get up and leave and won’t sit at the table with you that I just can’t, I can’t function in that environment. It eats at me.

Taking a slightly different view on the level of direct communication, a male faculty member suggested that “the friction is, is more below the surface than above. You find very little head-to-head confrontation.” Another male faculty member suggested that this approach of keeping conflict below the surface meant that the conflict was not always resolved. He summarized the approach as, “Let’s move on, but let’s not address really any of the issues.” From his perspective, this contributed to “a high turnover rate both for the staff and faculty.” An administrator shared the concern about turnover but had not drawn any conclusions yet about the causes. “There’s something, there’s a hiring problem here, or an expectation problem. And so I think that’s something that we have to really look at very carefully.” The concern about turnover was discussed by many



participants and varying degrees of responsibility were placed on the institution's manner of decision-making.

Overall, participants indicated that they did not see conflict as buried. "I think [the atmosphere is] very positive, I don't feel the competitiveness," stated an administrator. A staff member noted, "I think it seems to make things more above board. More direct. Well here it is, you know, not gaming, not ulterior, doesn't seem to be an ulterior motive." Although others concurred that disagreement could be stated, they were more reserved related to the consequences of speaking one's mind. "I would say it's not a risk in terms of I'll lose my job if I disagree. But I feel like there, it feels like there's a risk of losing respect." In an institution where power developed through relationships, the ability to maintain relationships was a high value.

As participants discussed how they responded to differences of opinion, they revealed a spectrum of comfort with direct confrontation. A staff member stated, "I think everyone kind of knows their place, um, and is okay with it...I try to stay in my lane." For some, this meant a decision to "try to quietly change what I can change. Rather than, I'm not, I'm not a confrontational person." A male participant suggested that there were two different groups in the organization: those that followed the direction of their superiors and those that "will stand up at least initially and protest. And if that doesn't work and they really feel strongly about it, then they use the undertow to try to get something done." Although some participants suggested there were "Yes, people" who agreed with everything decided by administration, the majority of participants concluded that confidence and knowledge were valued. Therefore, those who could raise objections supported by data and delivered with tact were likely to be heard within the organization.

When asked what one would do if direct efforts to address issues did not work, there was a consistent response that at some point, “I would have to look for work somewhere else.” Another participant stated, “If it was something that was going to ethically make me not be the person that I need to be or that I am, I’d quit.” Others used phrases such as “Walk away,” and questions of “Do I stay here or do I not because it’s not going to change.” A staff member summarized the reality that “You stick your neck out, there is risk involved. Is it worth it?”

An interesting observation was that the individuals who seemed to be most confident in their ability to raise questions of dissent were also the individuals who made statements such as, “Call it confidence, call it arrogance, I don’t know what it is, but I’m like, hey, I can find another job tomorrow.” A faculty member who had experience with “pushing back” said, “I do have choices.” Another participant stated, “I’m not fearful in terms of my job.” A staff member drew a connection that those who were comfortable with conflict “have a lot of integrity, and are pretty clear about who they are and what they want to accomplish personally and professionally and what they want for the organization.” These same participants spoke of encouraging others to voice their dissent. An administrator told of students voicing dissent and, from her perspective, “It’s not threatening at all.” It seemed evident that the individuals with the greatest confidence were most likely to hold power within the institution and sense the freedom to voice their dissent from other points of view.

## Summary

The focus of this chapter was on how decisions were made within the institution. Three main factors that influenced decision-making were roles, relationships, and resources. While analyzing the data for this chapter, I was struck by the incongruence between how participants defined the situation (a predominantly-female mission-driven institution focused on the development of women that was focused on collaboration and collegial relationships) and how they described the institutional processes for decision-making (data-driven decisions void of emotions where direct communication and confidence were valued). Based on previous research, these two descriptions would not typically be found together. Based on the hierarchical structure and frequency with which individuals referred to the president's style, it was clear that the president's style (the leader) was essential to understand how members of this organization viewed power. The agentic style of the president placed a premium on data-driven decisions made through the proper channels of the organization. Participants were consistent in describing women as communal in leadership and tying the ability to make decisions to an individual's potential for power. Therefore, the power of decision-making *experienced* in the institution reflected the president's style more so than the abstract descriptions of communal leadership and decision-making offered *in theory* by followers.

## Relevance to Previous Research

This chapter revealed the crux of the issue when exploring power in a predominantly-female institution. In the end, power is power. When the president sets the tone for the organization by favoring data and analytical decision-making, that is how

decisions are made. All five of French and Raven's (1959) bases of power were evident in this predominantly-female environment. The president set the tone for *how* decisions were made and, in fact, *what* decisions would be made. The ability to influence decision-making is a significant source of power that is sometimes overlooked.

Bachrach & Baratz (1970) suggested even "nondecisions" are important to examine (p. 44). "A nondecision...is a decision that results in suppression or thwarting of a latent or manifest challenge to the values or interests of the decision-maker" (p. 44). As the decision-making process was discussed by participants, they shared an understanding of the president as the ultimate decision-maker in the institution.

Powers and Reiser (2005) raised the question of how the target decides how to respond to exercises of power. In the descriptions of power within the institution, there seemed to be an abundance of legitimate power in terms of using the hierarchy of the institution for decision-making. The president held the power in this organization and she held it working from behaviors not necessarily expected in a predominantly-female institution. The president's ability to fit the social role expectations of a president, and exhibit contradictory behaviors in terms of gender roles, created a dynamic environment for men and women.

## CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY - THE INTERACTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND IMPACT AT  
STUDY INSTITUTION

## Summary

The research question that guided this study was: How do men and women in a predominantly-female organization describe their perceptions of power? The case study methodology proved essential to understanding the difference between how power is understood and expressed in an organization, and how power is exercised in the organization. As explained in chapter 2, the literature on power and gender points to a number of expected results for women in positions of power. As the discussion of the results indicated, the style of the leader in this study played a significant role in how participants framed their experiences with power in a predominantly female environment that sometimes matched expected results and sometimes countered previous results described in chapter 2.

The case study consisted of one-hour individual interviews with 25 faculty, staff, and administrators at a Midwestern college focused on the education of women. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for coding. Based on coding and identifying themes, data were analyzed. By applying the Interactional Framework for Leadership Development, it was possible to analyze this institution based on the situation, the followers, and the leader.

As a mission-driven institution, participants were single-mindedly focused on the desire to educate women. Because of the unique nature of this mission, participants could

articulate their role in that process and the benefits that students experienced. With the fervent support this mission received from participants, it was a bit of a surprise that the vast majority of participants indicated that they did not apply to the institution because of the mission, but because of the position. Having established the impetus for individuals to come to the institution, it was possible to explore the role gender played in participants' experiences with power.

Chapter 5 detailed the three themes that developed when discussing gender. These themes ranged from a blind "gender is not an issue," to a soft-peddled "Personality Disclaimer" that behaviors could be due to gender or behaviors could be due to personality, to the final blatant statements of "men are..." and "women are..." The majority of responses were in the third category which revealed that, though they worked hard each day to boost women beyond cultural stereotypes, they perpetuated stereotypes of men in how they viewed their co-workers. In this section of the findings, there was an "in-group" (women) and an "out-group" (men). Women were consistently described as collaborative, helpful, and able to deal with conflict in a straight-forward manner. As women described male participation or leadership, descriptions ranged from men who were "gentle" and matched the female style, to men who had to leave the institution because their domineering style was not appropriate for the collegial atmosphere. These stereotypic characterizations of male and female behaviors were interesting to find in an institution focused on the development of women.

What was surprising was the contrast between how participants described their view of the female-supportive environment and how they described the contrasting style of the president. In no uncertain terms, the president was described as decisive, data-

focused, and action-oriented. Whether from her own preferences or her response to the preferences of her followers, the president was also described as willing to listen and not likely to hold a grudge after a disagreement. The president relied upon agentic behaviors to lead the organization.

### Conclusions

Proven to be a competent leader through her experience with making difficult decisions and demanding excellence, participants had respect for the president. The president's style had an enormous effect on the institution. Throughout this study, I was struck by the way participants rationalized the president's style as appropriate (given their disdain for agentic leadership) because the president "had the best interest of the institution at heart." As an outside observer, I was surprised by how often a bright, confident, dedicated participant would be satisfied with an autocratic management style because of this paternalistic acceptance.

My own reaction was one of confusion at times. Although I see gender as a significant influence in identity, I also acknowledge the multitude of other forces that combine to affect one's personality. Therefore, I became less and less comfortable with descriptions of "men are...women are..." when I was hearing them from individuals who had a larger-than-life counter example in their president. Social psychologists have long held that humans will construct a reality that works with how they have structured the world in their own minds. Prejudices based on just a few experiences remain even after several experiences that serve as contradictions. This phenomenon appeared to be active in this organization.

### Future Research

Perhaps due in part to this model of strong female leadership at the top of the organization, a question arose of does this strong model send a message to men that their opportunities for advancement are limited? Certainly males were in leadership positions, so men were not without opportunities for advancement. But does it change how men engage in the work environment if they do not see a plethora of opportunities for advancement? Because women and minorities have argued this very point, it would be interesting to explore how men perceive their potential for advancement in predominantly-female environments where the upper levels of management are occupied by women. According to the literature, men advance faster than women in fields dominated by women such as education and nursing (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Further research should be conducted on the factors present in those environments and the role of career goals when men apply to predominantly-female institutions.

Overall, this study revealed the power of in-group/out-group status. Although a single case study cannot suggest a comprehensive application of the findings beyond this bounded system, it appears that women in the majority are equally blind to the minority as the men are when they are in the majority. Is there as much damage to the men? It is hard to tell. Because this institution identified turnover as a concern, it would be important to explore if turnover is a sign of harassment, belittling, or other factors when one is in the minority. If turnover is a sign that those particular men had difficulty working with strong women, then that is another area for research. Both possibilities need further exploration.



As the findings in chapter six suggested, the president in this institution was able to combine an agentic style with a communal focus on institutional success. Social psychology research could be advanced with further study of this combination. Much of the research leading up to this study suggested that women who used agentic behaviors were viewed negatively by both men and women; this study suggests that followers may be looking beyond the behaviors for validation of intent. If that is so, further inquiry is needed to see if social perceptions of female leaders have changed.

Finally, this study should be replicated at other predominantly female institutions. Variations on this would be to conduct the study at a predominantly female institution with a male president to see if that is a factor and to explore other female-led institutions comprised predominantly of women. This might be especially interesting at institutions that have not gone through a significant crisis.

### Propositions

Based on the findings of this study, the following propositions merit further examination.

- If the president is a member of a religious community, do members of the organization overlook behaviors that would otherwise be viewed as “out-group” behaviors in leadership?
- If turnover is a concern, does this suggest masked problems?
- If men are minorities in an organization, do they become invisible?
- If power is perceived as communal but exercised as agentic, does the disconnect result in conflict and turnover?

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## APPENDIX A – IRB Approval



HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTIONS  
Institutional Review Board

December 20, 2007

Ms. Virginia Curley  
Dr. Marilyn Grady  
Educational Administration  
5025 Davenport St Omaha, NE 68132

IRB# 2007-12-8492 EX

**TITLE OF PROJECT: Perceptions of Power at a Female-Intense Organization: A Case Study**

Dear Virginia:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. This project has been approved by the Unit Review Committee from your college and sent to the IRB. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study. Your proposal seems to be in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as exempt.

Date of EX Review: 12/03/07

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 12/19/07. This approval is Valid Until: 12/18/08.

1. Attached to NUgrant is the IRB approved informed consent form for this project. Please use this form when making copies to distribute to your participants. If it is necessary to create a new informed consent cover letter, please send us your original so that we may approve and stamp it before it is distributed to participants.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
- Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
- Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
- Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
- Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board. For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions, please contact Shirley Horstman, IRB Administrator, at 472-9417 or email at shorstman1@unl.edu.

Sincerely,

  
Dan R. Hoyt, Chair  
for the IRB

## APPENDIX B – Invitation to Participate



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES  
Department of Educational Administration

January 2008

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Ginny Curley and I am conducting a study at (institution name) in partial fulfillment of my doctorate at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. The purpose of my qualitative study is to investigate perceptions of power held by men and women at female-intense institutions. A "female-intense" institution is defined as an organization employing 2/3 or more women.

I am writing to see if you might be interested in participating in a study especially relevant to (this institution). I will be talking to a broad range of individuals at (Institution) during the next few months to gain a sense of the experiences of both men and women. Participants will be faculty, staff and administrators who have worked at (institution) for six months or more, are not currently full-time (institution) students, and are age 19 or older.

Your participation will allow for a significant contribution to existing research. There is a lack of qualitative research related to the influence of gender on how power is perceived and experienced. Additionally, the vast majority of studies have occurred in organizations or experiments numerically dominated by men. Because many organizations (e.g. schools, faith communities, hospitals, libraries) are female-intense, the results of this study will be pertinent to a wide audience.

I am seeking volunteers to participate in this study. The study would require one hour of your time to conduct an in-person interview. You may select the location for this confidential interview. All participants will be protected from being identified by careful attention to maintaining your anonymity in both field notes and publications or presentations that are constructed based on this experience. You may choose to withdraw -from this study at any time, including after the interview is complete.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at University of Nebraska – Lincoln and the IRB at (institution). If you have questions about this study you should call the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965.

Please contact me at [vcurley1@bigred.unl.edu](mailto:vcurley1@bigred.unl.edu) or 981-5334 if you are willing to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Ginny Curley, MS  
UNL doctoral student  
Department of Educational Administration  
981-5334

Advisor: Marilyn Grady, PhD  
Professor, Department of Educational Administration  
University of Nebraska – Lincoln  
402-472-0974

## APPENDIX C – Email Script to Establish Interview

## “Perceptions of Power at a Female-Intense Organization: A Case Study”

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I received your email indicating you are interested in being interviewed for the study on perceptions of power. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Your work at (institution) offers a unique lens through which to view how power is perceived and experienced. This study will contribute to the growing literature on power and gender, which is especially relevant to students and staff at (institution).

As I mentioned in the invitation letter, this interview will be strictly confidential and your name will not be associated with any data that is collected.

What days and times work best for you to be interviewed?

Because this interview will be tape recorded, it is best if we are in a fairly quiet environment. Where would you feel most comfortable for the interview?

I look forward to your reply so we can establish a time to meet. I can be reached at this email address ([vcurley1@bigred.unl.edu](mailto:vcurley1@bigred.unl.edu)) or 981-5334.

Sincerely,  
Ginny Curley, M.S.  
Doctoral Student  
Educational Administration

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## APPENDIX D –Email Confirmation of Interview Time

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I look forward to meeting you on \_\_\_\_\_(day and date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (time) at \_\_\_\_\_ (location). (If meeting at a public location, add the following: *So we can find one another, I am 5' 6" tall and have brown hair and glasses.*)

I have attached an Informed Consent form and the [Study Site] Rights of Research Participants statement for your review. I will bring two copies of the Informed Consent to the interview so you can sign one copy to leave with me and keep one copy. I will also bring a tape recorder and a notebook to take notes. If questions arise before the interview, or you need to change the time, please call me at 981-5334 or you can email me at [vcurlley1@bigred.unl.edu](mailto:vcurlley1@bigred.unl.edu) .

Sincerely,

Ginny Curley  
UNL Doctoral Student  
Educational Administration

## APPENDIX E – Interview Protocol

*Opening and Orientation:*

Thank you for meeting with me today. I appreciate you taking the time to participate in this study. I am seeking information from men and women on this campus about how they perceive and experience power for my doctoral work at UNL. I believe your experience at [institution] offers a unique perspective. The results of this study will be especially significant as most studies of power do not take place in a female-intense institution. You are making a significant contribution to the research.

*Informed Consent:*

With the confirmation of today's interview, I sent you a copy of the Informed Consent and have two copies here. Do you have any questions?

*(Answer questions and then move to signature)*

If you are ready to begin, please sign one copy of the Informed Consent to leave with me. I encourage you to keep the other copy as it includes contact information for me, my adviser, and the Institutional Review Board at UNL if you have questions after our interview today.

*Turn on tape recorder:*

Today's date is \_\_\_\_\_ and the time is \_\_\_\_\_.

I want to verify on tape that you are giving your permission for me to audio tape this interview for the purpose of this study. *(Participant agrees)* Thank you.

We will spend the next 60 minutes or so discussing a series of questions I will ask you related to power and how individuals perceive power in an organization. You have the right to refuse to answer any question and to stop the interview at any time. Feel free to ask for clarification or for me to repeat any question. To maintain confidentiality, all names will be removed from the transcript of this interview and replaced with job categories (faculty, staff, or administration).

Are you ready to begin?

Personal Demographics

1. Please describe your current position at the [institution] and how long you have worked here.
2. What other positions have you held at [institution] or elsewhere?

## Interview Protocol – continued

Exploration of Power as a Concept

1. This study is about individuals' perceptions of power. Please describe how you define "power."
2. Describe a time in your life when you have witnessed power 'in action.'

Exploration of Personal Power within the Organization

1. How would you describe your power at [institution]?
2. What factors influence your power here?
3. Describe a situation in which you exercised a form of power at [institution].

Exploration of Others' Power within the Organization

1. Who would you identify as people with power at [institution]?
2. What factors influence their power?
3. Describe a situation in which you witnessed one of these individuals exercising power in the organization.
4. Are there any commonalities among those who hold power within the organization?
5. Are there any outliers that don't seem to fit this pattern?

Exploration of the Climate of Power

1. Overall, how would you describe the climate at [institution] as it relates to power?
2. Describe how you see power being cultivated at [institution]. Is it shared? Hoarded? Suspect?

Clearinghouse Question:

1. When you heard about the topic of this interview, were there any questions you were hoping I would ask but have not yet?

*Closing:*

This concludes the questions I had. I again want to thank you for your time today. After the interview is transcribed I will send you the transcript for you to verify its accuracy. Once you have done this, the tape recording will be destroyed. If you have any questions, the contact information for me, my advisor, and the UNL Institutional Review



Board is on the Informed Consent form. You have given me important information to consider in this study.

APPENDIX F – Interactional Framework of Leadership Development

Leader

Description of President’s Style

Transforming the Institution— “Raising the bar”  
 Focused on data— “You can lead with your heart, but if your head’s not engaged...”  
 Focused on students— “...that’s what this institution is all about.”  
 Involved at every level— keeps her “ear pretty close...and deal very directly with what...find out.”  
 Open to new information— “...you’ve got to inspire that”

Interactional Model and its Impact at Study Institution

