

ABSTRACT

KEATING POLSON, ALICIA MICHELLE. An Exploration of the Experiences and Leadership Aspirations of College Women Serving in the Collegiate Elite Leadership Position of Student Body President. (Under the direction of Audrey J. Jaeger).

Given that women are achieving elite leadership positions at disproportionately lower rates than men across a variety of sectors (Catalyst, 2017a; Catalyst, 2017c; Catalyst, 2017d; White House Project, 2009), including the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president (American Student Government Association, 2012; Johnson, 2011; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Mink Salas, 2010; New, 2014), research is needed to explore women's experiences in, and leadership aspirations for, these elite leadership positions. The purpose of this basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was to explore the experiences and future leadership aspirations of undergraduate women who serve as student body presidents. To meet that purpose, 20 women student body presidents were recruited from across the United States to participate in this study. Participant voices emerged through multiple in-depth interviews regarding their experiences serving as collegiate elite leaders and their aspirations for elite leadership positions in their future career. Findings suggest that women student body presidents feel tremendous responsibility executing the duties of the presidency. They are other-oriented in their leadership, meaning they prioritize people and enact positive change for those around them. Through their position, they must navigate internal and external hurdles related to their gender and the national climate. They benefit and learn from watching others, especially female role models, practice leadership. Over the time they serve as student body president, women develop strengthened confidence and solidified leadership aspirations. Finally, they develop an increased desire over time to serve in elite leadership positions to be able to provide additional encouragement and support to other women in pursuing leadership opportunities. Developing this comprehensive,

yet nuanced understanding of the experiences and leadership aspirations of our next generation of women leaders through qualitative study may help us create additional paths to elite leadership positions for women.

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An Exploration of the Experiences and Leadership Aspirations of College Women Serving in the
Collegiate Elite Leadership Position of Student Body President

by
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BIOGRAPHY

Alicia Keating Polson is originally from Massachusetts and has a special love for spending time with her family on Cape Cod in the summer time. Over her 30-plus years, she has lived in several states across the country, including Massachusetts, Florida, North Carolina, and most recently, Washington. Living so many places has helped Alicia develop incredible personal and professional relationships with many people across the country, for which she is very grateful. It has also enabled her to explore the diverse regions of the United States.

Alicia began her college career studying business management at Western New England College (WNEC) in Springfield, Massachusetts. She began the study of leadership as an undergraduate business student. Her faculty advisor suggested she pursue a minor in leadership to complement her business management courses and out-of-class activities. This leadership minor sparked Alicia's passion for leadership. During her time at WNEC, she also worked with another professor to co-teach a management course and through that experience realized she had a real passion for teaching students. Alicia's experiences at WNEC prompted her desire to pursue a career in higher education and student affairs.

Upon graduation with her bachelor's degree, Alicia quickly sought out higher education and student affairs master's programs where she could hone her knowledge and skills in working with students. She chose the University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa, Florida. At USF, she served as the Graduate Assistant for Leadership Development in the Office of Student Activities. The experience as a master's student and graduate assistant at USF prepared her well to take on her first professional role at Northwood University in West Palm Beach, Florida where she served as the Director of Student Activities and Leadership Development. She worked at Northwood University for four years and then moved to Florida Atlantic University (FAU)

where she began as the Assistant Director of Student Involvement. Over the six years she worked at FAU, she took on progressive leadership responsibilities and eventually took over the role of Director of Student Involvement and Leadership where she oversaw a myriad of student life areas, including leadership development, student activities, student organizations, and fraternity and sorority life. In 2014, after working for ten years professionally in student affairs, Alicia began the doctoral program at NC State as a full-time student where her research interests focused on the leadership development of women.

In her personal life, Alicia enjoys traveling the world with her husband. They both have a special love for visiting national parks through these travels. Alicia also loves hiking in the mountains, playing and watching golf, exploring her new surroundings living in the Pacific Northwest, spending time with her niece and nephew, listening to podcasts and her favorite band Kuinka, and visiting wineries (and drinking wine). She also loves to sew, which is a skill she developed during her time in the doctoral program.

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Dr. Barry Olson was the first person I met when I visited NC State during Recruitment Weekend and I can't imagine a more caring, supportive, and enthusiastic person. I had the amazing privilege to work for Barry in my first year in the doctoral program and saw firsthand his commitment to the students and staff at NC State. I am tremendously grateful for the opportunity he gave me that first year, as well as the never-ending support he has given to me during every step of my doctoral journey.

In my second year of the program, I met Dr. Meghan Manfra who served as the professor for my Advanced Qualitative Research and Data Analysis course. Meghan has been my favorite, as well as my most stimulating, professor in the classroom. The combination of insightful reading, class discussion, fieldwork, and individualized attention from Meghan brought my learning to another level in that class and truly got me interested in rigorous qualitative study. I am a much better researcher and writer because of Meghan's feedback.

I remember the day I received an email from Dr. Alyssa Rockenbach asking if I would be interested in teaching the Foundations of Higher Education and Student Affairs course with her. I felt so lucky to have been asked and felt especially lucky to be able to have the opportunity to work so closely with Alyssa in the classroom. The experience co-teaching with Alyssa was an incredibly formative experience in my doctoral program. Even as a student teacher, Alyssa treated me as an equal. I learned tremendously from watching Alyssa engage with students in the classroom, as well as prepare for class, which both helped my own teaching style immensely.

I'm also thankful for Alyssa's feedback at every stage of my dissertation, which really helped to elevate my work.

Dr. Audrey Jaeger served as my faculty advisor for the four years I was in the doctoral program, as well as my dissertation chair. I'm not quite sure how I became so fortunate to have this woman be such an integral part of my life, but I am so grateful for it. Most doctoral students, especially women, struggle with their confidence when they begin their doctoral program. But AJ helped me realize quickly that I had value to add to the classroom. She helped me see that I was in a unique position to bring my many years of professional experience as an administrator to the program and that I was in a neat place to be able to teach other graduate students about applying theory to real-world practice. I was lucky to be assigned an advisor in AJ that values the contributions of both the scholar and the practitioner. During my time in the doctoral program, AJ has been an incredible mentor. The mentors who have been the most consequential in my life are those who strongly believe in the mutuality of mentor/mentee relationships. They are individuals who know that a mentor is not one who merely counsels their mentee, but rather believes in the power of reciprocal relationships and knows that a mentor can and should benefit from a mentor relationship as much as the mentee. When a mentor approaches a mentor relationship from this perspective, it aids in creating a collaborative relationship where a mentor and mentee can break down barriers and obstacles and build a relationship of trust. This perfectly describes my mentoring relationship with AJ. We have a reciprocal mentoring relationship, where we both continually learn from each other. Due to our mutually beneficial relationship, AJ and I have built a strong bond that I know will continue for our lifetimes, rather than just my time in the doctoral program. Her mentoring and unwavering supporting at each step of the doctoral program helped me to believe I could actually make it to

this point and for that I am so grateful. AJ's thoughtful insight and guidance also helped me make it through each point in my dissertation. I simply would not be where I am today without her.

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Through this study, I had the honor and privilege to meet 20 incredible women who are enacting tremendous change through their student leadership positions. I am grateful for the time they contributed to this study, as well as the trust they placed in me to tell their stories. In concluding the final interviews, I was a bit sad that I wouldn't be able to continue my conversations with these women. By far, the best part of the dissertation experience was connecting with these women through conversation. It was inspiring and empowering, and I can't wait to see where these women will go in the future.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Women now serve in a variety of elite leadership positions around the world, including the roles of president, prime minister, and chief executive officer, and have demonstrated the effective leadership behaviors necessary to be successful in those roles (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Helgesen, 2011; Vinkenburg, van Engen, Eagly, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2011). However, despite the gains women have made in achieving some of these elite leadership roles, they continue to lag behind men in advancing to positions of leadership at the highest levels. Women, on average, hold only 18% of the elite leadership roles across a variety of sectors in the United States, including business, government, military, journalism, film, law, nonprofit, sports, religion, and academia (White House Project, 2009).

Importantly, we are witnessing the same dynamic happening on college campuses across the country. Women hold only a quarter of university presidencies (American Council on Education, 2012) and are less likely than men to achieve tenure (Catalyst, 2017b). However, as college students, women outpace men. Women make up the majority of college attendees (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016), earn more college degrees than men (Catalyst, 2017c), and are well-represented in leadership and involvement opportunities on campus (New, 2014; Princeton University, 2011). Yet, like the women who are severely underrepresented as university president, female students are underrepresented in one particular student leadership position on campus: student body president (American Student Government Association [ASGA], 2012; Johnson, 2011; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Mink Salas, 2010; New, 2014). The student body president is the highest-ranking student leadership position on most campuses (Cuyjet, 1994; Mink Salas, 2010) and carries significant responsibility (Cuyjet, 1994;

Jaeger, 1999; Student Empowerment Training Project, 2004); therefore, this position can be considered a collegiate elite leadership position. The underrepresentation of women serving in the collegiate elite leadership role of student body president may very well be a microcosm of what is happening in greater society with the lack of women holding elite leadership roles.

Research demonstrates there may be a gender gap in the way men and women aspire to elite leadership positions in both the professional (Barsh & Yee, 2012; Gino, Wilmuth, & Brooks, 2015; Leanin.org & McKinsey & Company, 2015; Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007; Powell & Butterfield, 2003) and collegiate literature (Kreuzer, 1992). Leadership aspirations is a term used in this study to describe an individual's strong desire and intent to seek a leadership role. The study of leadership aspirations, particularly as related to college women, is an understudied area. This study adds to the literature by exploring the experiences and future leadership aspirations of college women who serve in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president. College women serving in the student body president role have made a choice and commitment to serve in an elite collegiate leadership position, so we can learn much from their experiences and future aspirations for elite leadership roles. We can assume these women may aspire to other leadership roles post-graduation and later in their careers. Exploring their experiences in a collegiate elite leadership position, as well their future leadership aspirations, may help us create additional paths to elite leadership positions for other women. To develop a comprehensive, yet nuanced understanding of the mindset and leadership aspirations of our next generation of women leaders, it is critical to gain an understanding of their mindset and future leadership aspirations as undergraduates.

Statement of the Problem

Hillary Clinton was close to being the first woman to become president of the United States in the 2016 national presidential election. She was the first woman to be nominated as a major party candidate in our nation's 240-year history, which is surprising considering we have watched more than five dozen nations around the world elect a female leader before the United States (Kent, 2015). Although Clinton did not win the election, her candidacy marked a new era for women's leadership. However, it also reminds us that women's opportunities to serve in elite leadership positions have been limited. Women hold 51.5% of the management, professional, and related occupations in the United States, but their representation decreases significantly in elite leadership positions (Catalyst, 2017c). In Standard & Poor's (S&P) 500 companies specifically, women make up 44.7% of the labor force, 36.9% of mid-level managers, and only 5.2% of the chief executive officers (Catalyst, 2017a). In government, women hold a mere 19.8% of the total 535 seats in the 115th Congress (Center for American Women and Politics [CAWP], 2018), which ranks the United States 104th worldwide for its representation of women in national government (Oh & Kliff, 2017). Three states, Delaware, Mississippi, and Vermont, along with large portions of Utah, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Ohio, and Indiana, have never elected a woman to the House or Senate (CAWP, 2018; Kliff & Oh, 2016). Only three of nine Supreme Court justices are women, with only four women ever having served throughout the Court's history of 112 justices (Supreme Court, 2016). The numbers are not any better in state and local government where women make up only 8% of governors, 25% of state legislators, and 19% of mayors (Catalyst, 2017d).

Women have been slightly more successful in advancing into elite leadership roles in higher education as compared to other sectors, such as business, government, and law, however

women still make up only 26% of college presidents (American Council on Education [ACE], 2012). This number has increased from 1986 when only 10% of college presidents were women, but this change has been slow (Lapovsky, 2014). Further, as the degree-level of the institution rises, women's representation in the presidency falls. Women hold nearly 33% of college presidencies at associate degree-granting institutions, yet only 22.3% of the presidencies at doctoral degree-granting institutions (ACE, 2012). Women also remain a minority on university governing boards, making up only 28% of voting board members at public institutions and 30% at private institutions (EAB, 2015).

While women surpass men on college campuses by making up 57% of college attendees (NCES, 2016) and earning 57% of bachelor's degrees (Catalyst, 2017c), they are still outnumbered by men when it comes to holding the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president. It is important to note that college women are not underrepresented when it comes to being generally involved on campus and holding student leadership positions, rather women on many college campuses hold many of the available leadership positions (New, 2014; Princeton University, 2011). However, there is a steep drop-off in women's representation when it comes to the student body president role.

Across a 10-year span from 2003-2012, on average, college women held only 38% of student government presidencies across the country, as compared to college men who held 62% of these positions (ASGA, 2012). At the 100 top *U.S. News and World Report* ranked institutions in 2014, college women made up only a third of student body presidents (New, 2014). Miller and Kraus (2004) found that women only represented 28.6% of student body presidents across 21 Midwestern universities and Mink Salas (2010) collected 10 years of historical information from the California State University system about the gender of student

body presidents to find that women made up only 33% of the total student body presidents from the years 2000-2010 across 23 institutions. These statistics make clear that women are not only underrepresented in elite leadership positions in academia, business, government, and many other sectors (White House Project, 2009), but also in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president (ASGA, 2012; Johnson, 2011; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Mink Salas, 2010; New, 2014).

The Importance of Women in Leadership

Why is it so important to close the gender gap in elite leadership? First, women have much to contribute. Women's involvement in leadership is critical to organizations and brings many benefits, including diversity and a variety of perspectives (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly et al., 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Helgesen, 2011; Vinkenburg et al., 2011). The diverse viewpoints of women encourage creative problem solving and critical thinking within the workplace (Rhode, 2016). The desire of many women to be inclusive and collaborative brings more people's voices into the decision-making process (Wenniger & Conroy, 2001). Kellerman and Rhode (2017) wrote about women's perspectives:

Clearly, more women at the top are preferred as a simple matter of equity. Substantively, diverse perspectives expand the spectrum of demographic attributes and characteristics, increase the number of alternatives in any given decision-making situation, enhance utilization of the total talent pool, and provide an example for others to emulate and also to relate to. (p. 16)

A series of studies have also claimed that increased gender diversity in leadership in the workplace leads to more highly satisfied employees, lower conflict, better communication

between employees, and higher performance (Andrevski, Richard, Shaw, & Ferrier, 2014; Dezso & Ross, 2012; Olsen, Parsons, Martins, & Ivanaj, 2016; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007).

Although there is no one way to characterize women's leadership, it is often representative of contemporary conceptualizations of effective leadership. No longer is leadership characterized by a single person being in charge. Rather, the school of thought concerning leadership has transitioned from this leader-centric framework to one that is non-hierarchical, collaborative, and relationship-based (Rost, 1991). One of the major reasons for this paradigm shift in the way we think about leadership is a greater acknowledgement of women's leadership (Kezar, 2014). Whereas men have tended to be more autocratic and directive in their leadership, women are typically more democratic, participative, and relational in their leadership approach (H. S. Astin & Leland, 1991; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Helgesen, 2011; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006; Rosener, 1990). Women leaders value building relationships with organization members and tend to lead, more than men, with an emphasis on accomplishing organizational goals, rather than individual ones (Melero, 2011; Merrill-Sands, Kickul, & Ingols, 2005). Women are also more likely to practice transformational leadership behaviors than men, such as mentoring and developing followers as leaders, communicating values and purpose, and displaying optimism about goals (Eagly et al., 2003; Vinkenbunrg et al., 2011). Many scholars agree that these postindustrial conceptualizations of transformative leadership are in line with the type of leadership needed in today's society (Dugan, 2006; Kezar et al., 2006; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2009).

Throughout the course of history, few women have been recognized as elite leaders, especially as compared to the number of men who are recognized (Klenke, 2004). Yet, with hard work and determination by women across the planet, the number of women leaders is

growing in the present day. Women across the world now serve as presidents, prime ministers, chief executive officers, and in a variety of other elite leadership roles. One may think it is only a matter of time until women become as likely as men to hold elite leadership positions.

However, as Rhode (2003) wrote, “At current rates of change, it will be almost three centuries before women are as likely as men to become top managers in major corporations or achieve equal representation in the U.S. Congress” (p. 7). Waiting three centuries is a sobering thought. Even if society is set on a course to eventually achieve parity for women in elite leadership positions, it is still too far away.

Reasons for the Lack of Women in Leadership

Reasons for the underrepresentation of women in elite leadership positions across sectors are varied and well documented. Considerable research points to the external barriers that women face. Eagly and Carli (2007) summarized much of the existing literature regarding the exclusion of women from leadership in their book, *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth about How Women Become Leaders*. The “glass ceiling” was termed in 1986 to explain the invisible barrier women face in breaking through to the executive-level suite (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986); however, in their book Eagly and Carli (2007) recognized that time and circumstances have changed and now the use of the glass ceiling metaphor depicting a single obstacle is inaccurate. Rather, a better metaphor is the “labyrinth,” whereas women face a variety of twists and turns, walls and openings, both expected and unexpected, as they progress through their careers. The labyrinth assumes that women may be able to achieve elite leadership roles, but the paths to get there can be quite circuitous and labyrinth-like (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

While the widespread adoption of federal laws and organizational policies prohibiting sex discrimination have increased the opportunities for women in the workplace, second-generation

gender bias still impedes women (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013). This form of gender bias recognizes that organizational structures and informal practices favor men and disadvantage women, however inadvertently, because men have been the dominant group for so long (Ibarra et al., 2013). Examples of second-generation bias include women feeling less connected to men through informal networks in the workplace, being advised to change to less demanding staffing roles after having a child, or having a lack of female role models in the workplace (Ibarra et al., 2013). These practices may inhibit women's advancement to leadership roles, despite comparable credentials to men (Ibarra et al., 2013; Sturm, 2001).

Women also face a multitude of challenges in being perceived by others as leaders and achieving leadership roles based on stereotypical beliefs of what a leader is expected to be (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). These "cultural stereotypes can make it seem that women do not have what it takes for important leadership roles" (Koenig et al., 2011, p. 116). Eagly and Karau (2002) refer to this mismatch in their role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders, which proposes that the perceived incongruity between leadership roles and the female gender role leads to women leaders being perceived less favorably than their male peers, which may result in it being more challenging for women to achieve leadership roles and subsequent success in those roles. A recent meta-analysis affirmed this theory by demonstrating that leadership continues to be associated with masculine traits (Koenig et al., 2011), so regardless of the positive contributions made by female leaders, men are still recognized as the "leaders by default" (Catalyst, 2007, p. 1). As a result, women are stuck in a double bind (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007) and are assumed to be less competent and worthy in leadership than men (Ridgeway, 2001).

The glass ceiling (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986) and leadership labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007), second-generation gender bias (Ibarra et al., 2013), perceived role incongruity (Koenig et al., 2011) and the double bind (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007) have been cited as just some of the reasons why women continue to be underrepresented in elite leadership positions. Examining the impact of these external factors on women's underrepresentation in elite leadership is important and this research has contributed to new ideas to lessen the impact of these factors on women leaders. However, these barriers may not be the only obstacles thwarting women's progression into these roles. We also need to consider women's aspirations for elite leadership positions.

Women's Leadership Aspirations

Leadership aspirations is a term used in this study to describe a person's strong desire or intent to seek a leadership role. Women's leadership development typically focuses on building leadership skills and developing strategies to combat the external barriers women face in achieving leadership roles. However, also important is findings ways to stimulate the leadership aspirations of women, as it may be critical in their achievement of elite leadership roles. As Boatwright and Egidio (2003) eloquently wrote,

Forces in the social environment thus seriously undermine women's advancement into leadership roles. But external factors are not the only crucial inhibitors. A logical assumption is that women must intrinsically possess an interest in aspiring for leadership roles before they can take full advantage of emerging opportunities: "Glass ceilings" are broken by opportunity accompanied by desire. (p. 654)

As the research demonstrates, women surely face numerous societal barriers that undermine their achievement of elite leadership positions (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Hymowitz &

Schellhardt, 1986; Ibarra et al., 2013; Koenig et al., 2011), but as Boatwright and Egidio (2003) pointed out, we must also explore women's leadership aspirations. The expressed desire and intent of women to seek out these elite leadership roles is a critical factor in their attainment of these positions.

Studies conducted to explore the leadership aspirations of men and women found a gender gap with more men than women aspiring to elite leadership positions. Studies examining the aspirations of professional employees have found that women are significantly less likely than men to aspire to elite leadership positions (Barsh & Yee, 2012; Gino et al., 2015; Leanin.org & McKinsey & Company, 2015; Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007; Powell & Butterfield, 2003) and in the political arena, women reported lower levels of aspirations for political office as compared to men (Fox & Lawless, 2004; 2011; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Sanbonmatsu, 2006). Among college students, findings also indicated that men reported higher leadership aspirations than women (Kreuzer, 1992).

Why are women reporting lower leadership aspirations for elite leadership positions? Much of the research about women's leadership aspirations demonstrates that the external barriers women face in leadership may not only impact their attainment of elite leadership positions, but also their aspirations for these positions. Studies comparing the leadership aspirations of men and women have found that women continue to perceive an incongruity between elite leadership roles and their gender identity, which contributes to their lower desire to seek out elite leadership (Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007; Powell & Butterfield, 2003). Further, women with more self-identified masculine gender traits were more likely to aspire to elite leadership positions than women (Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007; Powell & Butterfield, 2003). Women perceived elite leadership roles to be less attainable than men, which negatively affected

their aspirations for these roles (Litzky & Greenhaus, 2007). Also negatively impacting their aspirations was women's tendency to associate more negative outcomes with elite leadership positions, such as time constraints and the need to make trade-offs, (Gino et al., 2015). Women expressed more concerns than men over managing stress and balancing work and family when thinking about their desire to serve in elite leadership roles, which indicates "the path to leadership is disproportionately stressful for women" (Leanin.org & McKinsey & Company, 2015, p. 10).

Women may also have different priorities as related to their professional roles and make different choices. Across nine studies with 4000 participants from diverse populations (working professionals, employees in elite leadership positions, and undergraduate students), it was discovered that women had more life goals than men, and a smaller percentage of these goals were related to achieving status and power. Instead, many of the life goals of women were related to affiliation and their desire to connect with others, which many women felt were not consistent with holding an elite leadership role (Gino et al., 2015). Some women are also "opting-out" and choosing to leave or scale down their careers to spend more time at home because they do not feel compelled to try to have it all (Belkin, 2003).

In the collegiate literature, Yeagley, Subich, and Tokar (2010) found leader efficacy beliefs and leadership outcome expectations to be predictors of college women's leadership aspirations for elite leadership positions. Considering several studies have shown that college women report lower leader efficacy beliefs (Dugan, Komives, & Segar, 2008; Dugan, Garland, Jacoby, & Gasiorski, 2008; Dugan & Komives, 2010; McCormick, Tanguma, & López-Forment, 2002; 2003; Sax, 2008) and anticipate more negative leadership outcome expectation than their male peers (Killeen, López-Zafra, & Eagly, 2006; Lips, 2000; 2001), Yeagley et al.'s (2010)

findings demonstrate that college women's lower leader efficacy beliefs and negative leadership outcome expectations may contribute to their lower leadership aspirations.

Ultimately, it is a woman's choice to aspire to elite leadership roles. Blaming women's choices for the lack of women in elite leadership positions ignores the extent to which their choices are affected by numerous socially constructed inhibitors. Women have demonstrated they can thrive in high-level, high-power leadership roles (Keohane, 2014), so they do not need to prove they are worthy for these roles. Yet, we can still benefit from additional research on the important topic of women's leadership aspirations. This research may contribute to finding ways to further activate the leadership aspirations of women, which may be critical in their future attainment of elite leadership roles.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Given that women are significantly underrepresented in elite leadership positions across a variety of sectors (Catalyst, 2017a; Catalyst, 2017c; Catalyst, 2017d; White House Project, 2009), including the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president (ASGA, 2012; Johnson, 2011; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Mink Salas, 2010; New, 2014), despite the many advantages women leaders provide to organizations (Andrevski et al., 2014; Dezso & Ross, 2012; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly et al., 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Helgesen, 2011; Kellerman & Rhode, 2017; Melero, 2011; Merrill-Sands et al., 2005; Olsen et al., 2016; Rosener, 1990; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Vinkenburg et al., 2011), research is needed to explore women's experiences in, and leadership aspirations for, these elite leadership positions. The purpose of this basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was to explore the experiences and future leadership aspirations of undergraduate women who serve as student body presidents. Student body president is often seen as the most significant leadership position

for a student on a college campus (Cuyjet, 1994; Mink Salas, 2010); therefore, college women serving in this role hold a unique collegiate elite leadership position on their campus. College women comprise the future generation of women who may aspire to elite leadership positions; therefore, an examination of their experiences while holding a collegiate elite leadership position will be useful in gaining a perspective as to the challenges and triumphs associated with elite leadership positions at the collegiate level. Studying this unique population will also be useful in discovering how college women make meaning of their collegiate elite leadership role and future aspirations for elite leadership roles. This basic qualitative study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of undergraduate women serving in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president?
2. How do undergraduate women describe their future leadership aspirations for elite leadership roles throughout their tenure as student body president?

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; 2002) offers a useful theoretical framework to examine college women's experiences in the student body president position, as well as their aspirations to pursue elite leadership positions in their future career. SCCT is a widely used career development theory that is grounded in Bandura's (1986) general social cognitive theory, as well as Krumboltz's (1979) social learning theory of career decision making and Hackett and Betz's (1981) work applying self-efficacy theory to women's career development. The SCCT framework views "people as active agents in, or shapers of, their career development" (Lent et al., 2002, p. 255). The SSCT framework theorizes that two particular cognitive-person constructs, self-efficacy and outcome expectations, contribute to the

development of career interests and goals. These two constructs interact with an individual and their environment (e.g., gender, social supports or barriers, etc.) to shape their own career development. In essence, SCCT explains how one develops interests, makes choices, and accomplishes goals in relation to their career, while also taking into account contextual factors in one's background or environment. SSCT was found to be a useful theoretical model in a quantitative study to examine the factors that may impact college women's aspirations for elite leadership positions and found that positive leader efficacy beliefs and positive leadership outcome expectations predicted higher aspirations for elite leadership roles (Yeagley et al., 2010). The present study used SSCT as a lens through which to explore the experiences and future leadership aspirations of women serving in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president. Like Yeagley et al. (2010), I examined the central SCCT constructs of self-efficacy and outcome expectations with the participants in this study. I explored these constructs with participants using a qualitative design to better understand the experiences and highlight the voices of women. To build on Yeagley et al.'s (2010) study, I also examined contextual factors in participants' background (gender) and environment (supports or barriers). The inclusion of these contextual factors was important to understand some of the relevant stimuli that may exist to impact women's experiences in leadership roles and their future leadership aspirations.

Significance of the Study

Regardless of the numerous advantages women leaders bring to organizations (Andrevski et al., 2014; Dezso & Ross, 2012; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly et al., 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Helgesen, 2011; Kellerman & Rhode, 2017; Melero, 2011; Merrill-Sands et al., 2005; Olsen et al., 2016; Rosener, 1990; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Vinkenburg et al.,

2011), they continue to be underrepresented in elite leadership positions across a variety of sectors (White House Project, 2009). On college campuses, women make up a majority of attendees (NCES, 2016) and earn a majority of the degrees (Catalyst, 2017c), yet are still outnumbered in the role of student body president (ASGA, 2012; Johnson, 2011; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Mink Salas, 2010; New, 2014), which based on its high status and significant responsibilities (Cuyjet, 1994; Mink Salas, 2010) is considered a collegiate elite leadership position. Considering college women represent the future generation of elite leaders in society, it is valuable and significant to explore the experiences and leadership aspirations of women serving in these collegiate elite leadership positions, as it may help us create additional paths to elite leadership positions for other women. The following sections outline the significance of the study to research, theory, and practice.

Significance for research. This study aimed to expand the research in college women's leadership in a few ways, including (a) examining the experiences of college women serving in a collegiate elite leadership position, (b) exploring how college women describe their future leadership aspirations while holding a collegiate elite leadership position, and (c) recruiting a unique participant sample. Each of these areas is described below.

There are limited studies conducted on the experiences of college women serving in high-level leadership positions. This in-depth qualitative study explored the experiences of women at various points during their tenure as student body president and provides an in-depth perspective as to the triumphs and challenges the women faced in their role. Understanding these perspectives is important as they help us recognize what motivates women to seek out collegiate elite leadership roles, what they value in their roles as campus leaders, how they handle the responsibility, and what types of barriers and supports they face in the role.

Second, the study of college women's leadership aspirations is an understudied area. The few studies that do exist are quantitative in nature and offer little in subtlety and depth. This study examined how college women describe their future leadership aspirations for elite leadership positions in three interviews across six months. During the interviews, the women were serving in a collegiate elite leadership role, which shaped the way they described their future leadership aspirations. This study provides important information as to how college women's aspirations change over time.

Third, the participant sample in this study went beyond any studies that have been conducted previously on student body presidents (Damell, 2013; Dias, 2009; Hellwig-Olson, 2000; May, 2010; Spencer, 2004). This study focused exclusively on women, as opposed to many of the past studies on student body presidents, which underrepresented women in their participant sample (Dias, 2009; Hellwig-Olson, 2000; May, 2010). Further, the participants in this study were from a variety of institution-types across the United States and not from just one institution, or regional area, like past studies (Dias, 2009; May 2010). Finally, each participant participated in three interviews over the course of six months of their tenure serving as student body president. No previous studies on student body presidents, or female student leaders, have done multiple interviews with participants while they were serving in their position (Damell, 2013; Dias, 2009; Haber-Curran, 2013; Hellwig-Olson, 2000; May, 2010; Romano, 1996; Spencer, 2004).

Significance for theory. This study also aimed for theoretical significance. This research applied SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) to women's leadership experiences and aspirations in a higher education setting, which has only been done in a limited way in the past. Along with examining the central SCCT constructs of self-efficacy and outcome expectations

like Yeagley et al.'s (2010) study applying SCCT to women's leadership aspirations, this present study also explored the contextual factors in participants' background and environment, which is another important component to SCCT. Yeagley et al.'s (2010) found that self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations contribute to increased leadership aspirations in women. This study goes further in that it provides information about how self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and contextual factors shape women's description of their experiences and future leadership aspirations.

Significance for practice. This study also provides a significant contribution to practitioners. Colleges and universities can benefit from a better understanding of the experiences of women serving in collegiate elite leadership roles. This study helps university administrators understand the ways in which women develop confidence in their leadership abilities, as well as the experiences that shape their future leadership aspirations. The study also sheds light on the challenges women face in the student body presidency and what supports administrators can provide to best assist women serving in leadership roles on campus. Overall, this study aimed to provide a new perspective that strives to assist leadership educators in providing an environment rich with high impact leadership development experiences that can better meet the needs of women leaders, as well as positively impact campus culture to increase the number of women in elite leadership roles.

Overview of Methodology

The research design of this study supported a basic qualitative design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) exploring the experiences and leadership aspirations of college women serving in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president. Qualitative inquiry offers the opportunity to explore the meaning that participants ascribe to their lived experiences (Merriam,

2009) and is helpful for studying topics where limited research is available (Creswell, 2013), such as the experiences and leadership aspirations of college women serving in a collegiate elite leadership role. To conduct this basic qualitative study, 20 undergraduate women who served as student body presidents at four-year coeducational institutions across the country were recruited to participate in this study through the American Student Government Association (ASGA) and regional website searches. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015) was used to identify participants who represented diverse backgrounds from a variety of institution types across the United States. Participant voices emerged through three in-depth interviews occurring over the course of six months in their tenure as student body president.

An electronic database was used to organize the data and stored on two password-protected external hard drives, and included a log documenting the transcripts and field notes collected throughout the study. Process, emotion, in vivo, and descriptive coding were used as a part of eclectic first cycle coding. Pattern and longitudinal coding was used during second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016). Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, I wrote extensive memos to assist in meaning making and trustworthiness (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Member checking was used to increase credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A research design protocol was also designed and followed to increase dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For transferability, I aimed to present the findings with thick description and extensive participant quotes to assist readers in understanding the lived experiences and leadership aspirations of the participants serving in a collegiate elite leadership position (Patton, 2015).

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions are provided to aid readers in understanding several key terms used throughout this study.

Co-curricular involvement is the term used for the activities that occur outside of the academic curriculum at a university. It is also known as the “other curriculum” (Kuh, 1995, p. 124).

Collegiate elite leadership position refers to those student leadership posts at the highest level held by students in college, including such positions as student body president, sorority or fraternity president, and campus newspaper editor. See the definition for *elite leadership position* for further discussion.

Elite leadership position refers to those leadership posts at the highest level in any sector, including such positions as president, vice president, chancellor, and chief executive officer. The use of the term “elite” in this study is not meant to imply that people serving in high-level leadership positions are superior to others, as may be inferred from a traditional reading of the definition of the word “elite.” Rather, I am using the term “elite” to be consistent with the literature that I have drawn from for this study. Several leadership scholars have used the term “elite” to describe leadership positions at the highest level (Carli & Eagly, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Yeagley et al., 2010).

Leadership. Hundreds of definitions have been written over time to describe the concept of leadership, yet, there is still no one specific definition. However, most current definitions share some common themes, including the following, which I will use to define the concept of leadership in this study:

1. Leadership involves having a goal or vision for the future.
2. Leadership requires others to be involved in the accomplishment of a goal.
3. Leadership involves using social influence versus power to get things accomplished.
4. Leadership entails action to create change.

Leadership aspirations is a term used to describe a person's strong desire and intent to seek a leadership role.

Leader efficacy refers to a "leaders' confidence in their abilities, knowledge, and skills in areas needed to lead others effectively" (Machida & Schaubroeck, 2011, p. 460).

Student government refers to the representative body on a college campus, usually comprised of elected students, that serves as the official voice of students to administration, participates in institutional decision-making, and plans and organizes events and activities (Laosebikan-Buggs, 2006).

Student body president refers to a college student elected to serve as the chief executive officer of their student body. The student body president is the highest-ranking position in student government, as well as one of the highest ranking positions on most campuses (Cuyjet, 1994). Other titles may be used to refer to this student leader position on different campuses, including student government president, student council president, or student senate president, but this study will use the consistent language of "student body president" throughout the study even if individual institutions may refer to this position in a different way.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and future leadership aspirations of undergraduate women who serve in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president. This literature review aims to provide the reader with an understanding of the existing literature related to the central tenets of this study: women's leadership, student governance, and social cognitive career theory (leader efficacy, leadership outcome expectations, and leadership aspirations).

First, a brief overview of women and leadership is provided, which reveals that leadership has been dominated by men for most of history. However, as women gain more opportunities to practice leadership, their practices are often more consistent with postindustrial conceptualizations of leadership than men's. An explanation of many of the obstacles women face in achieving elite leadership roles is reviewed. This section concludes with an examination of women's leadership in college.

Next, a brief history of student government in higher education is provided, including how women were often excluded from student governance throughout much of the 19th and early 20th century. The modern role of student government on college campuses is also explored. Next, the role of student body president is explained, and studies conducted on student body presidents are reviewed. The underrepresentation of women serving in the student body president position is discussed and previous studies regarding women student body presidents are reviewed.

Finally, this section concludes with an explanation of the theoretical framework for this study: Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 1994; 2002). This theory provided a useful framework through which to explore the experiences of college women serving in collegiate elite

leadership positions, as well as the future aspirations of these women for elite leadership positions beyond college. The core constructs of self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations will be defined. Finally, the key aspects and findings of studies particularly relevant to the theory, including studies about leader efficacy, leadership outcome expectations, and leadership aspirations, will also be reviewed.

Women's Leadership

Leadership is a complex phenomenon and through much of history has been viewed in masculine terms. Although women have been integral to society, they have been nearly absent from the history books as men have been celebrated as having shaped the course of history. Although this section of the literature review does not provide a detailed historical outline of women's leadership throughout history, it does aim to provide the context through which to understand women's leadership through history, as well as some of the obstacles that impede women from gaining equal representation in elite leadership roles.

Women's Leadership: Past and Present

Researchers have long studied the concept of leadership and its history has been as complex as the nature of leadership itself. Scholars from many disciplines have aspired to understand this complex phenomenon and have developed a multitude of definitions trying to explain it (Klenke, 2004). Leadership has been found to play a part in every culture and society around the world through early and modern civilizations. Great accomplishment and success, as well as tremendous devastation and sorrow, can all be attributed to leadership (Klenke, 2004). Leadership has been "vital in every historical time period and in every culture" (Klenke, 2004, p. 1) and serves as a worthy area of study based on its impact in society across generations.

For much of history, the concept of leadership has been closely associated with

masculinity (Klenke, 2004; Rost, 1991). Few women, prior to the 20th century, were recognized as leaders. Rather “great men” were perceived by many to have shaped human history through their strong leadership with women being seen as nearly absent (Klenke, 2004). Men served as kings, prime ministers, and heads of state, so were recognized as the high-profile leaders. Yet, women played a number of important informal leadership roles throughout history, including leading families and volunteering through education, religious activities, and caring for the sick and poor. Each of these activities were “essential to the flourishing of human communities” (Keohane, 2014, p. 43), yet often went unrecognized as “it is through the lenses of the lives, prestige, courage, and grandeur of those men that much history and leadership is viewed” (Klenke, 2004, p. 2).

Most of the research related to leadership prior to the 1980’s was conducted by men, about men, and for men. This research focused on the gender differences between men and women and emphasized that these differences resulted in men being better leaders (Klenke, 2004). Through this industrial leadership paradigm, what was considered good leadership came from a positional leader, typically a man, who had the right and ability through this position, to exert power and control over followers (Rost, 1991). This type of leadership was described as “management oriented, personalistic in focusing on only the leader, goal achievement dominated, self-interested and individualistic in outlook, male-oriented, utilitarian and materialistic in ethical perspective, rationalistic, technocratic, linear, and quantitative” (Rost, 1991, p. 27). The few references to women in the literature were negative. Wenniger and Conroy (2001) explained:

Women just didn’t fit the classic white Western male style of leadership now called the command-and-control model: women were accused of being less aggressive, more

dependent, and more emotional than males. Further, women were excitable in minor crises, illogical, home-oriented, unskilled at business, sneaky, and unfamiliar with the ways of the world. (p. 9)

More recently, the way many think about leadership has changed. Our conceptualization of leadership has transitioned from a leader-centric framework to one that is non-hierarchical, collaborative and relationship-based (Rost, 1991). Burns (1978) seminal work *Leadership* was instrumental to this shifting paradigm by explaining how leadership should be a transformative process characterized by collaboration, group process, and human relations. This shift in thinking about leadership occurred in the 1980's but was influenced by the political and social shifts in the 1960s and 1970s when society began to look at leadership in new ways, especially through the lenses of Marxism and Feminism (Kezar et al., 2006). No longer was leadership being considered the work of a single individual; rather it was beginning to be seen as a collaborative effort among all group members (Rost, 1991). The emergence of postindustrial conceptualizations of leadership has made leadership more accessible to women.

A foundational work on women's leadership, released in 1991, studied 77 women of influence (Astin & Leland, 1991). This cross-generational study focused on the way's women described their personal values, the context in which they were leaders, and how they worked to enact change. Through the study, women characterized their leadership as collaborative and non-hierarchical. They valued relationships and prioritized providing support to their team members. The women also saw leadership as a process by which to create change within an organization. This study explored the ways in which women lead but did not compare men's and women's leadership styles (Astin & Leland, 1991); however, other studies compared leadership based on gender. A meta-analysis of 370 studies focused on the differences between men and

women's leadership behaviors found that women practiced more relational and collaborative leadership behaviors than their male peers (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Another meta-analysis of 45 studies found that women practiced more transformational leadership behaviors than men, such as mentoring and developing followers as leaders, communicating values and purpose, and displaying optimism about goals (Eagly et al., 2003). More recently, additional research echoed these findings where women were reported as having more transformational leadership behaviors than men (Vinkenburg et al., 2011).

The literature demonstrates that women's leadership tends to be consistent with the collaborative, participative, and relationship-based themes of postindustrial concepts (Astin & Leland, 1991; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly et al., 2003; Helgesen, 2011; Rosener, 1990; Wenniger & Conroy, 2001). Many scholars agree that the postindustrial paradigm is in line with the leadership needed in today's society (Dugan, 2006; Kezar et al., 2006; Komvies et al., 2009). No longer is leadership characterized by a positional leader who is decisive and in control of his subordinates in a hierarchical structure (Rost, 1991). Postindustrial leadership is instead characterized by collaborative effort between leaders and followers focused on collective change, wherein leaders aim to transform followers into leaders (Burns, 1978; Rost, 1991). Based on the research, some scholars point out that women have a leadership advantage considering their preference for postindustrial leadership in today's society (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Helgesen, 2011), yet many still perceive that men have better leadership qualities than women (Fischbach, Lichtenthaler, & Horstmann, 2015; Yukl, 2010).

Obstacles to Women's Leadership in the Workplace

Many reasons have been attributed to the underrepresentation of women in elite leadership positions. Considerable research points to the external barriers that women face,

including the glass ceiling (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986), leadership labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007), second generation gender bias (Ibarra et al., 2013), perceived role incongruity (Koenig et al., 2011), and the double bind (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007). The remainder of this section explains some of these socially constructed barriers.

Glass ceiling and leadership labyrinth. The term “glass ceiling” was first introduced by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt in 1986 to describe the invisible barrier women face in breaking through to elite leadership positions in corporate America. The glass ceiling was a metaphor that suggested that beliefs and attitudes held by members of an organization (i.e., women are not capable of leadership) and the context of an organization (i.e., social structures) contributed to women struggling to advance in their careers. However, Eagly and Carli (2007) recognized that time and circumstances have changed and the glass ceiling metaphor is no longer accurate. Instead, they developed a more contemporary way of viewing women’s struggles to achieve elite leadership positions with a new metaphor called the “labyrinth.” The concept of the leadership labyrinth acknowledges the many challenges and obstacles women encounter as they ascend to elite leadership positions. While the labyrinth metaphor assumes that some women will achieve elite leadership status, it recognizes that they often must take a more circuitous route than men, with a variety of twists and turns, both expected and unexpected, as they progress to the top (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Second-generation gender bias. Second-generation gender bias refers to organizational structures and informal practices that favor men and disadvantage women (Ibarra et al., 2013). This type of bias “erects powerful but subtle and often invisible barriers for women that arise from cultural assumptions and organizational structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently benefit men while putting women at a disadvantage” (Ibarra et al., 2013, p.

64). The structures and practices appear to be non-sexist or neutral, but still work to discriminate against women because they reflect the values of the men who developed the organizational setting in the first place. The psychologist Faye Crosby stumbled upon this phenomenon more than two decades ago when she discovered, “most women are unaware of having personally been victims of gender discrimination and deny it even when it is objectively true and they see that women in general experience it” (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 63). Second-generation gender bias does not deliberately exclude or harm women, rather it is a bias that creates an environment where women may fail to reach their full potential without men, or even women, noticing it in the workplace. Examples of second-generation bias include women feeling less connected to men through informal networks in the workplace, being advised to change to less demanding staffing roles after having a child, or having a lack of female role models in the workplace (Ibarra et al., 2013). These practices may inhibit women’s advancement to leadership roles, despite comparable credentials to their male peers (Ibarra et al., 2013; Sturm, 2001). For instance, research demonstrates that women benefit from same-gender role models more than men do. A study found that being exposed to women staff and faculty had positive effects on the educational attainment of women students but had no effects for men. Further, women are more likely to be inspired by female role models, whereas men are less likely to connect role models, of either gender, to their future career aspirations (Lockwood, 2006). Therefore, if second-generation bias limits the numbers of female role models in the workplace, this lack of female role models may impact women’s full potential.

Perceived role incongruity and the double bind. Many people have beliefs about what a leader is expected to be or how they are expected to act, which are often based on gender stereotypes (Koenig et al., 2011). Women are expected to exhibit communal qualities, such as

being friendly, helpful, and sympathetic, while men are expected to display agentic qualities, such as being aggressive, ambitious, and self-reliant (Eagly & Carli, 2007). When women display communal characteristics in leadership, they may be perceived as weak, but on the other hand, when women display agentic qualities in leadership, they come off as too strong. Studies have shown that when women exhibit stereotypical male behaviors in leadership, they are viewed less favorably (Catalyst, 2007; Heilman, 2001; Koenig et al., 2011; Ridgeway, 2001).

Eagly and Karau (2002) refer to this mismatch in their role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. This theory proposes that the perceived incongruity between a leadership role and the female gender role leads to prejudice against women. This prejudice can take two forms: (a) less favorable evaluation of women's leadership potential based on stereotypically held beliefs that connect masculinity with effective leadership and (b) less favorable evaluation of women's actual leadership based on the perception that the behaviors displayed by women are less desirable (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The perceived incongruity between leadership roles and the female gender role leads to women leaders being perceived less favorably than their male peers, which may result in it being more challenging for women to achieve leadership roles and subsequent success in those roles. Women are then stuck in a double bind (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007). If they exhibit the communal qualities women are expected to practice, they are not seen as a leader. On the other hand, if they display the agentic qualities that are typically associated with men, they fail in exhibiting the gender role expectations of being a woman. Either way, women face this double bind and find themselves in a continual dilemma contending with the stereotypes others have about women in leadership (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Women's Leadership Development in College

Developing students as leaders is often cited as a critical outcome of higher education (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2007; Astin & Astin, 2000; Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2009; Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999) and most institutions make reference to the development of students as leaders in their public mission statements (Boatman, 1999). The time students spend in college is believed to significantly contribute to the development of their leadership capacity (Astin & Astin, 2000; Pascarella, Terenzini & Feldman, 2005; Roberts, 2003). Several studies have empirically linked collegiate experiences to gains in leadership capacity, including student organization membership (Dugan, 2006), positional leadership roles (Dugan 2006; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000), and formal leadership programs (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt; Dugan, 2006; Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999).

The Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL) is an instrument now used at over 350 institutions to measure the leadership capacity of college students (MSL, 2017). Over 610,000 students have taken the MSL since its inception in 2006. The MSL is theoretically based on the Social Change Model of Leadership which posits that leadership is a collaborative and values-based process enacting change for the common good (HERI, 1996). This model is consistent with contemporary conceptualizations of leadership through the postindustrial paradigm (Rost, 1991). College women have consistently rated their leadership capacities higher than college men on the MSL (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Dugan, Fath, Howes, Lavelle, & Polanin, 2008), which may indicate a female propensity to practice leadership in accordance with postindustrial conceptualizations. There were several collegiate experiences considered to contribute to

student's increased leadership capacity, including positional leadership roles, formal leadership programs, mentoring, student organizations, participation in socio-cultural conversations, and service (Dugan & Komives, 2007). The MSL also measures students' leader efficacy and findings demonstrated that college women score lower on leader efficacy scales than college men (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Dugan, Garland, et al., 2008; Dugan, Komives, et al., 2008). Though women are rating themselves as having higher leadership capacity than their male peers, they are reporting lower confidence in their own abilities. The collegiate leadership experiences that contribute to increased leader efficacy include positional leadership roles, formal leadership programs, mentoring, and participation in sociocultural conversations. The impact of holding a position leadership role was greater on women's increased leader efficacy than men. The concept of "leader efficacy" will be discussed in more detail later in this literature review.

The MSL findings are in line with Sax's (2008) work on gender in college, which found that women enter college with less confidence in their leadership skills than men, and that this gender gap grows during their time in college. According to Sax (2008), both women and men experience gains in leadership confidence when they participate in co-curricular experiences, including student government, formal leadership training, and student organizations; and curricular experiences, including studying with peers, engaging with faculty for support, and challenging faculty in class. Additional factors only affected women's leadership confidence. The further away from home women attended college resulted in increased confidence in her leadership skills. Additionally, socializing with friends, taking honors classes, and participating in workshops related to race and culture contributed to increased confidence. Finally, women's leadership confidence was related to their academic major. Women in business majors

experienced higher-than-average gains, while women in biological science majors experienced lower-than-average gains (Sax, 2009).

There have been two qualitative studies that specifically examined the experiences of women student leaders in college, which relate to the present study. Romano (1996) interviewed 15 college women who served as presidents or co-presidents of student organizations. She found that women often saw their mothers or grandmothers as their primary female role models. Their mothers and grandmothers did not necessarily hold leadership positions but were seen as strong and powerful women in the family. The women described their leadership styles as relationship- and group-oriented, which was consistent with previous work on women's leadership in the workplace that found that women tend to value relationships and collaboration (Astin & Leland, 1991; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly et al., 2003; Helgesen, 2011; Rosener, 1990; Wenniger & Conroy, 2001). The women in Romano's (1996) study felt they were successful in bringing groups together and including organization members in decision-making. They were challenged in managing conflict within the group. Several women in the study recounted experiences in which they thought their male peers were intimidated by their leadership style. The women in the study also cited direct experience practicing leadership and observing other practice leadership as the ways in which they learned to be leaders (Romano, 1996).

Haber-Curran (2013) also studied the experiences of college women student leaders by focusing on the successes and challenges faced by women in leadership roles on campus. Women in the study found their biggest successes were related to bringing about positive change in their student organization, which included strengthening relationships among organization members and setting their organization up for success in the future, and contributing to the development of their organization members. Two of the challenges faced by women were

related to relationships. They struggled in keeping up positive relationships while also being task-oriented and in balancing the roles of leader and friend. A third challenge faced by the women was the organizational and environmental contexts in which they worked. They were challenged by a lack of advisor support due to staff turnover in a university department and having to lead in an authoritarian way based on organizational bylaws. Related to gender, some women were challenged by leading all-women organizations and thought it would be easier to lead co-ed organizations, while others thought it was more difficult leading a co-ed group because of having to adapt their leadership styles based on gender make-up of the group (Haber-Curran, 2013). This next section will explore student governance.

Student Governance

This section of the literature review will provide a brief history of student government in higher education, including how women were often excluded from student government activities until the mid-20th century. The role of modern student government on college campuses is also explored. Next, the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president is explained along with the underrepresentation of women serving in the student body president role. Previous studies conducted on student body presidents are reviewed. The final portion of this student governance section includes a synthesis of the literature in this area.

History of Student Government in Higher Education

While there may be arguments about the specific institution where student governance began, most historians believe that it began with the first colleges in Colonial America, so in some form has been in existence since the 1700s (May, 2010). Students becoming involved in governance on their campuses sprouted “out of a combination of the need for extracurricular outlets, disengagement with the academic curriculum, dissatisfaction with institutional rules and

disciplinary procedures, and a desire for student empowerment” (May, 2010, p. 207). Along with the many changes that have occurred in higher education over the last 300 years, means of student governance have changed in many ways as well. In the early days of student government, students were able contribute their ideas regarding campus governance, but they had little power and minimal decision-making authority (Golden & Schwartz, 1994; May, 2010). However, in the 1970s, “many in higher education began to acknowledge the importance of student involvement in campus governance... and the valuable input from those students involved in governance” (Golden & Schwartz, 1994, p. 21). Since then, student government has played a more crucial role on college campuses, as will be described in more depth in a later section. Over the years, the position of student body president has also transitioned from what was once a ceremonial position with little power and responsibility to a position that is seen as significantly more critical on the college campus with real power and authority to be involved in institution-wide decision-making (May, 2010).

History of Women in Student Government

In the earlier days of higher education in the United States, women were often considered intellectually inferior to men. Women did not have the same access to college that men did, as many feared that college may distract women from their roles in the home as wives and mothers (Horowitz, 1987). Some women began to gain increased access to higher education in the mid-1800s, but they did not share “an equal or common experience either academically or socially with male counterparts” (May, 2010, p. 215) in coeducational institutions. Their male peers excluded them from extracurricular activities, such as student governance, so women began their own clubs and activities, including women’s student governance organizations. Yet, these organizations were not seen as equal to men’s organizations in power, influence, or status (May,

2010). The exception to this was in women's colleges. Women who attended women's colleges in the late 19th and early 20th century "thrived socially and academically" (May, 2010, p. 215) and were able to be actively involved in student governance, including holding officer positions. In coeducational institutions however, women were excluded from involvement. Women did not begin to gain access to male-dominated extracurricular organizations, like student government, until the mid-1900s as college campuses were affected with events such as World War II and the Civil Rights Movement, which in turn, expanded the access of women to higher education, as well as extracurricular activities and student government (May, 2010).

Modern Role of Student Government on College Campuses

It is difficult to generalize the role of student government on college campuses, as each campus is quite unique and the power granted to student government varies widely across private and public, large and small institutions, and state by state. However, there are still many similarities. On many campuses, the organizational structure of student government mirrors the federal government with an executive, legislative, and judicial branch (Golden & Schwartz, 1994). In general, student government across the large majority of campuses practices the following:

Serves as the official voice of students to administration (representation); allows students to participate in the decision-making processes of university governance (voice); ethical and responsible collection and dissemination of student fees; and recognition of student organizations as well as the coordination of the activities and clubs on campus (advocacy). (Laosebikan-Buggs, 2006, p. 3)

Overall, student governments on their individual campuses are typically “considered high profile organizations and are charged with many responsibilities... and serve as formal structures for student involvement in decision-making at colleges and universities” (Miles, 2011, p. 324).

A recent study was conducted to determine what types of decision-making student governments actually participate in on their campuses (Smith, Miller, & Nadler, 2016). The researchers collected and analyzed documentation, including website content and a year’s worth of meeting minutes, from 10 student governments across the country. They discovered the following:

Overall, the student governments identified in the study took on meaningful issues that potentially impact the lives of students on campus. The issues were substantive and meaningful, and generally represented mature thinking about problems students face on campus, such as what kinds of material should be covered in a general education curriculum and how many credit hours a student can enroll in. Similarly... there were issues that seemed related to student life and perhaps carry some real concern among student government leaders. (Smith et al., 2016, p. 46)

This recent study provides evidence of the role the modern student government plays in critical decision-making on college campuses.

Benefits of Involvement in Student Government

Students learn and develop through their involvement in co-curricular activities on campus. A significant body of work has established powerful connections between student involvement and positive outcomes of student development and success, including satisfaction, persistence, academic achievement, and social engagement (A. W. Astin, 1993; Berger & Milem, 1999; Kuh, 1995; Mayhew et al., 2016; Trowler, 2010). Although the literature focusing on the

benefits of student involvement to the growth and development of students is vast, the majority of these studies examine co-curricular involvement generally, rather than in terms of a specific involvement experience like student government (Patton, Renn, Guido, Quaye, & Forney, 2016). Rhee and Kim (2011) used longitudinal data obtained from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and found that students' participation in student government contributed positively to the development of civic values, (e.g., influencing the political structure, influencing social values, helping others who are in difficulty, becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment, developing a meaningful philosophy of life, participating in a community action program, helping to promote racial understanding, keeping up to date with political affairs, and becoming a community leader). Lott's (2013) findings, also using data from the CIRP, were consistent that participation in student government positively affected civic values.

One foundational study specifically selected students in student government for its sample and examined the gains students experienced as a result of their participation in student government (Kuh & Lund, 1994). As compared to other areas of student involvement, Kuh and Lund (1994) found that participation in student government contributed to the development of both practical and social competence, and student government participation was "the single most potent experience associated with the development of practical competence" (p. 10). Practical competence refers to decision-making ability, as well as organizational skills like time management, budgeting, and dealing with an organization's structures and processes, while social competence refers to the ability to work with others, practice leadership, and communicate effectively. Participation in student government was also found to expose students to many ideas and beliefs, which may be different from their own. Through this participation, students must

represent others and in turn, learn to articulate viewpoints they do not necessarily share, while also attempting to work effectively with others who have conflicting ideas. Kuh and Lund's (1994) study was useful as it was the first to identify the gains students attributed to their involvement in student government; however, it is admittedly an outdated study, as it is nearly 25 years old. This study also addressed the gains students experienced from general student government involvement, rather than the gains experienced specifically by those students who served in leadership roles within student government, such as president. The next section will examine previous dissertation studies specifically related to students serving in the student body president role.

Student Body Presidents

The student body president role is the highest-ranking position in student government, as well as one of the highest ranking positions on most campuses, and is considered “one of the most prestigious and influential student leadership positions on a college campus” (Mink Salas, 2010, p. 1). Student body presidents must manage and lead a large organization of their peers, while also continually addressing the concerns of their constituents (students) and university administration (Cuyjet, 1994). The student body president serves as the chief executive officer of the student body on their campus, selects and supervises numerous students serving in cabinet positions, and often represents the student body as a voting member on the university's governing board. In 28 states, the student body president at each state institution also participates on the state governing student association, which enables students to have a voice beyond the institution level by allowing student body presidents to represent student concerns at the state government level (Jaeger, 1999; Student Empowerment Training Project, 2004).

Students serving in the student body president role at many institutions receive various forms of compensation that are not offered to other student leaders on campus. This compensation is based on the significance of the role. More than 70% of student government presidents receive a stipend for their service, which is often paid out of student activity fees (Pappano, 2013). Stipends can range from \$1000 a year to upwards of \$20,000 a year. At some institutions, they receive tuition waivers. Student body presidents also often receive parking passes, which allows them park in various locations on campus to meet with administrators. At some institutions, the student body president has their own designated parking spot on campus. Other perks of the presidency include receiving reimbursement for monthly cell phone bills, meal cards to eat for free in dining halls across campus, and tickets to home football and basketball games (Moore, 2013; Pappano, 2013; Torres, 2012). In addition to the various forms of compensation that student body presidents may receive, they are also the student typically called upon by their university president to welcome VIP visitors to campus, such as the United States president, vice president, and first lady (Pappano, 2013).

Research focusing specifically on student body presidents has been somewhat limited. There has been one research article appearing in a refereed journal (Miller & Kraus, 2004), five doctoral dissertations (Damell, 2013; Dias, 2009; Hellwig-Olson, 2000; May, 2009; Spencer, 2004), and two additional dissertations focused on the experiences of students running for the office of student body president (Mink Salas, 2010; Zimmerman, 2017). These studies examined a variety of topics in relation to the student government presidency, including (a) the experiences of student body presidents (Dias, 2009; Hellwig-Olson, 2000; May, 2009); (b) the underrepresentation of women serving in the student body president role (Miller & Kraus, 2004); (c) the experiences of women running (or considering running) for the student body president

role (Mink Salas, 2010; Spencer, 2004; Zimmerman, 2017); and (d) the leadership identity development of women student body presidents (Damell, 2013). One of these studies focused on students currently serving in the student body president role (Hellwig-Olson, 2000), two studies included participants who would potentially run for, or were running for, student body president (Mink Salas, 2010; Zimmerman, 2017), and the remaining studies included participants who had formerly served as student body presidents (Damell, 2013; Dias, 2009; May, 2009; Spencer, 2004). These studies will be analyzed in the following sections beginning with the lack of women serving as student body presidents, followed by the experiences of student body presidents, and concluding with the leadership identity development of women student body presidents.

Lack of women serving as student body presidents. Women did not begin to gain access to student government at coeducational institutions until the mid-20th century (May, 2010). Since that time, women have not gained parity in holding the role of student body president, which is the highest-ranking position on most campuses. Across a 10-year time span, from 2003-2012, on average, women held 38% of student government presidencies across the country, as compared to college men who held 62% of these positions (ASGA, 2012). Miller and Kraus (2004) explored how women were represented in student government at a smaller subset of 21 Midwestern universities. Through a survey sent to these institutions, they found that women represented 47% of student government positions in general, but were significantly underrepresented in the student body president role where they held only six of the 21 positions (28.6%). They also found that in the previous five years, women only held the student body president position 25.7% of the time across the 21 institutions (Miller & Kraus, 2004). As part of her dissertation study, Mink Salas (2010) collected 10 years of historical information from the

California State University system about the gender of student body presidents. She found that women represented only 33% of the total student body presidents from the years 2000 - 2010 across 23 institutions.

Three doctoral dissertation studies closely examined the experiences of women running for, or considering running for, the position of student body president (Mink Salas, 2010; Spencer, 2004; Zimmerman, 2017). Each of these studies serves to shed light on some of the reasons for the underrepresentation of women serving in this collegiate elite leadership role. Spencer (2004) explored the conditions that exist at institutions that may impede a college woman's desire, ability, and willingness to run for, and be elected student body president. She focused on four major areas for the study: (a) the obstacles women face running for student body president; (b) the experiences in college that may encourage future political participation, (c) the political interests among women in college, and (d) the traits that would be useful to women serving in a political role. During the study, she interviewed 16 women who served as student body president at various institutions across the country between the years of 1977-2004 and found the most common reason that the women ran for the student body president position was them feeling the need to make a difference on campus. Participants described their leadership styles as collaborative, empowering, compassionate, and engaged (Spencer, 2004), which is consistent with postindustrial conceptualizations of leadership (Rost, 1991)

In term of obstacles faced in running for office, Spencer (2004) found many of the women had a lack of exposure to politics as they were growing up and she proposed this lack of exposure for women could impact the desire of women to run for student body president. When asked why more women did not run for student body president, participants had some common responses, including:

Women do not think they should or could run for office, women are not willing to take the risk to run for office, women see campuses as male dominated, and women do not look at student government as an avenue where they can be involved. (Spencer, 2004, p. 135).

After making the decision to run for office, participants described experiencing a chilly climate on campus as they campaigned for office and were often questioned about why they were running for the office of student body president. Many of the participants also dealt with gender stereotypes while running for and serving in the position, which is consistent with the literature that demonstrates that women deal with perceived role incongruity (Koenig et al., 2011) and the double bind (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007) in their pursuit of leadership roles. Some women experienced others assuming they were secretaries or vice presidents by those who did not know them, and many felt they were treated in a different way by university administrators than the male presidents that had come before them. In terms of factors that encouraged them to run for office, Spencer (2004) discovered that women often credited mentors and role models in their lives for encouraging them to seek out the student body president position and this encouragement was critical to their perseverance. Involvement in other governance activities, such as high school student council or class council, also affected women's desire to run for the student body president position (Spencer, 2004).

Participants had mixed responses when it came to their future political aspirations. Five of the women had political aspirations and three were not interested in future elected positions due to the intense level of scrutiny that comes along with these types of positions. The remainder of the participants were unsure of their future political aspirations with many of them

citing the immense toll running for student body president had taken on them as a reason why they may not run for an elected position again in the future (Spencer, 2004).

Overall, Spencer's (2004) study provides helpful insight into the obstacles women face, both in running for student body president, as well as serving in the role. However, the study did have some limitations. First, the participants only included women who served in the student body president role. It would have been quite insightful to also include women who had run for the position of student body president but had not won, as well as women who were involved in student government, but did not choose to run for this elite leadership position. The obstacles and encouragement factors may have been quite different for these groups of women. Second, while the study did examine the political aspirations of the participants, it did not explore the leadership or career aspirations of the women, which also may be influenced by their experiences as student body president. The present study explored these topics in depth with participants.

Building upon the work of Spencer (2004), Mink Salas (2010) explored "the reasons why women, from a diversity of ethnicities, choose to run or not run for the student body presidency on college campuses" (p. 1). Based on her review of the literature, Mink Salas (2010) developed a *Taxonomy of Factors that Impede or Encourage Candidacy*, which she used as a framework to take a more nuanced look than the previous study (Spencer, 2004) by examining the role self-efficacy plays, the influence of role models and mentors, the impact of organizational culture, and the ways participants conceptualize leadership. She also expanded upon the participants in her study by including not only students who served in the student body president role like Spencer (2004) had done, but also including students who were generally involved in student government. Her rationalization for including women who were generally involved in student government was that these were the women who would potentially be the ones who would run

for student body president in the future and their perspectives were important. Mink Salas (2010) interviewed 38 women student government leaders from across four institutions in the California State University system.

In accordance with Spencer (2004), Mink Salas (2010) found that women who made the decision to run for office, did so because they felt a desire to make a change and contribute positively to their campus. Further, they were often encouraged to run for office by a role model or mentor in their life. Mink Salas (2010) described that many of the participants had an “active champion” (p. 133) in their lives that played a critical role in their decision-making process. This champion went beyond the typical duties of a role model or mentor by actively and continuously encouraging women to pursue leadership opportunities and helping them to develop a plan for running for office.

Participants also described a variety of reasons for making the decision to not run for student body president. The response mentioned most often by participants was that they did not believe they knew enough to serve in the role, or in other words, they did not possess the self-efficacy to believe they could be successful in the role. These women believed they had the basic skills to serve as president, but “still believed they lacked a specific knowledge base” (Mink Salas, 2010, p. 131). A few women shared that they felt they may be more prepared to run after gaining another year of experience working generally in student government. Some other common responses from participants about not running included not having a passion for the position, not having an interest in the politics of the position, and not wanting to take on the huge responsibility of the role (Mink Salas, 2010).

Although participants had a variety of responses in relation to how well they believed the culture of student government fit with their own leadership style, Mink Salas (2010) did find that

the organizational culture could negatively impact a woman's choice to run for office. Participants explained scenarios where they felt the women in student government were sometimes not taken as seriously as the men in the organization and they often felt they had to work harder to prove themselves. This sentiment is similar to the participants in Spencer's (2004) study who struggled with other's perceptions of gender role incongruity in the student body president position, and the larger literature on women's leadership that cites this gender role incongruity as a significant barrier for women in attaining leadership roles (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Koenig et al., 2011).

This study's participants were not limited to women who served in the student body president role, and instead included participants who had the potential to make the decision to run for office. This group of participants provided some real insight into the barriers that may impact a college woman's decision to run or not run for a collegiate elite leadership role, which expanded upon previous work in this topic (Spencer, 2004). However, like all studies, there was a limitation. Mainly, the participants all came from the California State University system, so the similar institution types and the environment within that state system could impact the findings in the study. Including participants from a wider variety of institutions may uncover new and different information, which is the strategy that was used in the present study. Additionally, the work of Spencer (2004) and Mink Salas (2010) was helpful in uncovering the factors that may encourage or discourage women from running for student body president, yet these studies did not explore the experiences of women serving in their role throughout their term, which is an important perspective. The current study explored the experiences of women at multiple points during their tenure as student body president, which offers a new perspective that has yet to be provided.

The most recent study to be conducted related to the lack of women in student body president positions focused on the experiences of college women running for the student body president position. Zimmerman (2017) used Eagly and Carli's (2007) leadership labyrinth and Bronfenbrenner's (1994) human ecological systems framework to examine how women "navigate leadership pathways into the student government presidency" and the "contextual factors that impact the ways they navigate those pathways" (Zimmerman, 2017, p. 65). She was particularly interested in how women make the decision to run for president, including their motivations and the choices they need to make while making the decision to run. Additionally, she studied the contextual factors that impact a women's decision to run for president, including mentorship and campus culture. Zimmerman (2017) interviewed seven participants at different institutions who were running for student body president in spring 2017. She conducted three separate interviews with each participant at three distinct points in time: beginning of the campaign, middle of the campaign, and after the election.

Zimmerman (2017) found that the women had a number of significant leadership involvement experiences, both pre-college and during college, which contributed to their decisions to run for student body president. They were motivated to run for office based on what participants called "the right reasons" (Zimmerman, 2017, p. 81), which were based on their desire to create change versus their desire to be president just for the title of it. Another motivation was the women's desire to make a positive impact on their campus, which was similar to the reasons cited by the participants in the previous studies conducted by Spencer (2004) and Mink Salas (2010). Some women also explained being motivated based on the identities they held. While making the decision to run for office, the women questioned their confidence, as well as whether they had the qualifications to run, which aligns with experiences

of the participants in Mink Salas' (2010) study. Although the women felt they were strong leaders in student government, they still turned to people around them to provide encouragement and validation when making their decision to run, which again, was consistent with previous work by Mink Salas (2010).

This study also highlighted some of the contextual factors that can have positive and negative effects on women's decisions to seek out the position of student body president. Mentorship from a variety of people in the women's lives, including previous student body presidents and administrators, was an important factor to their decision to run. Additionally, social media was a contextual factor in their campaigning period as some experienced negative campaigning and bullying. Another factor impacting women's decision to run, as well as their experience running, was the 2016 U.S. presidential election and perceptions of gender and politics. Many saw parallels between their campus elections and the national election. Some were worried to run against, and lose to, men who were less qualified as they felt that is what happened in the national election with Clinton and Trump. Others were told by students they should not be running as women because very qualified men were running.

Zimmerman (2017) conducted an insightful study that built upon the previous work of Spencer (2004) and Mink Salas (2010). The newest study confirmed earlier findings that women are often motivated to run for the student body president position because of a desire to impact positive change on their campus. Further, women questioned their confidence in their leadership ability, regardless of the qualifications they brought to the table, and often turned to mentors for external validation to receive support and encouragement to run. Most notable in Zimmerman's (2017) study was her findings related to the current context in which women are operating when making the decision to run for president, including factors such as social media and the 2016

U.S. presidential election. A next step in Zimmerman's research would be to conduct additional interviews with the participants who won the student body president position. These interviews could provide great insight into the ways that women need to continue to navigate the leadership labyrinth in their role as president. Although the present study did not examine participants' experiences in the leadership labyrinth while they served in office, it does explore some of the contextual factors brought up in Zimmerman's (2017) study with women serving in the student body president position.

Experiences of student body presidents. Three doctoral dissertations focused on the experiences of students who served as student body presidents (Dias, 2009; Hellwig-Olson, 2000; May, 2009). The first, Hellwig-Olson (2000), crafted an overarching research question that guided her phenomenological study: "What can be discovered from the totality of the experiences of those who are elected to serve in the student body president position on college campuses" (Hellwig-Olson, 2000, p. 7). She interviewed eight participants from four different institutions, with four of the participants having just finished their term as president and four just beginning their term. She found seven themes to emerge through the participants' stories, including factors that motivated them to serve in the president role, beliefs and values that influenced the way they served, leadership, campus issues they dealt with in the president role, factors that aided in their success, impact of the president role on their personal life, and recommendations to others interested in the president role. Through their president role, participants benefited the most from the opportunities to build their leadership, communication, conflict management, and public speaking skills, which was consistent with the results of Kuh and Lund's (1994) earlier study. They also felt the skills they learned through the student government presidency would directly benefit them in their future employment. Participants

described experiencing personal sacrifice through their role, including a loss of privacy due to their public student leadership positions and a decline in their academic performance due to the heavy responsibilities of their role. Particularly relevant to this study, participants expressed their belief that men and women lead differently and that women are underrepresented in top student leadership positions. Multiple participants shared that women are more involved in campus activities than men are on their campuses, but not in the top positions (Hellwig-Olson, 2000).

This study was the first to examine the experiences of student body presidents, however it did have some limitations. First, of the eight participants, only one was a woman. This lack of women was likely due to the lack of women serving in the student body president role as indicated in the study; however, having only one woman in the study limits the perspectives of women, as well as the applicability of findings to women in general. Second, half of the participants had not served in the president's role yet, and instead were about to begin their term. Therefore, these students were sharing their expectations of the president role, rather than their actual experience. It may have been more beneficial to interview participants at multiple points during their student government presidency in order to learn about their expectations, as well as actual experiences, much like the present study.

Another qualitative dissertation study sought to understand the essence of the experience of former students who served in the student body president role. May (2009) focused on three broad categories in his study: (a) understanding what participants gained from serving in the student body president role; (b) the perspectives of participants toward their experience serving in the student body president role; and (c) the meanings students derived from their role as student body president and how this meaning affected their lives. He interviewed six participants who had each previously served as student body president at the same small, liberal

arts institution in the South. These participants had served in the president's role in sequence over the years 2000 through 2007 and had each been advised by the researcher in this study who served as the director of student activities and student government advisor at the institution. May's (2009) study revealed several themes, including the positive and negative aspects of serving as student body president, personal characteristics needed to be successful in the role, the struggle to balance the demands of the role, and the relationships and conflicts that arose through the role. Many of the key findings of this study were consistent with Hellwig-Olson's (2000) similar study, such as participants indicating they experienced significant growth by serving as student body president, as well as dealt with personal sacrifice from the considerable duties associated with the position, which contributed to high levels of stress and less time for academics. Participants in May's (2009) study were also challenged with the "ongoing struggle to work with and lead peers on the executive board and the student senate" (p. 364). Some indicated "they felt that they lived their presidency on a stage under a hot spotlight" (May, 2009, p. 352), which contributed to them each feeling as if they had a high level of scrutiny placed upon them while serving in the role. The two women in the study felt they had higher levels of scrutiny placed on them as compared to their male peers because of their gender (May, 2009).

While May (2009) came to some important conclusions, his study is not without its limitations. First, the researcher served as the direct advisor for each of the participants during their tenure as student body president. This relationship likely had an impact on the participation and responses of participants throughout the study. Next, only two of the six participants were women. May (2009) explained this was due to the lack of women serving in the student body president role at his particular institution, however having only two women in the study still limits the perspectives of women. Lastly, this study included participants from only one

institution, so limits the perspectives of participants from different campuses. The present study focused exclusively on women student body presidents from a variety of institution types from across the United States, which expands the perspectives gained from women.

Also examining the perspectives of former student body presidents, Dias' (2009) purpose was to examine the extent to which these former students exhibited leadership as defined by Bolman and Deal's (2003) multi-frame model and how they described the impact of their presidency on their lives post-college. Bolman and Deal's (2003) multi-frame model identifies four distinct "frames" or ways of viewing the world that can be helpful to leaders in providing leadership and management to an organization. Dias (2009) utilized a mixed methods research design, in which she invited former students who had served as student body president between the years 1977 and 2007 at one institution to complete the Leadership Orientations Instrument (Bolman & Deal, 2003) and participate in one 30-minute interview. Of the 19 participants, all completed the survey and 14 participated in the interview. Survey results indicated that 42% of participants exhibited multi-frame leadership with the human resource frame being the most dominantly used, followed by the political, symbolic, and structural frames. Participants described people as being at the center of their leadership, as well as an important factor as to whether they would succeed or fail. Echoing the findings of Hellwig-Olson (2000) and May (2009), Dias (2009) found that participants gained many skills as result of serving in the student body president role, such as leadership, communication, negotiation, organization, and critical thinking skills. Also consistent with previous studies, some of these former presidents experienced challenge in balancing the demands of their role, as well as a lack of privacy (Dias, 2009; Hellwig-Olson, 2000).

Over half of Dias' (2009) participants believed they applied the leadership, communication, organization, and negotiation skills they gained through the student body president role in their life post-college. Many also felt that serving in the president's role provided career direction and employment opportunities that would not have been available to them had they not served in the role. Two participants had conflicting views on the influence of the student body president role on their career as related to politics. One felt the role positively influenced their desire to become involved in politics, while another felt the role had made them not want to get involved in politics. However, there was no clarification provided as to what type of politics the participants were referring to, whether it was politics in the workplace or politics as a career (Dias, 2009).

Consistent with the previous two studies on student body presidents (Hellwig-Olson, 2000; May, 2009), a major limitation in Dias' (2009) study was the lack of women. Of the 19 participants, only three of them were women. There were no questions related to gender as a part of the study and the lack of women made it impossible to conduct any type of statistical analysis comparing the results of men and women. Further, of the 14 participants interviewed, only one was a woman. Having only one woman's voice in the qualitative aspect of this mixed methods research design was a real weakness. The participants in this study also all hailed from the same institution, so similar to May's (2009) study, there was no ability to compare experience across institution.

Leadership identity development of women student body presidents. Examining the impact the student body president role had on the leadership identity development of women was Damell's (2013) dissertation study. She twice interviewed 14 women who had previously served as student body president between the years of 1997 and 2012 at a variety of institutions. She

found that holding the role of student body president has a significant impact on the development of leadership identity both during the time of holding the position, as well as beyond the experience post-graduation. Damell (2013) wrote, “Unarguably, the women all believed the experience was influential, impactful, and shaped their leadership identities” (p. 181). Four overarching themes emerged in her study: (a) getting involved; (b) relationships matter; (c) navigating gender dynamics; and (d) student government experience matters.

Consistent with the women in previous studies (Mink Salas, 2010; Spencer, 2004), the participants in Damell’s (2013) study were very involved in co-curricular activities prior to making the decision to run for student body president and felt the strong encouragement they received from others strongly contributed to their decision to run for office. Also consistent with previous studies (Mink Salas, 2010; Spencer, 2004), the women in this study wanted to create positive change on their campus by serving in the president role. Damell (2013) found relationships to matter significantly to her participants and these relationships “played a role in shaping how the women developed as leaders” (p. 107). The women prioritized creating relationships with peers and administrators and Damell (2013) wrote, “it was evident that the women believed that relationships indeed mattered to them” (p. 106). Many of the women in the study attributed much of their success in the student body president role to strong female role models and mentors in their life. Some pointed to mothers, while others credited female administrators and female university presidents.

Although gender was a focus of her study, Damell (2013) made an effort to not bring up gender early in the interviews. Instead, “as the interviews progressed, gender was often brought up organically as part of the conversation” (Damell, 2013, p. 119). She found that the participants did not find gender to be deeply connected to their experiences as student body

president, which is in contrast to the women in Spencer's (2004) study who described dealing with a chilly climate on campus as they ran for office and gender stereotypes as they served in the office. Damell's (2013) participants did not feel gender was a factor in their student government role, but that gender did become a significant component of their identities post-college, particularly in their roles as employees, supervisors, and leaders. Some women were aware of the "double bind" they were in where they would either be perceived as too weak or too strong in the workplace and many were unsure of juggling personal and professional responsibilities into the future. Damell (2013) described one participant who felt more prepared to navigate these gender-based challenges based on her prior experience dealing with negative stereotypes regarding women.

Damell's (2013) research suggests that serving in the student body president role impacts the leadership identity development of women. One limitation of the study is that Damell (2013) did not ask about participants future leadership aspirations and how serving in the president role may have influenced those leadership aspirations. Further, the women she interviewed for the study graduated between the years of 1997 and 2012, so could have been one year removed from serving as student body president or up to 15 years removed from the role. This is quite a variance of years removed from the position, but there was no explanation in the findings if responses were similar or dissimilar across years removed from the position.

Synthesis of Student Governance

The student body president role is a collegiate elite leadership position. Students serving in this role have much responsibility, including managing and leading a large organization, hiring and supervising peers serving in cabinet positions, and representing and advocating for others at the institutional (and sometimes state) level (Cuyjet, 1994; Jaeger, 1999; Student

Empowerment Training Project, 2004). Research about the experiences of student body presidents has demonstrated that students serving in this role learn a tremendous amount from the position, especially through the opportunities to build their leadership, communication, conflict management, negotiation, organization, and critical thinking skills (Dias, 2009; Hellwig-Olson, 2000; May, 2009). Students currently serving as student body president felt the skills they were learning in the position would benefit them in the workplace (Hellwig-Olson), while former student body presidents were able to provide examples of how the student government presidency had directly benefited them in the workplace, including providing career direction and employment opportunities (Damell, 2013; May, 2009). In the position, student body presidents felt they were under close scrutiny and suffered a loss of privacy because of their public role (Dias, 2009; Hellwig-Olson, 2000; May, 2009). Some women felt they were held to higher levels of scrutiny than their male peers (May, 2009). Former student body presidents also experienced challenge in dealing with the many responsibilities of the role, which for some, contributed to high stress and a decline in academic performance (Dias, 2009; Hellwig-Olson, 2000; May, 2009).

Similar to how women are underrepresented in elite leadership positions in the workplace (Catalyst, 2016), college women are significantly underrepresented in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president (ASGA, 2012; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Mink-Salas, 2010). Women who do run for the office of student body president have a few similarities, including being encouraged to run by a role model, mentor, or active champion in their life, having a history of being involved in high school and college governance activities, and possessing a desire to create positive change on campus (Damell, 2013; Mink-Salas, 2010; Spencer, 2004; Zimmerman, 2017). In the role, women described relationships with peers and

administrators as being critically important to their success as student body president and their development as leaders (Damell, 2013). Women who did not run for student body president had several reasons for not running for office, such as a lack of self-efficacy beliefs to serve in the role, not having a passion for the position, not having an interest in the politics of the position, and not wanting to take on the huge responsibility of the role (Mink-Salas, 2010). Some former student body presidents described experiencing a chilly climate on campus when running for office, as well as having to deal with gender stereotypes while serving in the office from their peers and university administrators (Spencer, 2004). In contrast, some former student body presidents did not agree and felt that gender was not a factor in their student government role, rather their gender did not become a factor until they began their careers in the workplace (Damell, 2013). The most recent study found that women running for student body president saw parallels between the 2016 U.S. presidential election and their own campus presidential election.

The current literature on student body presidents focuses on the reflections of graduated students who formerly served in this collegiate elite leadership role (Damell, 2013; Dias, 2009; May, 2009; Spencer, 2004). Only one study examined the experiences of current students serving in the role (Hellwig-Olson, 2000). In Hellwig-Olson's (2000) study of eight participants, four of the participants had just finished their term as president and four were just beginning their term. Only one of the participants was a woman, so the perspectives of women were not necessarily represented. Further, this study was conducted nearly two decades ago, so an updated study focusing on the experiences of women currently serving in the student government role is needed. The current study aimed to broaden the literature on student body presidents by studying the experiences of women currently serving in this collegiate elite leadership role at

multiple points during their tenure. Further, this study examined the future leadership aspirations of women serving in the student body president role, which is an area that has not been examined in previous literature. The theoretical framework for this study is described in the next section.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994; 2002) provides a useful framework to explore the experiences of college women serving in collegiate elite leadership positions, as well as the future aspirations of these women for elite leadership positions beyond college. The SCCT framework views “people as active agents in, or shapers of, their career development (Lent et al., 2002, p. 255). Lent et al. (1994; 2002) theorize that three key cognitive-person constructs enable people to exercise agency in their career development: self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals. This section will provide an overview of SCCT and two of its core constructs, self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. The key aspects and findings of studies particularly relevant to SCCT, including studies about leader efficacy, leadership outcome expectations, and leadership aspirations will also be reviewed. The final portion of this SCCT section includes a synthesis of the literature.

SCCT as a Theoretical Framework

SCCT is a theory developed by Robert Lent, Steven Brown, and Gail Hackett in 1994, which aims to explain three interrelated aspects of career development: (a) how educational and career interests develop, (b) how educational and career choices are made, and (c) how educational and career success is realized. The theory is principally based on Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory, but also incorporates some of the commonalities and differences among already existing career theories (e.g., interests, abilities, environmental factors). Lent et al. (2002) explained that they designed SCCT “to help construct useful conceptual bridges, to

identify major variables that may compose a more comprehensive explanatory system, and to sketch the central processes linking these variables together” (p. 257).

SCCT is comprised of three key constructs: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. Self-efficacy reflects the confidence an individual has in his or her own capacity to perform successfully in a particular domain (e.g. mathematics, leadership). Outcome expectations refer to the beliefs one has about the “consequences or outcomes of performing particular behaviors... If I do this, what will happen?” (Lent et al., 2002, p. 262). Personal goals represent one’s determination in pursuing a particular future activity or outcome. SCCT proposes that these three cognitive-person constructs interact, which then affects a person’s sense of agency. The authors stated, “self-efficacy and outcome expectations affect the goals that one selects and the effort expended in their pursuit. Personal goals, in turn, influence the development of self-efficacy and outcome expectations” (Lent et al., 2002, p. 263). Figure 1 below provides a visual representation of SCCT. It is important to note that the intention of this study was not to examine all the aspects of Lent et al.’s (2002) theory as depicted in the figure below, rather the present study focused on exploring the constructs of self-efficacy and outcome expectations, as well as contextual factors (proximal environmental influences) with participants.

As shown in Figure 1, according to SCCT, interests in career-related activities develop as a result of self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. By being exposed to and engaged in career-related activities, people enhance their self-efficacy beliefs as related to particular tasks and develop expectations about outcomes they will experience. People are more likely to develop interest in career-related activities in which they have high self-efficacy beliefs and positive outcome expectations. They are more likely to form persistent interest in career-related activities when they see themselves as competent and expect good things to result from

continued activity. On the other hand, people are less likely to develop enduring interest in career-related activities in which they question their competence and expect bad things to result from continued activity (Lent et al., 1994; 2002).

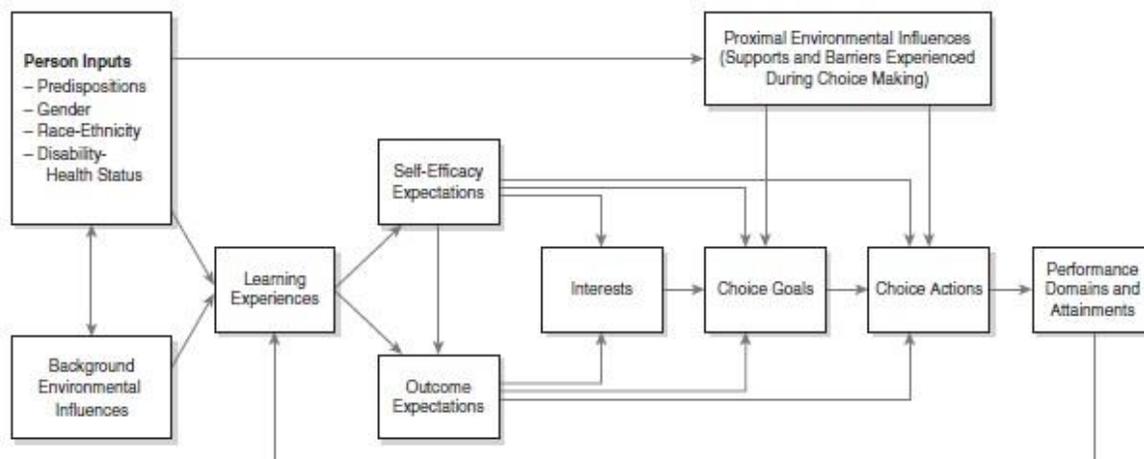


Figure 1. Adapted SCCT Model of Person, Contextual, and Experiential Factors Affecting Career-Related Choice Behavior from “Cognitive Career Theory,” by R. W. Lent, S. D. Brown, and G. Hackett, 2002, *Career Choice and Development*, 4, p. 269.

SCCT also considers background and environmental contexts, which may impact one’s self-efficacy and agency. For instance, of interest to this study is that the SCCT considers that gender-role socialization may impact career pursuits of women. As discussed earlier in this literature review, women often deal with a number of societal barriers, such as the glass ceiling (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986), leadership labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007), second generation gender bias (Ibarra et al., 2013), perceived role incongruity (Koenig et al., 2011), and the double bind (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007) that may limit their perceived career choices. This recognition of contextual factors is relevant to examine while studying women’s career choices as these factors may influence one’s sense of agency. SCCT can be a useful framework to

explore the various factors that may play a role in the development of college women's leadership aspirations, particularly in the areas of leadership self-efficacy and leadership outcome expectations, as well as the contextual factors that may impact college women's experiences in their role as student body president.

Using SCCT to Explore College Women's Leadership Aspirations

Yeagley et al. (2010) used SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) to examine college women's perceptions of elite leadership positions, as well as the factors that may impact women's interests and goals for elite leadership positions. The authors stated, "SCCT offers a promising theoretical framework for understanding internal factors that contribute to young women's elite leadership aspirations" (Yeagley et al., 2010, p. 31). They defined elite leadership roles as upper-level leadership positions, such as "top executives, CEOs, vice presidents, presidents, and board members for Fortune 500 companies" (Yeagley et al., 2010, p. 30), as opposed to middle management leadership roles. The authors were interested in studying women's leadership in the context of elite leadership positions because of the scarcity of women serving as leaders at the highest levels. They used SCCT as it incorporates several constructs integral to studying women's leadership, including leader efficacy, leadership outcome expectations, and leadership aspirations. Figure 2 displays the authors' hypothesized model.

In the study, Yeagley et al. (2010) surveyed 156 college women using five questionnaires designed by the authors, including the following: Self-Efficacy Expectations for Elite Leadership Questionnaire which assessed "women's beliefs in their abilities to successfully complete 26 tasks relevant to an elite leadership position" (p. 33); Outcome Expectations for Elite Leadership Questionnaire which assessed "the degree to which women believe that engaging in an elite leadership position yields positive outcomes" (p. 33); Interest in Elite Leadership Questionnaire

which assessed “participants’ interest in 12 tasks involved in participation in an elite leadership position” (p. 33); Goals for Elite Leadership Questionnaire which assessed “students’ level of agreement with five statements reflecting their plans to pursue elite leadership positions” (p. 33); and a demographic questionnaire. Through their analysis, the authors sought to determine if women’s leader efficacy and outcome expectations for elite leadership positions were related to the development of interests and goals for elite leadership positions. They found there was a positive correlation between women’s leader efficacy and outcome expectations for elite leadership positions and interests and goals for elite leadership positions. According to the study, “women with higher levels of both self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations for elite leadership indicated higher levels of interest and goals for such positions” (Yeagley et al., 2010, p. 36). In other words, higher leader efficacy and positive leadership outcomes were associated with higher leadership interests for women in elite leadership positions.

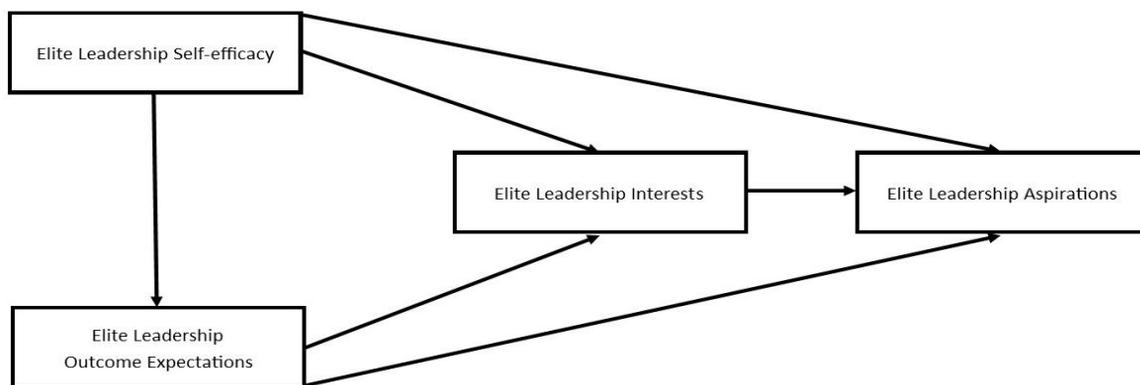


Figure 2. Adapted SCCT Model for College Women’s Aspirations for Elite Leadership Positions from “Modeling college women’s perceptions of elite leadership positions with Social Cognitive Career Theory,” by E. E. Yeagley, L. M. Subich, and D. M. Tokar, 2010, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 77, p. 32.

This study found the SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) to be a useful theoretical model to examine the aspirations of college women for elite leadership positions; however, the study had several limitations which should be noted and also serve to inform the present study. First, the majority of the participants in the study were first year students. These first year college women likely did not have much leadership experience, and therefore, may not have had as much personal insight in responding to the numerous questionnaires designed in the study. It may be more useful to conduct this same study with college women who are juniors and seniors with significant involvement and leadership experience at the university level as they likely will have a better context through which they can respond to survey questions. Second, because this study was a quantitative study, there was no ability to delve into the data and ask women why and how they responded the way they did through the survey. No insight was able to be gathered in relation to how women develop leader efficacy and leadership outcome expectations or how their involvement experience may influence the development of these constructs. Finally, Yeagley et al. (2010) did not examine the impact of contextual factors in the environment that may influence women's future leadership aspirations. The present study sought to build on Yeagley et al's (2010) important work by exploring the environmental barriers and supports women experienced in the student body presidency, as well as the potential barriers and supports they expected to experience in future leadership role.

Key Constructs of SCCT

The previous portion of this SCCT section provided an overview of the SCCT theoretical framework and specifically reviewed a quantitative study that validated the use of SCCT in examining the leadership aspirations of college women for elite leadership positions. The next portion of this section will review two of the critical constructs of SCCT: self-efficacy beliefs

and outcome expectations. Each construct will be defined, and then relevant studies related to college student leadership and the constructs will be reviewed. This section will conclude with a summary of studies related to college women's leadership aspirations.

Self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy is a core construct in SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002). Self-efficacy denotes the confidence an individual has in his or her own capacity to perform successfully in a particular domain (e.g. academic skills, public speaking, leadership, etc.), as well as one's beliefs about their own sense of agency and personal control. Bandura (1997) described that efficacy beliefs:

influence the course of action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize. (p. 3)

It is important to note that self-confidence and self-efficacy are not identical concepts. Self-confidence is not a validated theoretical framework (McCormick et al., 2003); therefore, researchers often substitute self-efficacy for self-confidence. McCormick et al. (2002) explained:

Self-confidence is a generalized sense of competence that has been considered a personal trait; thus it is not subject to change. In contrast, self-efficacy is a personal belief, a self-judgement about one's task-specific capabilities. Being a social cognition, it is subject to change, given appropriate conditions. But despite the conceptual differences, the two are related to some extent, as has been noted by others. (p. 36)

Similarly, Bass (1990) wrote, “Self-efficacy is closely allied with self-confidence” (p. 153) and Chemers (1997) proposed that an individual’s self-efficacy is influenced by their self-confidence. Thus, it is likely a highly confident leader would have higher levels of leader efficacy. However, it is not the level of self-confidence that contributes to the leader’s success, “rather it is the individual’s belief regarding his or her own capabilities to successfully perform the leadership task that is the causal factor” (McCormick et al., 2002, p. 36).

Bandura (1997) explained four critical sources that contribute to the construction and strengthening of self-efficacy beliefs: (a) enactive mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) physiological states. Efficacy beliefs can be most highly influenced by enactive mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997). As a person overcomes challenges and experiences success in a task, the level of mastery is increased, consequently building one’s confidence in accomplishing a task. The key to mastery experiences contributing to one’s efficacy beliefs is that the task must be challenging enough that some obstacles will have to be overcome, but the person will ultimately be successful in the task. Efficacy can be undermined if the task is too easy to accomplish; additionally, if the task is perceived as too difficult, a person’s efficacy can lower, therefore potentially lessening one’s inclination to engage in that task in the future. Bandura (1997) asserted that mastery experiences are “the most influential source of efficacy information because they provide the most authentic evidence of whether one can muster whatever it takes to succeed” (p. 80).

Another type of experience that affects one’s self-efficacy is observing how others perform in a task, which is referred to as vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1997). Vicarious experiences enable individuals to evaluate their own capabilities in relation to someone else’s. Seeing others engage in a task successfully can raise one’s efficacy beliefs as the mere

observation can demonstrate that if someone else can accomplish a particular task, then the task must be doable. When one outperforms others, efficacy gains can be experienced for a particular task, while underperforming, as compared to others, may lower efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

Verbal persuasion is yet another way to strengthen one's efficacy and occurs when one receives positive verbal feedback from people seen as credible and significant (Bandura, 1997). People who receive positive feedback that they hold the necessary capabilities to accomplish a task are more likely to engage in this task than those who hear negative feedback. However, it is important this verbal feedback is honest, as overinflated feedback can either be seen as insincere by the participant or even believed by the participant, which could in turn contribute to failure at the task in the future, thereby lowering efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Lastly, physiological states can be used to self-evaluate one's capabilities, therefore contributing to efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). For instance, when a person gets nervous before a task, the nervousness could be interpreted by someone with low self-efficacy for that task as inability, therefore decreasing self-efficacy even further. In contrast, a person with higher self-efficacy for that same task would interpret the nervousness as normal and unrelated to ability to accomplish the task. It is a person's interpretation of the physiological responses experienced that affects self-efficacy beliefs, rather than the physiological state itself (Bandura, 1997).

Leader efficacy. Recently, scholars have been examining leadership through the context of self-efficacy theory, yet there is no single term or definition that has been accepted in the literature to describe self-efficacy as related to leadership. The terms *leader efficacy*, *leadership efficacy*, *leader self-efficacy*, and *leadership self-efficacy* have been used interchangeably in the literature, as well as to denote separate concepts. McCormick et al. (2002) explained leadership

self-efficacy as “a person’s confidence in his or her abilities to successfully lead a group” (p. 37). Paglis (2010) defined leadership self-efficacy as a “person’s judgement that he or she can successfully exert leadership by setting a direction for the work group, building relationships with followers in order to gain commitment to change goals, and working with them to overcome obstacles to change” (p. 217). In a review of the literature related to leader efficacy, leadership efficacy was defined as “a specific form of efficacy associated with the level of confidence in the knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with leading others” (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008, p. 669). These authors discussed the need to differentiate between the terms *leader* self-efficacy and *leadership* self-efficacy, whereas leading (leader) refers to an individual leader’s behavior while leadership refers to the influence occurring at the group level. They stated, “We suggest there is potentially great value in building a more comprehensive understanding of the contribution of leader efficacy in building collective leadership efficacy” (Hannah et al., 2008, p. 669). For purposes of this study, I used the term *leader efficacy* as this study focused on the development of individual leaders, rather than group-level leadership. Machida and Schaubroeck (2011) defined leader efficacy as “leaders’ confidence in their abilities, knowledge, and skills in areas needed to lead others effectively” (p. 460), which is the definition I subscribed to for this study.

Leader efficacy beliefs can help us understand how a person frames personal goals and aspirations, exerts effort in a leadership-related task, and persists through challenges and obstacles. The higher one’s leader efficacy, the more likely one will persist, perform, and succeed as a leader (Bandura, 1997). Although leader efficacy is a relatively new concept being studied empirically, a number of quantitative scales have been developed to measure the construct (Anderson, Krajewski, Goffin, & Jackson, 2008; Dugan & Komives, 2007; Kane &

Baltes, 1998; Paglis, 2010) and there is increasing evidence of its connection to positive outcomes. Leader efficacy has regularly been validated as a critical component to leadership development (Hannah et al., 2008; Machida & Schaubroeck, 2011; McCormick et al., 2002; 2003; Paglis, 2010) and considered to be an important component to leader identity development (Hannah et al., 2008; Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004), as well as associated with leader effectiveness and performance (Anderson et al., 2008; Chemers, Watson, & May, 2000; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Hannah et al., 2008). Leader efficacy has also been linked to increased motivation and aspirations for leadership (Cho, Harrist, Steele, & Murn, 2015; Hannah et al., 2008; McCormick et al., 2002; 2003; Paglis, 2010), which is consistent with the SCCT framework.

College women's leader efficacy. Prominent student leadership scholars, Dugan and Komives (2010) believe that leader efficacy is a “powerful contributor to the leadership development process” (p. 540) and it is a valuable lens through which to associate students' capacity for leadership with their performance. Several quantitative studies have been conducted that demonstrate that women are reporting lower leader efficacy than their male peers (Dugan, Garland, et al., 2008; Dugan, Komives, et al., 2008; Dugan & Komives, 2010; McCormick et al., 2002; 2003) and are described below.

One of the first studies in the collegiate literature centered on leader efficacy examined the relationship between leader efficacy and leadership role attainment (McCormick et al., 2002). McCormick et al. (2002) found that the higher one's leader efficacy, the more likely the person was to attempt to take on a leadership role. The sample was comprised of 223 college students (43% men, 57% women) who completed the Kane and Baltes (1998) leader efficacy scale and a survey which asked participants “to recall the number of times they had acted in the role of a

group leader responsible for organizing, directing, and motivating the actions of others in a variety of leadership settings” (McCormick et al., 2002, p. 40) and “how often they had sought to be a group leader when they had been given the opportunity to assume a leadership role” (McCormick et al., 2002, p. 40). The study confirmed four of the five hypotheses: (a) leader efficacy was highly related to attempts to take on a leadership role; (b) participants with higher leader efficacy took on significantly more leadership roles than participants with low leader efficacy; (c) the number of previous leadership roles correlated positively with leader efficacy; and (d) women had significantly lower leader efficacy than men. The fifth hypothesis that women will report less previous leadership roles than men was not confirmed, therefore despite no significant differences between women and men’s leadership experiences, women reported lower leader efficacy (McCormick et al., 2002).

In a follow-up study, McCormick et al. (2003) explored gender differences in leader efficacy with 404 college students (47% men, 53% women). These participants completed the same survey instruments as used in the previous study (McCormick et al., 2002), as well as the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (1977), which was added to “measure the masculine and feminine dimensions of each participant’s sex-role identity” (p. 19). Consistent with findings of their previous study (McCormick et al., 2002), women reported significantly lower leader efficacy than men and the more leadership roles a person experienced, the higher their leader efficacy (McCormick et al., 2003). Examining participants’ gender-role congruence, they found that women with more masculine-type behaviors sought out a higher number of leadership roles as compared to women with more feminine-type behaviors. This was particularly concerning because per self-efficacy theory, the more enactive mastery experiences a person has related to leadership, the higher their leader efficacy. However, if women with more feminine-type

behaviors seek out less leadership roles, they have less of an opportunity to participate in efficacy-enhancing leadership behaviors and therefore will not demonstrate increased leader efficacy. These two studies (McCormick et al., 2002; 2003) were the first to examine the leader efficacy of college students and brought up a critical issue, namely the differences in men and women's reported levels of leader efficacy.

Another set of studies confirmed McCormick et al.'s (2002; 2003) findings that college women reported lower leader efficacy than their male peers (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Dugan, Garland, et al., 2008; Dugan, Komives, et al., 2008; Dugan & Komives, 2010). These studies were based on results of the Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MSL), which is an instrument that was designed in 2006 based on the lack of national data related to college student leadership. The MSL is currently used at over 350 institutions to measure the leadership capacity and leader efficacy of college students (Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership, 2017). A scale designed to measure leader efficacy in college students, based on Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, functions as a portion of the MSL. This tool measures students' self-rated confidence in a variety of leadership behaviors such as "leading others" and "working with a team on a group project" (Dugan & Komives, 2007). Results of the MSL have shown that college women are scoring lower on leader efficacy scales than college men, even though these same women rate their leadership capacity higher than men (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Dugan, Garland, et al., 2008; Dugan, Komives, et al., 2008; Dugan & Komives, 2010). The MSL has also shown leader efficacy to be a strong predictor of increases in leader capacity, as well as whether a student even participates in leadership (Dugan, Fath, Howes, Lavelle, & Polanin, 2013).

Why would college women be reporting lower levels of leader efficacy than college men? McCormick et al. (2002; 2003) believe that self-efficacy theory provides a possible explanation for why this may happen. They speculated that the way men and women attribute their successful leadership performance may contribute to this attribution either being efficacy enhancing or non-efficacy enhancing. Rosenthal's (1995) work on gender differences in the way men and women attribute their work performance may provide insight on this topic. In a study she found,

Compared with their male counterparts, women managers tended to attribute their achievement of work goals less to their ability and more to hard work. Women also made more 'generous' attributions for the success of subordinates. Finally, women managers (unlike men) tended to believe that ability had more to do with their subordinates' successful performance than their own. (Rosenthal, 1995, p. 26)

Therefore, with identical leadership performance, men may attribute their success to their own ability, which is efficacy enhancing. In contrast, women attribute their success to hard work and those around them, which does not enhance efficacy. This could be one potential reason that college women rate themselves lower in leader efficacy than college men. The previously mentioned MSL studies related to gender differences in leader efficacy (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Dugan, Garland, et al., 2008; Dugan, Komives, et al., 2008; Dugan & Komives, 2010) do little to explain why college women may be reporting lower levels of leader efficacy than men. Researchers in one article asked about women's lower leader efficacy scores through the MSL, "Is it possible that female students are more humble in their self-evaluation and less likely to inflate their experiences whereas men may be exhibiting overconfidence in their self-evaluation"

(Calizo, Cilente, & Komives, 2007, p. 7), but they did not provide more analysis than that statement.

In summary, leader efficacy beliefs can help us understand how a person frames personal goals and aspirations, exerts effort in a leadership-related task, and persists through challenges and obstacles. The higher one's leader efficacy, the more likely one will persist, perform, and succeed as a leader (Bandura, 1997). In studies of college students, women have consistently rated themselves as having lower leader efficacy than their male peers (Dugan, Garland, et al., 2008; Dugan, Komives, et al., 2008; Dugan & Komives, 2010; McCormick et al., 2002; 2003). Further, women who report more masculine-like behaviors take on more leadership roles than women who report more feminine-like behaviors, which in turn contributes to women with more masculine-like behaviors reporting higher leader efficacy. Each of these quantitative studies would benefit from the addition of a qualitative component to learn about how women describe their leader efficacy, as well as how they describe engaging in activities they believe are efficacy-enhancing.

Outcome expectations. Outcome expectations in the SCCT framework are the personal beliefs one has about the “consequences or outcomes of performing particular behaviors... If I do this, what will happen?” (Lent et al., 2002, p. 262). Self-efficacy has to do with one's belief in their capability to do something, whereas outcome expectations has to do with what one thinks will happen if they do something. Lent et al. (2002) explained:

Outcome expectations include several types of beliefs about response outcomes, such as beliefs about extrinsic reinforcement (receiving tangible rewards for successful performance), self-directed consequences (such as pride in oneself for mastering a

challenging task), and outcomes derived from the process of performing a given activity (for instance, absorption in the task itself). (p. 262)

Bandura (1997) explained that outcome expectations can take three forms: social effects, physical effects, and self-evaluation. Social effects may include how a person imagines power, recognition, or admiration from others. Physical effects may include the financial gain a person expects. Self-evaluation is shaped continually through a person's learning experiences. Outcome expectations are theorized to strongly impact how a person makes decisions on a chosen career path (Bandura, 1997). The choices that people make about the activities they engage in, and the effort and persistence they put forth in these activities, require people to think about the potential outcomes of these activities. People are more likely to engage in activities that lead to positive outcomes, rather than those that lead to negative outcomes. SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) posits that women who have positive outcome expectations for elite leadership positions will aspire to those positions more often than those who have negative outcome expectations for those same positions. This section provides a review of previously conducted studies on college women's leadership outcome expectations.

College women's leadership outcome expectations. The outcome expectations of college women for leadership positions is an understudied area in the collegiate arena. A few studies have asked college students to imagine themselves in positions of leadership and they have consistently revealed that college women anticipate relationship problems to be associated with leadership roles and may not aspire to leadership roles as often as men because of these anticipated relationship problems (Killeen et al., 2006; Lips, 2000; 2001). The key aspects of these studies are explained below.

Lips (2000; 2001) conducted two qualitative studies examining how college men and women imagined their “possible selves” in positions of power, which was designed to provide some insight into how college men and women perceive elite leadership roles. Participants were asked to imagine themselves as a chief executive officer, political leader, and research center director, which are each positions that would be characterized by the term elite leadership position according to the literature (Yeagley et al., 2010). The concept of *possible selves* was defined as “personalized representations of one’s self in various future states” (Lips, 2000, p. 39) and theorized that an individual’s vision of a possible self may serve as a motivator since this vision of the future may contribute to their aspirations. In both studies, college men and women were asked to imagine their “possible self” as a person with power and then complete an open-ended questionnaire answering a variety of prompting questions related to being in a position of power and some of the outcomes they expected (e.g., What would you be like?; What would you do?; How would you look?; etc.). Participants were then asked to specifically imagine their possible selves in three different elite leadership roles (chief executive officer, political leader, and research center director) and respond to the same questions. Lastly, they were asked to rate how likely they would become the person they described in each of these elite leadership roles, how positive they saw the role, as well as what they liked and disliked about the elite leadership positions they imagined. Results across both studies (Lips, 2000; 2001) indicated that college women thought it was less likely they would serve in these elite leadership roles as compared to their male peers. Women also rated the elite leadership roles less positively than men. Further, women more often mentioned relationship problems as related to these leadership roles as a concern than men, which contradicts findings by Boatwright and Egidio (2003) which found that women with a high desire for relationships have higher leadership aspirations. However, the

context for participants to respond about relationships in both studies was quite different, so that could likely be the cause for the contradiction. Lips (2000; 2001) asked participants what they expected to happen as a result of holding an elite leadership role (participants expected relationship problems), while Boatwright and Egidio (2003) tested the desire for relationships as a predictor of leadership aspirations. The measures in both studies were also quite different. Boatwright and Egidio (2003) used the Connectedness Scale (Welch, 1997) to measure individual's value and need for meaningful relationships with others, while Lips' (2000; 2001) participants were not asked about relationships specifically, rather their responses in the open-ended survey were coded according to whether the response included any reference to anticipated relationship problems.

Extending the findings of Lips (2000; 2001), Killeen et al. (2006) also used the "possible selves" context to examine the leadership outcome expectations of college men and women, but they built upon previous studies by applying Eagly and Karau's (2002) role incongruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. The theory proposes that the perceived incongruity between a leadership role and the female gender role leads to prejudice against women. Killeen et al. (2006) explained:

We assume that aspirations for leadership roles are also responsive to the amount of role incongruity, with women viewing their future occupancy of leaders roles as more positive and possible to the extent that these roles are congruous with the female gender role. (p. 313)

Through their study, they aimed to compare the outcome expectations of women and men for varying levels of leadership role (mid-level versus elite leadership positions), in two different organizational contexts (auto manufacturing company - perceived to be a masculine industry

versus a clothing manufacturing company -perceived to be a feminine industry), across two different cultural contexts (United States and Spain). College men and women from the United States and Spain were asked to envision themselves in a particular leadership role (either a mid-level leadership role or an elite leadership role) for a particular company (either auto manufacturing or clothing manufacturing). They were then asked to “indicate how positive and possible the role would be and to estimate the outcomes that would follow from occupying the role” (Killeen et al., 2006, p. 312). Across both countries, women found the leadership roles they imagined as less possible than men, which was consistent with Lips (2000; 2001). The authors attributed this to the lack of women serving in elite leadership roles for college women to look up to and emulate. Also similar to Lips (2000; 2001), this study also found that women anticipated more relationship problems associated with leadership roles than men, which may negatively impact women’s leadership aspirations. In regard to anticipating relationship problems, the authors stated, “Given an unequal division of labor in the home and the challenges of finding and affording high-quality nonmaternal child care, these perceptions by women may be realistic” (Killeen et al., 2006, p. 320). In regard to organizational context, participants acted more favorably towards serving in a leadership role that correlated with their gender, which suggests that people may evaluate leadership roles more positively if the industry is perceived to be more congruent with their gender (Killeen et al., 2006). This finding is consistent with Eagly and Karau’s (2002) role incongruity theory as participants were more likely to evaluate leadership roles positively when the industry aligned with their gender role.

There is certainly not a plethora of literature related to college women’s leadership outcome expectations, however from the previously described studies, we have learned that when men and women imagine themselves in elite leadership positions in the future, women find

it less possible that they will serve in these roles than men (Killeen et al., 2006; Lips, 2000; 2001). Women also expect relationship problems to be an outcome of holding an elite leadership position (Killeen et al., 2006; Lips, 2000; 2001) even though women with a high desire for relationships have demonstrated higher leadership aspirations (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003). Each of these studies would benefit from the addition of in-depth qualitative data collection and analysis. Although the Lips' (2000; 2001) studies were qualitative in nature, they each utilized survey questions where participants responded to open-ended questions in writing, rather than participants engaging in one-on-one interviews where researchers could gain more insight by asking probing questions. Lips' (2000; 2001) approach allowed many more participants to engage in the research, however the studies' findings are limited by a lack of in-depth data. The present study aimed to gain some of this in-depth knowledge about women's outcome expectations through multiple interviews.

Leadership Aspirations

Leadership aspirations is not a core construct of the SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002); however, it is hypothesized to be the outcome of an adapted model of the SCCT proposed by Yeagley et al. (2010) that suggests that leader efficacy and leadership outcome expectations contribute to college women's elite leadership aspirations. For purposes of this study, leadership aspiration is defined as the strong desire and intent to seek a leadership role. In the next section, a review of the definitions of this term in the higher education literature will be provided. Next, a summary of previously conducted studies on college women's leadership aspirations, which propose some additional predictors of leadership aspirations, will be provided.

Leadership aspirations defined. Although the concept of leadership aspirations has not been widely-studied area in the literature, there have been a few studies dedicated to the topic

and what has been made clear through a review of these studies is that there is not a consistent definition of the term leadership aspirations used in the research. Table 1 provides definitions of the term leadership aspirations that have been used in higher education research. Some researchers have conceptualized leadership aspiration as the desire to serve in a leader role, therefore a woman who self-selected to be a leader in a group project versus self-selecting to be a follower would have higher leadership aspirations. Others define leadership aspirations to be synonymous with leadership goals, while others see leadership aspirations to be characterized by ambition as related to leadership. Overall, a consistent definition of leadership aspiration will be useful in the leadership literature to ensure researchers are referring to the same construct through their studies, rather than examining separate constructs.

The definitions in Table 1 were compared and synthesized down to the commonalities found across multiple studies. Many of the definitions included some reference to a person's demonstrated intent, interest, or desire in taking on a leadership role, therefore the definition of leadership aspiration used for this study is as follows: a strong desire and intent to seek a leadership role.

Table 1

Definitions of Leadership Aspiration as Found in the Literature

Source	Definition of Leadership Aspiration
Kreuzer (1992)	“ambition for leader roles”
Boatwright & Egidio (2003)	“one’s willingness to seek a leadership role in one’s career”
Davies et al. (2005)	“degree of interest in assuming the leader role”, also “how much more a person wanted to be a leader than a follower”
Killeen et al. (2006)	“entails setting goals for oneself and thus requires projecting oneself into the future”
Gray & O’Brien (2007)	“the degree to which women aspire to leadership positions and continued education within their career”
Yeagley et al. (2010)	No explicit definition given, but used the terms “Leadership Goals” and “Leadership Aspirations” interchangeably
Gregor & O’Brien (2015)	“seeking leadership and training/managing others in one’s career”

College women’s leadership aspirations. Although not a widely-studied area in college student leadership, there have been a few studies designed to examine the factors that are thought to contribute to college women’s leadership aspirations. As previously discussed in this literature review, leader efficacy beliefs and leadership outcome expectations have been shown to predict college women’s leadership aspirations (Yeagley et al., 2010), which is in accordance with SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002). Three other quantitative studies have also revealed the following to be predictors of women’s leadership aspirations: parental encouragement,

socioeconomic status (Kreuzer, 1992), gender-role congruence, connectedness needs, and self-esteem (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003). Fear of negative evaluation (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003) and exposure to stereotype threat (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005) have been found to be negative predictors of women's leadership aspirations. The remainder of this section outlines the key aspects of these three studies.

The first study to address college women's leadership aspirations was a quantitative dissertation conducted to determine the extent to which college women aspire to leadership positions, as well as determine if there was any relationship between leadership aspirations and certain sociological factors, such as gender-role congruence, parental encouragement, and socioeconomic status. The author self-designed a questionnaire, since no instrument existed to measure the constructs she was interested in studying. Kreuzer (1992) defined leadership aspiration as "ambition for leader roles" (p. 38) and measured it by asking participants about their future career plans in terms of how many people they would manage, as well their hierarchical status in their future career. The author rationalized that if participants could imagine themselves in roles where they led others, they would have leadership aspirations for those roles. The study included 403 seniors (37% men, 63% women) and its major conclusion was that women reported lower leadership aspirations than men. She also found that parental encouragement and socioeconomic status were positively related to women's leadership aspirations, in contrast to men where any relationship between these constructs was inconclusive. Kreuzer's (1992) findings related to parental encouragement are consistent with more recent studies that have demonstrated that women are more likely to run for the office of student body president when they are encouraged by role models and mentors, like their parents (Damell, 2013; Mink Salas, 2010; Spencer, 2004). Finally, while the author hypothesized that gender-role

congruence would be related to leadership aspirations, meaning that men and women who identified with more masculine traits would have higher leadership aspirations than men and women who identified with feminine traits, that hypothesis was found to be inconclusive (Kreuzer, 1992).

A limitation of Kreuzer's (1992) study was that she needed to self-design a questionnaire to examine leadership aspirations since no instrument existed at the time. However, just a few years later, O'Brien, Gray, Tourajdi, and Eigenbrode (1996) developed the Career Aspiration Scale to measure women's leadership and educational aspirations. Using this Career Aspiration Scale (O'Brien et al., 1996), Boatwright and Egidio (2003) conducted a quantitative study to examine the impact of four psychological variables on college women's future career leadership aspirations. They wanted to build upon the work of Kreuzer (1992) by using a more psychometrically sound instrument, as well as add additional variables. In addition to examining gender-role congruence, like Kreuzer (1992), they also studied the impact of connectedness needs, self-esteem, and fear of negative evaluation on women's aspirations for leadership. The authors included these variables based on themes discovered in the literature they posited may be related to the desire of women to aspire to take on leadership responsibility. Leadership aspiration was not explicitly defined in this study, but the phrase: "one's willingness to seek a leadership role in one's career" (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003, p. 657) was used to describe the construct being examined in the study. Their sample included 213 undergraduate women who filled out a variety of questionnaires, including a demographic questionnaire, the Career Aspiration Scale to measure leadership aspirations (O'Brien et al., 1996); the Bem Sex Role Inventory to measure to which extent individuals identify with masculine or feminine traits (Bem, 1977); the Connectedness Scale to measure individual's value and need for meaningful

relationships with others (Welch, 1997); the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Silber & Tippet, 1965), and the Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (Watson & Friend, 1969). Results indicated that connectedness needs, self-esteem, self-identified masculine gender role traits, and lower fear of negative evaluation were all predictors of women's leadership aspirations, which were consistent with their hypotheses (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003). In other words, they found that women with high self-esteem were more likely to report higher leadership aspirations and women who had a high desire to connect with others also reported higher leadership aspirations. They also found that women who reported more feminine gender roles were less likely to aspire to leadership roles, which was consistent with their hypothesis, but in contrast to Kreuzer's (1992) findings that found no relationship between gender-role congruence and leadership aspirations. Finally, women who reported a lower fear of negative evaluation were more likely to have higher leadership aspirations (Kreuzer, 1992).

Boatwright and Egidio (2003) discovered four important factors that may impact women's leadership aspirations; however, the study had some limitations. First, the study was almost entirely comprised of White women, which limits the generalizability to diverse populations. Further, most of the study's participants were first year students who likely did not have much context through which to think about their future leadership aspirations. Rather, it may have been useful to concentrate on a junior and senior participant sample to find students who may have thought more about their future career and leadership roles. Lastly, there were some critical variables Boatwright and Egidio (2003) examined in this study, however the quantitative design limited the ability of the researchers to dig deeper into some of the hows and whys of these factors. A qualitative research design would enable researchers to ask questions

related to the variables, such as how and why connectedness matters to women's leadership or how and why women perceive positive and negative evaluation the way they do.

While Kreuzer (1992) found parental encouragement and socioeconomic status, Boatwright and Egidio (2003) found gender-role congruence, connectedness needs, self-esteem, and less fear of negative evaluation, and Yeagley et al. (2010) found leader efficacy and leadership outcome expectations to be predictors of women's leadership aspirations, another group of researchers examined a different variable's impact on women's leadership aspirations: exposure to stereotype threat (Davies et al., 2005). An experimental study was conducted to examine whether a woman's exposure to stereotype threat would impact her desire to take on a leadership role. The researchers conducted two studies with different groups of college men and women. Each study was composed of a treatment group and a control group. Both groups were asked to watch a series of commercials before participating in a leadership-related task, however the treatment group's commercials included gender-stereotypic advertisements. After watching the commercials, participants were asked to participate in what they thought was a separate experiment about leadership strategies. Through this leadership strategies group project, each participant was asked to indicate their role preference in the group as leader or problem solver (follower). Researchers used this information to determine if the stereotype threat affected participants' aspirations for the leadership role. In the study, leadership aspiration was defined as "how much more a person wanted to be a leader than a follower" (Davies et al., 2005, p. 283) and was measured by "participants' degree of interest in assuming the leader role minus their degree of interest in assuming the problem-solver role" (Davies et al., 2005, p. 283). They found that women exposed to the stereotypic commercials indicated less inclination to serve in the leader role as compared to women who were only exposed to neutral commercials, which

demonstrated the potential negative consequences stereotype threat can have on women's aspirations for leadership positions. However, a major limitation needs to be noted regarding this study. The way the researchers (Davies et al., 2005) defined leadership aspirations is not consistent with the ways Kreuzer (1992) and Boatwright and Egidio (2003) defined the construct. Davies et al. (2005) determined that a participant's choice to take on the leader role in the leadership strategies group project within the experiment was indicative of them having leadership aspirations, which may not necessarily be the case.

Although the topic of women's leadership aspirations has not been a widely-studied topic in the college student literature, there are some important findings from the previously reviewed studies. First, these studies have discovered some variables that may predict women's leadership aspirations, such as leader efficacy, leadership outcome expectations (Yeagley et al., 2010), parental encouragement, socioeconomic status (Kreuzer, 1992), gender-role congruence, connectedness needs, self-esteem, fear of negative evaluation (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003), and exposure to stereotype threat (Davies et al., 2005). Second, a validated instrument has been created to measure women's leadership aspirations in the Career Aspiration Scale (O'Brien et al., 1996). Although this instrument has not been used regularly in research on college students, it is a tool that can be used in the future as a useful instrument across studies to insure researchers are studying the same construct. Finally, the findings from these studies provide a useful knowledge base from which to conduct an in-depth qualitative study. Because each of these studies was a quantitative study, there was no ability delve into the data directly with participants by asking them questions to learn more about how they describe their own leadership aspirations and how they perceive the impact of various aspects of their lives. The present qualitative study explored some of the nuanced perspectives of women as related to their leadership aspirations.

Synthesis of SCCT

SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) provides a useful theoretical framework to explore the experiences and future leadership aspirations of college women serving in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president. SCCT theorizes that three key cognitive-person constructs enable people to exercise agency in their career development: self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals. A review of the college student leadership literature revealed that college women have consistently rated themselves as having lower leader efficacy than college men (Dugan, Garland, et al., 2008; Dugan, Komives, et al., 2008; Dugan & Komives, 2010; McCormick et al., 2002; 2003). This may be due to women attributing their leadership success to others, which is not efficacy-enhancing, as opposed to men who are more likely to take credit for their own leadership success, which is efficacy-enhancing (McCormick et al., 2002; 2003). It may also be that women underestimate themselves as compared to their male peers (Calizo et al., 2007). Women who report more feminine-like behaviors take on less leadership roles than women who report more masculine-like behaviors, so this gender-role congruence could also contribute to some women not having as many efficacy-enhancing leadership experiences (McCormick et al., 2002; 2003).

When asked to imagine themselves as elite leaders, college women found it less possible that they would serve in these roles than men (Killeen et al., 2006; Lips, 2000; 2001). Could this lower expectation be a result of their lower reported levels of leader efficacy as validated by multiple studies (Dugan, Garland, et al., 2008; Dugan, Komives, et al., 2008; Dugan & Komives, 2010; McCormick et al., 2002; 2003)? Perhaps college women have trouble believing they have the competence necessary to serve successfully in these elite leadership roles. This is an understudied area. Women also expected relationship problems to be an outcome of holding an

elite leadership position (Killeen et al., 2006; Lips, 2000; 2001), but we do not know what kind of relationship problems these women anticipate. Are they relationship problems at home, in the workplace, or both? Research demonstrated that college women with a high need for relationships also had higher leadership aspirations (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003), so how does this connect to the relationship problems that women expect as an outcome? To date, studies have not examined this important topic.

Finally, studies have discovered some variables that may predict women's leadership aspirations, such as leader efficacy and leadership outcome expectations (Yeagley et al., 2010), which is consistent with SCCT. Other variables that are thought to impact college women's leadership aspirations include parental encouragement, socioeconomic status (Kreuzer, 1992), gender-role congruence, connectedness needs, self-esteem, fear of negative evaluation (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003), and exposure to stereotype threat (Davies et al., 2005). These findings provide a useful knowledge base; however, to date, no in-depth qualitative studies have been conducted to explore any of the previously mentioned topics (leader efficacy, leadership outcome expectations, or leadership aspirations). A qualitative study will allow a researcher to delve more deeply into these important topics through one-on-one interviews with multiple college women to learn more about the highly-nuanced perspectives of women as related to their leadership experiences and leadership aspirations.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Given that women are achieving elite leadership positions at disproportionately lower rates than men across a variety of sectors (Catalyst, 2017a; Catalyst, 2017c; Catalyst, 2017d; White House Project, 2009), including the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president (ASGA, 2012; Johnson, 2011; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Mink Salas, 2010; New, 2014), research is needed to explore women's experiences in, and leadership aspirations for, these elite leadership positions. College women across the country serving in the student body president role made a choice to seek out a collegiate elite leadership position on their campus, therefore much can be learned from this group about their experiences in this role and future leadership aspirations. Considering college women comprise the future generation of women who may aspire to elite leadership positions, an examination of those women who serve in a collegiate elite leadership positions is important. Studying this unique population provides a perspective as to the challenges and triumphs associated with elite leadership positions at the collegiate level and is useful in discovering how college women make meaning of their collegiate elite leadership role and future aspirations for elite leadership roles.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was to explore the experiences and future leadership aspirations of undergraduate women who serve as student body presidents. Qualitative inquiry offers the opportunity to explore the meaning that participants ascribe to their lived experiences (Merriam, 2009) and is helpful for studying topics where limited research is available (Creswell, 2013), such as the experiences and leadership aspirations of women student body presidents. This basic qualitative study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of undergraduate women serving in the collegiate elite

leadership position of student body president?

2. How do undergraduate women describe their future leadership aspirations for elite leadership roles throughout their tenure as student body president?

The remainder of this chapter provides a description of the methods used to answer this study's research questions. The chapter begins by describing the basic qualitative research design, while also outlining the rationale for using a qualitative approach. The remainder of the chapter will provide the proposed steps for participant selection, data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness, as well as review the study's limitations.

Basic Qualitative Research Design

This study was designed to explore the experiences and future leadership aspirations of college women serving in the elite leadership position of student body president; therefore, a basic qualitative design guided this study. This type of research design is utilized to understand the meaning individuals ascribe to the experiences they have (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described that researchers conducting a basic qualitative research design should focus on: "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 24). Basic qualitative studies are found in many disciplines and are most common in the field of education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Qualitative research enables researchers to learn how people make meaning and interpret their experiences by speaking directly to people in their natural setting (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) described:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the World... This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to

make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.
(p. 3).

Merriam (2009) explained that meaning is entrenched in people's lived experiences and this meaning is mediated through the researcher's own perceptions. A researcher's role in qualitative research is to interpret participant experiences and make meaning as themes emerge through data collection (Mertens, 2015). However, of key concern in qualitative research is to appreciate the phenomenon of interest from the perspectives of the participants, not the perspective of the researcher (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Research Paradigm

I work from a social constructivist worldview in my qualitative research. The social constructivist worldview assumes that people understand and interpret their world through multiple, subjective meanings in ways that are varied and complex (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell (2013) explained:

Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not imprinted on individuals but are formed through interactions with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives. (p. 24)

A fundamental concept of qualitative inquiry is that there is not one set of universal truths a researcher is seeking to obtain, rather researchers are exploring the complexity of views of people (Creswell, 2013). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described that qualitative research:

Assumes that reality is socially constructed; that is, there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event. Researcher do

not “find” knowledge; they construct it. Constructivism is a term often used interchangeably with interpretivism. (p. 9)

Through my social constructivist worldview, I believe that knowledge and reality are constructed by one’s experiences. In this study, I explored how college women make meaning of their experiences as collegiate elite leaders and their future aspirations for elite leadership roles. Each participant brought their own perceptions, viewpoints, and interpretations to the study, as these stories represented the reality of their student government experiences.

Researcher Positionality

Qualitative methods are most worthwhile to a researcher who pursues an understanding of the multiple realities constructed by people in various circumstances (Mertens, 2015). As the researcher for this study, I acknowledge that I play a critical role in the research and am aware that my personal qualities and experiences could affect how I view data (Mertens, 2015). I am a female passionate about the leadership development of college women and recognize I bring obvious subjectivity to this topic. I also believe that increasing the number of women in elite leadership positions, both on college campuses and in greater society, is necessary for true gender equality, as well as a better world.

As a student affairs professional focusing my career on student leadership, I have always had a passion for developing college students as leaders. My study of leadership began as an undergraduate business student when an advisor recommended I pursue a minor in leadership to augment my business management courses and co-curricular activities. This leadership minor inspired me to dedicate my career to the leadership development of college students. As a graduate assistant in my master’s program, and subsequently as a student affairs administrator for over a decade, I have served as a student leadership educator. Through this role, I have

taught countless leadership courses, facilitated workshops and retreats, and mentored numerous student leaders. More recently, I have had the opportunity to work specifically with college women leaders. Through my work with these women, I realized that many felt undeserving of their leadership positions, unsure of themselves, confused about their future leadership aspirations, hindered by their female peers, and unwilling to take credit for their accomplishments. Specifically, I was struck by their lack of leader efficacy beliefs regarding their own leadership capacity, especially as it related to their desire to pursue elite leadership positions during their college years and beyond. I believed in these women and I could not understand how they could not recognize their own talents. It was these realizations that prompted me to begin thinking about how college women develop confidence and leadership aspirations, which has inspired my current research. I believe more women in leadership is necessary for a more just world; therefore, I find it critically important in my life to find ways to activate the leadership confidence and aspirations of women during their experiences in college.

Recognizing this, in this present study, I aimed to focus on the meanings the participants ascribed to their experiences, rather than the meaning I brought to it (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Throughout the process of conducting this study, I maintained a researcher's journal. This journal not only served as a place to keep notes about my observations, but also allowed me to describe and reflect upon my own personal feelings during the data collection and analysis process. In qualitative research, keeping a reflective journal enables a researcher to make "experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings visible and an acknowledged part of the research design, data generation, analysis, and interpretation process" (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 703), therefore assisting in minimizing bias.

Participant Selection

In soliciting participants for this study, I used purposeful sampling to find individuals “from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 53). With purposeful sampling, participants are selected intentionally to provide information that cannot be elicited from others (Patton, 2015). This form of sampling is suitable when researchers are interested in particular people, activities, and settings.

Purposeful sampling was appropriate in this study as I studied particular people (college women student body presidents) and their activities (experiences of student body presidents). The following criteria was used to identify potential participants:

1. Woman
2. Undergraduate
3. Full-time enrollment at a four-year institution of higher education
4. Elected to serve as student body president for the 2017/2018 academic year.

I utilized two strategies to recruit participants for this study. First, I worked with the American Student Government Association (ASGA) to gather a list of potential participants for this study. ASGA works with many student governments across the country and maintains updated contact information for elected student government officers. Second, I conducted website searches of four-year institutions in regional areas in the United States to determine if any institutions had a woman serving in the student body president role who may have been eligible to participate.

Potential participants from ASGA and my website searches were sent a solicitation email about the research project (see Appendix A), which explained the expectations of participation. Those who are interested in participating were asked to return an online information questionnaire (see Appendix B). I selected the final sample of participants from this pool of

students who completed the questionnaire. Along with selecting a group of participants who fit the criteria listed above, I also aimed for the participants to be diverse in three characteristics: race and ethnicity, institution type, and regional location. Through this process, I initially selected 22 participants for inclusion in the study, although only 20 participants remained throughout the duration of the study and participated in all three interviews. The purpose of identifying this many participants was “that one interviews as many persons as necessary to find out what one needs to know” (Forsey, 2012, p. 369).

Prior to participation in this research project, I explained the Consent for Participant in Interview Research form to each participant, which outlined the purpose of the study, a description of the involvement required on behalf of the participant, and the rights of the participant (See Appendix C). Each participant signed a copy of this form.

Data Collection

The source of data for this study was multiple one-on-one in-depth interviews with each participant. Interviews are considered one of the most essential methods of data collection in qualitative research (Forsey, 2012; Patton, 2015). Forsey (2012) wrote, “We interview in order to find out what we do not and cannot know otherwise. And we record what we hear in order to systematically process the data and better understand and analyze the insights shared through the dialogue” (p. 364). He went on to explain that interviews are the best way to answer research questions when we cannot answer them through observation alone. Patton (2015) also wrote about qualitative interviews:

The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of

others is meaningful and knowable and can be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind to gather their stories (p. 426).

Through this research, I set out to understand the experiences and future leadership aspirations of women serving in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president and in order to do that effectively, I worked to build rapport and trust with the participants through continued contact (Elliot, 2012). To this end, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. Seidman (1998) suggested that a series of three interviews contributes to the trustworthiness of the findings due to the researcher being able to check the participant's consistency across the three different interviews. He advised a three-interview design to provide an opportunity to ask participants separately about their (a) past, (b) present, and (c) reflections of their past and present experience (Seidman, 1998). I utilized Seidman's (1998) three-interview design as a framework for conducting interviews, but in addition to asking participants about their past and present, I also asked participants about their future.

The first interview with participants occurred prior to the start of the fall 2017 semester, which was during the participants' first few months in elected office. Most student body presidents are sworn into office during the April or May prior to the academic year in which they will serve. My first interview with each participant occurred between late July and early September and lasted roughly 45-70 minutes. This first interview focused on the leadership life history of the participant, as well as their expectations for their upcoming experience serving in a collegiate elite leadership role and their future aspirations for elite leadership positions. The second interview occurred midway through each participant's term as student body president and focused on their present experiences serving in a collegiate elite leadership role, including the triumphs and challenges associated with such role. The second interview with each participant

occurred between late November and early December and lasted roughly 40-60 minutes. The third interview occurred during the final months of each participant's student government presidency and asked each participant to reflect upon on their experience in a collegiate elite leadership role, as well as how they made meaning of their future aspirations for elite leadership roles in their career. The third interview with each participant occurred between mid-January and mid-February and lasted roughly 30-60 minutes. Throughout each of the interviews, questions were guided by the theoretical framework for this study. Interview questions can be found in Appendices D, E, and F.

Due to my specific intention of interviewing women from across the United States, in-person interviews were not feasible. I utilized video call technology via Google Hangout and Apple FaceTime to connect with participants. Name and Trotter (2014) wrote that a video call is "often a good approximation of face-to-face interviewing" (p. 458) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that in today's technologically advanced world, a strength of online interviews is the expansion of the geographic reach of researchers. Due to technological difficulties with video calls, some interviews were conducted by telephone

Prior to beginning the first interview with each participant, I discussed the purpose of the study, participant role, and confidentiality. Participants were able to choose their own pseudonym in order to maintain confidentiality. Throughout the study, I also took care to protect other aspects of participants' identity that may be identifiable. I did not refer to participants' institutions or the cities in which their institutions were located. Additionally, I also developed additional pseudonym names when participants referred to other people in their interviews and used general language when participants described places and events that may be connected back to their institution.

Participants were told they may withdraw from the study at any point. All interviews were audio recorded with permission from the participants and transcribed after the interview. Audio recording is considered less distracting to participants than taking copious notes during the interview (Forsey, 2012). Each interview followed a semi-structured interview format, which includes the development of a general set of questions and a similar structure for all participants, while also providing some slight flexibility while asking questions as the situation demands (Lichtman, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Each participant received a \$10.00 Amazon gift card after participating in each interview, therefore after successfully completing all three interviews, participants received \$30.00 worth of gift cards.

Data Analysis

I conducted this study over the course eight months and it involved the collection of large amounts of data through in-depth interviews with multiple participants, therefore it was imperative that I began data analysis as soon I began collecting data, rather than waiting until all interviews were complete. Miles and Huberman (1994) strongly proposed that researchers do not wait until all data is collected to begin the data analysis process. They stated:

We strongly recommend early analysis. It helps the field-worker cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data. It can be a healthy corrective for built-in blind spots. It makes analysis an ongoing, lively enterprise that contributes to the energizing process of fieldwork... So we advise interweaving data collection and analysis from the start. (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 50)

I used Creswell's (2013) steps explained through the "Data Analysis Spiral" (p. 182) as a framework to continuously analyze the qualitative data collected during this study. An important

first step in data analysis is preparing and organizing the data for analysis. For the first-round interviews, I personally transcribed the first 12 interviews using Transcribe, which is an online transcription service that tightly integrates an audio player and a text editor to make the process of transcription easier. Transcribe is completely secure as it works offline, and data is not uploaded to the Transcribe servers, rather it stays on the transcriber's own computer. A transcription service was utilized for transcribing the remaining eight interviews in the first round, and for all interviews in the second and third round. As data was transcribed and organized it was de-identified and stored on two password-protected external hard drives. Field notes were also organized continually throughout the data collection process in a Word document and stored on the two password-protected external hard drives.

To begin data analysis, I carefully read each transcript to get a general sense of the data. To do this, after an interview was transcribed and de-identified, I printed out a hard copy of that transcript. I read the hard copy transcript and wrote preliminary notes in the margins based on key concepts that occurred to me in reading through the data (Creswell, 2013). This was to give me a feel for what was in the data. After reading and indicating these preliminary notes on each transcript during the first round of interviews, I then uploaded the transcripts to Atlas.ti, which I used for data analysis. Throughout this process, as well as the entire data analysis process, I memoed extensively. Memoing can be quite worthwhile in data analysis to help “tie together different pieces of data into a recognizable cluster... They [memos] are one of the most useful and powerful sense-making tools at hand” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 72). All memos were dated, categorized with key words, and kept separate from the rest of the data collected in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The memos helped me to flesh out concepts that were beginning to emerge in the data. I used memos throughout the process of data analysis and

found them to be particularly useful in later determining the study's major themes and writing up findings.

Interview transcriptions and fields notes were coded using eclectic first cycle coding methods, which involves “using a repertoire of [coding] methods simultaneously” (Saldaña, 2016). I utilized a variety of coding strategies in my eclectic first cycle coding, including process, emotion, descriptive, and in vivo coding. Process coding uses gerunds to indicate action (Saldaña, 2016). I found this coding was important as it allowed me to analyze the actions the women described through their interviews using –ing words. Emotion coding labels the emotions experienced by participants. This coding strategy was helpful in providing insight into participants' perspectives and feelings about their experiences. Descriptive coding summarizes the basic topic of a segment of data with a word or short phrase. I found descriptive coding to be helpful when making comparisons across multiple interviews with participants. Finally, in vivo coding was used, which is a strategy that uses participants' own words (Saldaña, 2016). While using these eclectic first cycle methods in coding the first round of interviews, I read and coded each transcript twice (in addition to the initial hard copy read through). I continued to memo as I coded, making notes on connections and patterns that began to emerge. I also used research and theory, such as SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) and obstacles women face in leadership as references that informed my coding. After coding each transcript twice, I then utilized code mapping to assist in organizing and condensing the codes established through first cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016). To do this, I reviewed each code, combined similar codes, and eliminated repeated codes. I then read each first round transcript another time to insure I had coded all of the data after code mapping. After the first round of interviews, each transcript was read once in hard copy form, and then three times in Atlas.ti to be coded.

For the second-round interviews, I continued to use the eclectic first cycle coding methods I had used coding the first-round interviews, including process, emotion, descriptive, and in vivo codes. I used the codebook I developed after coding the first round of interviews to code the second round of interviews. I developed many new codes in the second round of interviews in addition to what had already been coded in the first round of interviews, so I utilized code mapping once again to organize and condense codes (Saldaña, 2016). After code mapping, I then went back to recode the first round of interviews with the updated codebook. After rereading the first-round transcripts (and recoding when necessary), I then went back to reread the second-round transcripts a third time. I used this same process for coding the third round of interviews.

After completing the first two rounds of interviews, I began second cycle coding. Materials from the first and second interviews were reviewed again using pattern coding to decipher the important themes within the data (Saldaña, 2016). Similarly, coded excerpts from the data were analyzed and assigned a pattern code, which helped me to establish the major themes in the study. After completing the third round of interviews, I was able to further develop the pattern codes, as well use longitudinal coding to examine changes over time with each participant (Saldaña, 2016). To conduct this longitudinal coding, I built an Excel spreadsheet which included responses from the women about their belief in their capacity to lead (leader efficacy), their expectations meeting reality (leadership outcome expectations), and their leadership aspirations from each interview. This visual format allowed me to examine women's experiences over time and make comparisons between a woman's first interview, second interview, and third interview, particularly in the areas of leader efficacy, leadership outcome expectations, and leadership aspirations.

Trustworthiness

When conducting qualitative research, it is important to address the trustworthiness of the study by identifying the steps taken to ensure credibility, dependability and transferability.

Credibility refers to the extent that a study's findings are believable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility for this study was achieved using the strategy of member checking (Creswell, 2014).

Member checking was conducted in two ways. First, a transcript of the first two interviews was shared with each participant who was then able to share additional feedback or provide clarification. Second, a summary of findings was shared with each participant after the third interview to insure accuracy (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). After sharing the summary of findings with participants, I have received affirming feedback from more than half of the 20 participants.

Dependability refers to the extent that a study's findings can be replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers need to outline the steps in the research process utilized to insure credibility and accuracy of their findings (Creswell, 2014). In order to demonstrate dependability, I outlined the steps involved in this study's research design as clearly as possible through a research study protocol so that another researcher could conduct the research in the same way. This is not to say that a researcher replicating the study would get the same results, as that is not a characteristic of qualitative research, but rather the detailed research design protocol demonstrates a reliable and consistent procedure and contributes to dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

Transferability refers to the extent that a study's findings can be generalized to other contexts. One of the most commonly used methods to enhance the possibility of generalizing a study's findings to another setting is using rich, thick description. Themes that made meaningful

contributions to answering this study's research questions were written up through this rich, thick description in my writing of chapter five as if to bring readers into the setting where the readers feel as if they are within the settings themselves (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). In addition, in chapter four I present three composite profiles of the participants written in a first-person narrative. Each of these composite profiles conveys the major themes that arose in each interview using direct quotes from participants and helps the reader to assess the similarities between the context of this study and their own circumstances.

Delimitations

The participants of this study will be limited to four-year coeducational institutions. Although student body presidents may be present at two-year institutions, there is no literature on the roles and status of those student leader positions, therefore they are beyond the scope of this study. In addition, I will only include participants from institutions that have a student body president. Some institutions may not have a student government organization, therefore would not be included in the study.

Limitations

While the results of this study provide a representation of the experiences and leadership aspirations of college women serving in the student body president role, it is not without its limitations. First, for this study, I was particularly interested in women's experiences in the student body president position over time, especially in relation to how women's experiences as student body president may shape the way they describe their future leadership aspirations over time. To do this, I conducted three interviews with each participant; however, a limitation is that I conducted these interviews over the course of only six months of the women's presidency, rather than the full year of their presidency. Ideally, I would have conducted the final interview

immediately after the women concluded their terms as president, rather than a few months before they completed their term.

Second, I recruited a diverse group of 20 women from a variety of institution types across the country to participate in this study. I focused on how women described their experiences and leadership aspirations through concepts from the theoretical framework of SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) and gender. My intention going into this study was to focus specifically on gender, so I did not include questions in my interview protocols about race and ethnicity. Yet, a limitation in this study is that I did not delve deeply into race and ethnicity to see if there were similarities and differences based on this aspect of a woman's background.

Third, I interviewed women who served in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president for this study. This population was important as these women had made the choice and commitment to serve in a significant and high-level leadership position at the collegiate level and we can assume they likely have aspirations for elite leadership positions in the future. The qualitative approach helped me to develop a comprehensive, yet nuanced understanding of the mindset and leadership aspirations of our next generation of women leaders, which in turn, may help us create additional paths to elite leadership for other women; however, this study did not incorporate the experiences of other women who hold other collegiate elite leadership positions on campus, such as newspaper editor-in-chief, sorority president, or other high-ranking officers in student government. These other perspectives are important and can lead to additional knowledge about the experiences of female student leaders, including the supports and barriers they face in their leadership roles, which may be similar or dissimilar to the experiences of women student body presidents.

CHAPTER 4: COMPOSITE PROFILES

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and future leadership aspirations of undergraduate women who serve as student body presidents. To this end, I interviewed 20 women student body presidents in three interviews over the course of six months. This chapter presents three composite participant profiles written in a first-person narrative. Each of these composite profiles conveys the major themes that arose in each distinct interview using direct quotes from participants. Stanley Wertz, Nosek, McNiesh, and Marlow (2011) wrote that composite first person narratives are a unique way to represent qualitative data. They stated:

This novel method is employed to re-present narrative data and findings from research through first person accounts that blend the voices of the participants with those of the researcher, emphasizing the connectedness, the “we” among all participants, researchers, and listeners. (Stanley Wertz et al., 2011, p. 1)

It is important to note that these composite profiles are not meant to represent the experiences of any one participant, or even all of the participants. Instead, I found this composite profile technique was useful in providing readers with a meaningful way to distinguish between the major themes in each of the three interviews. The three composite profiles are entitled “the first day,” “the first few months,” and “the last few months.” “The first day” provides a picture of the first interview with participants. “The first few months” represents the conversations in the second interview and the “the last few months” explores conversations in the third interview. The study’s themes and subthemes are explored in depth in chapter five.

I used a structured approach in writing the composite profiles. As I described in chapter three, themes and subthemes emerged through my data analysis process. To write these composite profiles, I determined which of these themes and subthemes was present in each

interview. It was important I communicated this in the composite profiles in order for readers to gain a feel for the conversation in each of the three interviews. Once I determined the six to eight themes and subthemes that were present for each interview, I printed out a report from Atlas.ti of the codes that fit under each theme or subtheme. Each of these reports included quotes from participants. I went through each subtheme one by one and read and re-read the quotes within that subtheme until I began to form a story about a fictional woman who served as student body president at the fictional institution Rainier University. To tell this fictional woman's story, I included direct quotes from participants, along with my own words to tie sentences and ideas together. I strived to represent as many women as possible through these composite profiles by keeping track of the quotes I used from each participant. Each composite profile has at least one quote from each of the 20 participants in this study, and no participant is quoted more than three times in any composite profile. Overall, these composite profiles are designed to give the reader an inside look at what it may be like to be a woman student body president, particularly in terms of what it is like to hold the position at different points of the presidential tenure. However, it is important to note that the composite profiles are not meant to communicate, in any way, that all women have the same experiences in the student body president position.

The First Day

If you would have told me a few years ago I was going to one day be inaugurated as student body president at Rainier University, I would have laughed and never believed it. Really! I never thought I wanted to be student body president, never mind ever thinking it was an attainable or realistic proposition. I didn't really think I was capable. But here I am. Day one of my student body presidency. I go into this day optimistic and hopeful for what will come this

year, but also knowing that it will be tremendous work and probably the most challenging experience of my life. But I'm ready. I'm qualified for this position and will greet this undertaking enthusiastically!

My days in student government actually began when I was in high school, or maybe even middle school. I've always been drawn to leadership opportunities as I care a lot about creating change. If things aren't working and we can make them better, then let's do it. I seem to gravitate towards leadership positions, where I'm either stepping into these positions or sometimes just falling into them. Looking back at it, our student government didn't have much power in high school. We had class officers and planned fun events like homecoming, prom, and powder puff games, but it was nothing too serious. And nothing like my experience in student government at Rainier University.

When I first began at Rainier as a first-generation college student, I really didn't know exactly where to put my time. I didn't know what I wanted to be involved in and I especially didn't know if I was going to have the time to be involved in anything because of my coursework. So, the first few months, I wasn't involved at all. I decided to go to class and focus on my grades and figure out how to balance everything and adjust to college. But I pretty quickly realized that I needed to do something. There was this sudden urge where I felt like I needed to continue the involvement I had in high school. I was really missing the responsibility of my former leadership positions. I was missing that ability to make things happen. I thought to myself, okay, my grades are set, I've successfully transitioned to college, so now it's time to figure out what to do. Everyone around me was joining organizations and I felt like I was behind.

Luckily, one of my friends was a senator in student government, so she invited me to a senate meeting and that's when I got my first taste of what student government is like at Rainier. I was invited into the senate chamber and it was all very intimidating. I remember thinking, wow, okay, these people know what they're doing. I'm sitting there, and I'm listening, and I'm feeling a little awed at how different student government was in college. Here are all these politicians in the room yelling at each other, debating with each other, and I was impressed by how official it all seemed. It was like a mini version of our national government. Students were getting up and talking about parking issues on campus, dining options, textbook affordability... things that touched students' lives every single day. I quickly decided this was something that I wanted to be involved in. Based on my few months on campus, I already had ideas on things that could be improved, and I thought student government would likely be the most effective place to affect change on campus. There were a few vacant senator positions at that time, so I was able to run for one of those positions, and to my surprise, I won! I ran on party slate, which made that election a lot less stressful because I had the support of so many peers who were also running for office. So since that election, I've been a member of student government. It's definitely shaped me into the person that I am today, and I really don't know who I'd be without it.

Over the last three years, I took on progressive responsibilities in student government. I began as a senator my first two years and advocated for things I believed could bring positive change for the students of Rainier, like providing more open-source textbooks to assist students with college affordability. My junior year, I moved to the executive branch and served as chief of staff to the student body president. Through this role, I gained incredible experience, which

taught me about navigating the processes for making things happen on campus and helped me to establish relationships around the university.

Throughout my first three years in student government, I can't say I thought much about being student body president. I never really saw myself in this role. And if I thought about it at all in the back of my mind, I definitely did not think I was capable. But then sometime in the fall of my junior year, a mentor, who was also a past student body president, told me that I should think about running for president. I didn't take him seriously at first. He probably talked to me about it four or five times until I began to actually consider it. I just didn't see it as something realistic for myself. I began to carefully think about it when a few more people approached me about running. They would say, "You can do this, you don't exactly have to have all the answers, but you have the right questions, and already you're being a voice for the students." At this time, I started thinking to myself, okay, if everyone's coming to me and everyone's seeing this in me, who am I to say that I'm incapable?

At the same time, working so close to the student body president my junior year, I began to realize there's a lot that you can do in the president position. Watching the student body president take on big things, like our dining services on campus, or being involved in all the contracts at the university, made me see the potential influence of the president. From my chief of staff position, I was already doing so much from a different perspective than the people who were typically in charge at Rainier, like advocating for more mental health counselors on campus and providing free pads and tampons for women. I realized that my perspective, just me being a female, being able to understand that those needs need to be met as well, was really important. As chief of staff, I had already made a lot of change, so I began to think, what kind of an impact could I have as student body president? So, the combination of those things, receiving

encouragement from others, and realizing the real impact I could have in the position, motivated me to run for the position of student body president. I also realized, out of the people who were running, no one was going to represent the students as well as I would, and no one had as much experience as I did.

Campaigning for student body president was super stressful. It's a ton of work and long hours. When you're running as president, you're not just organizing your own campaign, but also the campaign of other senators that want to be on your slate, and highlighting what's great about them, and what's great about the slate. And then you're figuring out what the slate message will be and trying to figure out where these people are going to campaign and what they are going to do. You are figuring out things for the entire party, so it's a lot of stress. I know every campus is a little different, but for us, we are able to campaign for seven days prior to the election. So during that week, you do all this work for seven long days. I don't think I slept at all. I don't think anyone on my team slept. It seemed like one very, very long day. And at the end of it, I was so exhausted I think I slept for 20 hours. Campaigning is the most fun that you ever had that you don't want to ever have again, but you wouldn't trade it for the world. It is just insane.

In the campaign, I ran against three other male candidates. I didn't really want to focus on being the only woman running in the election; rather, I focused on my previous accomplishments in student government. Although once in a while, when I was campaigning to a group of women, I could really capitalize on the "girl power" and share some of the advantages I thought I could bring to the office as a woman, but that definitely didn't happen very often. I remember a very stressful situation during the campaign was being on the stage in a debate with the three other men that I was running against. I was really trying to tiptoe that line of what a woman has to come off as to be liked and respected by the crowds. I think that was a big

challenge. We don't have a long history of women serving as student body president at Rainier, so there were no other women to look up to and model yourself after. You have to figure it out yourself.

My election also happened shortly after the national election, so that was something a lot of us on campus were thinking about. I saw people saying that Hillary was too stone-faced, and it really seemed to me like she was given a harder time because she was a woman. People were quick to label her one way or the other and I saw it's harder for a woman to step in because if you're too soft, then you're weak and if you're too strong, you're just labeled a certain five letter word. So, I had all of that in the back of my mind. But strangely, I also think the national election may have helped me. I think everyone was a little triggered after what had happened with Trump being elected and I found that a lot of people were really excited to have a qualified woman to be running for student body president. They were really excited to find out I was running and that was especially validating for me. I don't think that is why I won, but I think it may have contributed, as I heard from people that they really wanted to see change on campus as often times it's only male figures running for this position. I actually still can't believe I won!

And now, here I am, an inaugurated student body president. I'm confident in being the leader because that is what I have done, and that is what I do, but I still suffer a bit from imposter syndrome, which I think is pretty common for women. I sometimes struggle in believing I should be in charge and I feel like somebody's going to find me out. One of the questions I sometimes ask myself is whether people are going to think I am capable of leading as compared to the guys I was running against, especially because I'm a woman. And now that I'm sitting alone in my office, I find myself thinking, am I really president? Who elected me? What if they are disappointed in me? What if I'm disappointed in myself? And if I'm honest, I'm a little

overwhelmed. This is only day one and I already have a list a mile long of things to do. When am I going to get it all done? Will I be able to keep the promises I made to people in my campaign? Will I actually be able to affect change? Will I be able to make a difference? It's a lot of pressure. I hope I'm able to handle that pressure this year. I think with time that I will learn what I am doing. I definitely hope to grow my confidence in my leadership abilities and my leadership skills this year. When I ran for president, I felt like I was sort of overcoming my fear, but it doesn't take away that I am still fearful. I would like to get rid of that, so I hope this position helps me to do that.

Regardless of how I feel internally, I am going to try to be outwardly confident because I don't want people to think that I struggle in my own decisions. If I go to the senate with something and say, "We're doing this," but then I say, "Oh, but I don't really know," then the senators are not going to be as confident in me and in what I'm saying. Even though I may have doubts, I need to work hard to not show it. This is a definitely a difference I see between myself and the men I work with in student government. Sometimes I joke with one of my male colleagues and say, "Corey, if I had the confidence that you have in your pinky finger, I would be okay for the rest of the year." And that's just because he goes through life by saying, "I'm Corey. I'm great. I earned my position here. I am a top student leader." And I'm sitting here, I'm trying to figure things out, I'm learning, I'm second-guessing things. And I know I perform just as well, if not better than Corey, but it's kind of my internal thought process that is different. Based on the conversations that we have, I can tell he just doesn't have this internal thought process. He feels he always knows the right answer and he is going to do it and that is it. He doesn't really think about the alternatives or how it is going to impact people; he just kind of goes for it. But I think about things more than Corey does. I contemplate more, for sure. And I

don't know if that is being a female thing, or maybe just a “me” thing, but I think about things more and I think I'm a little less confident, but that pushes me to do better I think. I work harder and think about how my decisions will impact others, which is really critical in leadership.

I'm looking forward to my upcoming term. Although I have days when I question myself, I know I am the best person to do this job. I believe in my ability to bring people together and better things for this campus. No one will represent the students as well as I will, and no one has as much experience as I do. I ran knowing I bring a unique perspective and I hope I am able to be successful in the upcoming months. I have a lot of things that I want to accomplish. To me, leadership is about creating change, so my success will depend on my ability to have an impact at Rainier. I also hope I am able to keep up friendly relationships with people. Relationships are really important to me and I'm a little worried about balancing being president versus being a friend. I'm not quite sure how that will play out this year, but it's something I've been thinking about a lot lately. But I suppose only time will tell. For now, I must get back to work!

The First Few Months

I can hardly believe I have already been student body president for four months. It's definitely weird. I never would have considered myself for this position, even a year ago. I didn't think I was capable. I didn't think I was that person who could have all the answers and could be the go-to person on things. And now, I am that person. It actually is quite incredible and a little humbling. I think one of the most surprising things to me is how many people really rely on what I have to say and what I have to do. When I was a senator, I worked to write legislation, but in this role as president, I really can make change on campus. This responsibility is stressful at times, but it also is one of my favorite things because I actually get a whole year to

make a difference. It's really rewarding work personally. Knowing that you are the one leading the changes, and as long as you put in the hard work that you'll get results, and sometimes even if you don't get results, you know that you fought for the students.

It's interesting, because every administrator comes straight to me when they're talking about anything having to do with students. They see me as the person that has the pulse of the student body, so they come to me about fees, parking, campus policies, really anything. Another interesting thing is that somebody's texting me when anything happens on campus, like a protest or big event. I seriously might receive 20 texts about the same thing happening on campus. I knew I was going to be in a high-level leadership role on campus, I just don't think I realized to what extent that was going to be. I didn't know how much I would be looked at to weigh in on anything that happens on campus. Also, it's not just administrators coming to me, it's also students. I run into students on campus and they are always bringing their issues to me, which I really like because I think they approach me because they think I can actually do something about their problems. Also, I've realized being the student body president is really different than past positions I've had in student government. Anything that happens internally in student government, I have the power to fix, or pull people out of their positions, or veto legislation. Sometimes, the power, I guess you would say, is weird. I know power has that negative connotation, but I actually kind of like being in charge. I like being the one that people look to for direction. I'm not always comfortable with it, and I'm not always sure what to do with it, but I think I like being that top leader. I have definitely realized my desire to be the one in charge through my role as student body president.

Something that has been really important to me in my role as student body president is making sure that people feel they have a voice on campus. I try to find ways, as often as I can, to

find out what students are thinking on campus and to get input on ideas. I think it's important to think about the implications of my actions, and student government's actions, on the student body. I'm not sure everyone is able to think about how their actions impact everyone, but I try to. It's important I think about the majority and minority students. I represent everybody and want students to know that I value their input. I really try to be present at events around campus. I want to be out there because I want students to know that I care, and I want them to know that I hear what they're talking about. This position is especially rewarding when it comes to all the people that I've met. I love when I walk around campus and I'm able to say hello to a lot of folks that I've met through this position, and student government in general. I've definitely been able to create some amazing relationships with people, both students and administrators, by being the student body president. The relationships I've built in this role are quite different than past students who have served as president. When I have one-on-one meetings with my staff, I want to demonstrate to them that I care about them personally, so I ask how they are and how I can support them. Whereas last year, the male president's one-on-one meetings were always very business-oriented. And I think that's a difference between men and women leaders that I've seen. Women are more in tune with people and building relationships, whereas men just want to get to the business and get it done without thinking about the implications on people.

One thing that has been a little frustrating to me in relation to gender is when people just assume that the male students around me are in charge. There's definitely been a lot of different points where this happens. I don't think it's been on purpose, but it's something I have been dealing with on a continual basis in these first few months. Sometimes I will go into meetings with a male senator and people shake his hand, but they don't shake mine. And, that's really frustrating because I'm technically the one in charge, and people are acting like somebody else is.

Sometimes, we'll like go to a meeting, and people will say to the male, "How's the presidency?" They just kind of assume the male is the president, and then I have to step in say that I'm actually the one who is president. It's nothing major, but it's just something I wish people wouldn't just assume all the time.

One of the biggest challenges for me these past few months is not being able to do anything other than be president. It's the time commitment and being on all the time. It's really challenging because you have that side of you who loves this position and feels extremely blessed to be able to serve in this position. It's taught me tremendous lessons I needed to learn going into the world. But then, on the other hand, there's that little piece of you that still wants to have that regular senior year, you know? I want to go to football games with my friends. I want to be able to celebrate my friend's 21st birthday. I want to be able to sleep in. I even want to spend more time on my school work. But every time I want to do one of those things, I know I have bigger responsibilities. Last Saturday for instance, I wanted to sleep in a bit and attend my sorority's service event, but because I had to be at a fundraising event for the university Saturday night, I knew I had to wake up early and spend the day catching up on homework. And even some of that was cut short because I also had to clear out my president email and meet with my team who has a big town hall coming up next week. So sometimes that is tough. The responsibility is never ending. But I'd say that if your goal is to be a really good student body president, it's going to be very hard to balance everything and you're most likely going to end up prioritizing student government over other things. That was a choice I made this year. I set out to be an excellent student body president and I realized quickly that meant I was going to be missing out on some things in college. But I've also realized that I'm willing to make that sacrifice for the impact I'm able to have in this position. I know missing a party isn't going to

matter five years down the road. This, what I'm doing now as president now, is going to matter. And so that makes me feel better about the sacrifice. I don't think I would choose to do it another way.

I hope that I'm not putting too much pressure on myself, but I also feel like I have a responsibility to hold myself to a higher standard than I may have when I wasn't student body president because everything that I do, and anywhere I go, even if I'm not acting in my official capacity as student body president, people know that I'm student body president. I just don't want to be doing anything I'm not supposed to do because a lot of people do look towards me. A lot of people do watch me, and I've had to make sure that any setting that I'm in, I stay professional, or I try to look nice. I'm not just a college student anymore, I'm also representing an office. So, making those decisions sometimes is interesting. I definitely don't go out as much as I used to. Not only do I not have the time for it as much, but it's just easier not to be in a place where other students may be questioning if it's okay if I have a drink in my hand. And this makes it difficult hanging out with friends. One of the biggest things I've sacrificed by giving my all to student government is having free time to hang out with friends. I don't see them very often on the weekends, and most of the time I don't get back home on the week days until after midnight. I can't even see my roommate that much because she will go to sleep before I get home and I'm usually gone before she is up in the morning. Luckily my friends are pretty understanding and don't give me too hard a time for not being around as much. But I still feel like I am missing out sometimes.

When I first stepped into the role, I was confident in what I thought this year would entail, but not necessarily confident in my abilities to address challenging issues or truly lead in many ways. But after serving in these first few month, I definitely feel more capable in my

ability to lead. I've gained all this experience in making tough decisions and tough calls. And also knowing that everyone is looking to me as a final authority on things, not just because of the position but also because of my experience, really contributes to the faith I have in myself to make these tough decisions and be that final authority. Now, if I am faced with an issue, it's easier for me to call the right people, get them all in the room, and ultimately make a decision. Last year, I was very indecisive. I was not comfortable making decisions. I didn't exactly know what to do, or I would change my mind. Now, when I'm faced with a decision, it's easier for me to hear both sides, weigh pros and cons, and ultimately decide which avenue to take. And I think I gained confidence in my ability to make decisions by having all of those experiences where I had to do it. People were looking to me to make decisions and I had to do it time and time again. I have slowly realized over the last few months that, yes, I am right for this role. I shouldn't be doubting myself, and honestly at the end of the day I would trust myself out of anybody to do this job.

Along with making hard decisions, there have been other difficult aspects of being student body president. I've faced things that I couldn't foresee. Even when I was going through the transition with the former president, he was telling me, "Sometimes it's hard," and I heard him, but I don't think I conceptualized what that meant. It didn't really register with me, what kind of hard that was. I was thinking, the work I can do, the interviews to hire students I can do, speaking on behalf of the students, I can do. But there are just some situations that I could not plan for. For example, I had to fire a friend who worked in student government. This was definitely not something that I expected to do, and not something I felt really prepared to do, but in the end, I had to do it. And now I'm definitely better prepared to handle that type of situation in the future. As another example, I have very strong views on most things, but can't always

represent those views as strongly as I want to in my role as student body president. It's hard, because I know I have to represent all students, and not just myself and my personal views. Even if I feel a certain way, other students might not. That has been particularly difficult in figuring out what my role, and student government's role, is in addressing matters related to national politics and social issues. But as I go through the year and continue to gain experience in dealing with these challenging situations, I think I am getting better at handling them. The more practice I get, the more confident I get in my leadership ability.

As I think about what is to come in the remainder of my term, I think I am most concerned with time. Ever since I became student body president, I feel I have a responsibility to follow through on my campaign promises. People voted for me for a reason and I have a duty to make those things happen. But time seems to be going by so fast. At the beginning of my term, a year seemed like so long, but now that I'm nearly halfway through my term, I'm thinking that I'm running out of time to do all these things that I want to do for the campus. I really feel I have a responsibility to check off the whole list of things that I promised and I'm a little worried I won't be able to accomplish everything. I would say the bureaucracy that is higher education is really a hurdle for me because everything takes so long to do. It seems like it takes forever to get anything accomplished, which is really frustrating. It seems to me that if people all agree that something needs to change, or something needs to happen, you'd think that would be really quick, and that you could just make that happen, but that's not the case at all. So figuring out how to navigate that will be important in the upcoming months.

The Last Few Months

In the final months of my student body presidency, I'm feeling more confident than ever. I've learned a lot throughout this last year from just doing this job. I've become familiar with the

duties, gained a lot of practice dealing with difficult situations, and developed incredible relationships, all of which contribute to me feeling like I am beyond capable of serving as student body president. If I'm honest, I came into this role with a little bit of insecurity, which I think is so common for female leaders. We second guess ourselves, we always ask for others' opinions, and often doubt what we can do, especially in relation to our male counterparts who are always over confident it seems. But stepping into a role like president, a role I never saw myself in, provides a real boost. There's so many things that I always felt I was incapable of doing, or that I wasn't the best for the job. There are so many people that I thought would have been better. But to have successfully done these president duties, and to have done them at a high level, is a huge confidence booster, and just continues to affirm how capable not only I am, but that so many others are. And it's the direct experience that teaches you that. No one can really prepare you for this role. The president before me tried as best as he could, but until you're in control, you just don't understand. You really don't. You might want to understand. You might think you understand. But until you are really in it, you don't understand all the complex things that go into making a decision or justifying the decision that you do make. You really have to be in it to understand.

Another one of the biggest things that helped me build confidence in myself is really just the people around me encouraging and supporting me along the way. The encouraging words of my advisor, and other administrators help me so much. Even if I mess up, I get support. And people are there to help out in any way. I've been lucky to work with so many high-level administrators in this role. These people are so busy leading the university, but still take the time to invest in me. That has really helped to build my confidence. People come to me with difficult tasks and say that they can count on me and that they can rely on me to do a good job. That is a

really excellent feeling knowing these people that I look up to actually look to me to get things done. I think one of the most memorable moments I have had so far was meeting with the university governing board and hearing from them that I'm doing a good job. Hearing that from them just means a lot to me because they are such influential people in the state, and in higher education in general.

When I think back to my term as student body president, I'm proud of what I was able to accomplish, but especially proud of the relationships I was able to establish through this role. I would say the most successful component of my presidency has just been establishing relationships with students and administrators across the university. I have realized that when relationships are a little more than just professional, it sort of helps you because they have a better understanding of your thought process and where you're coming from. And so, the more I get to know someone, whether they're an administrator or another student, it definitely helps, because they know what I stand for, and they know that I have good intentions, and they know why I'm doing what I'm doing, and why I'm asking for these things to be done. Looking back at it, I definitely see this as a difference between myself and my male predecessor. He connected with people through business, and I've always had more of a friendly relationship with everyone. I find those more personal relationships have really helped me move forward my agenda at Rainier and are different than what I have observed past student body presidents do.

It's been really important to me in my role to be very accessible to the student body. I thought about how our student government office communicated our accessibility to students. The way our office is set up, we have a main shared office space, and then we have two offices in the back for the president and vice president to have their private offices. Last year, the president and vice president spent a lot of time in their private offices with the door shut. They

weren't really super approachable. But I prefer to spend my time in the office out in the shared office space, and I think that communicates a lot about the accessibility of our administration. It's also been really important to me to encourage younger students in their leadership pursuits. I think I'm pretty good at helping other students realize their own leadership skills, and the possibilities and the opportunities they have at Rainier. I'm proud to be able to help folks in that way. Because of my own journey, and where I've come, and what I've learned, I think I can help other students by being able to tell them about what I've been through, and how I've gotten to the places that I have. And then I try to inspire other people to know they have the ability to do these great things, even if they don't necessarily think they're ready. I've realized I'm good at bringing out the best in people and try to do that in any way that I can through student government.

One of the things that I've realized in this role, more than any other previous leadership role, is that time goes by very quickly. At the beginning of your term, you feel like you have so much time, but then a few months in, you realize how quickly time flies. It's tough, because you know you are finally in a position on campus to enact real change through your position as president, so when the time flies by, you just want it to slow down so you can have more time to make things happen. It was really important to me to accomplish the promises we made in our campaign, but there's a point when you realize that a lot of things that you wanted to do are just going to take longer than the time you are in office. I review our campaign website pretty regularly throughout the year and I'm happy to say that most of our campaign promises are either done or are in progress. Nothing is just not done, which feels pretty good. I like moving forward on things, even if things don't get done by the time we're finished with it, at least we've kind of gotten started with it. Because a year sounds like a long time, but it's not a long time at all. But

with the things we haven't been able to see all the way through, I feel that we've set the groundwork for them, and certain things might not get done next year, might not get done two years from now, but five to 10 years from now, I'll be able to come back to Rainier and say, "Hey, we started that!" So, I like thinking about that legacy we can leave behind. I would say with time, you don't have enough of it. I just didn't have enough of it. That was one of the things that I was fighting against throughout my term.

I think one of the things I've really learned to do in this position is guard my emotions. In the past, I usually let my emotions be seen. And I've worked on it a lot this year to not let those emotions be seen. One time I was really stressed last year, this was before I was president, and I cried. It happened one time, literally one time. But because of that, I was seen as weak, which was really frustrating because a man could be upset, and maybe he doesn't cry, but people respect him for it. But as a woman, if you cry, oh, that's three strikes and you're out. So I'd say it's been difficult to be able to navigate that because you do want to come off strong. But you also don't want to come off as a bitch. And unfortunately, that's how women in leadership roles are sometimes titled. And sometimes you just kind of have to own that and think to yourself, fine, if you want to look at me like that, then do that. Because a man that was doing the exact same thing would be looked at as a good leader, but a woman who acts strong is looked at as a bitch. I hate using that word because I don't like being called that, but that's what happens. So yeah, I think that's been something that I've struggled with a lot, and just trying to navigate, am I being too emotional about something? And will people think that's why I'm making the decisions that I am, because I'm an emotional woman? Or when I'm walking into a meeting if I'm strong and adamant, are people going to see me as not being a good leader because they can't get past thinking I'm making them uncomfortable because I'm a strong woman? A lot of times

people will comment on how I do stand my ground a lot, but I don't see that them saying that to a man. I guess they just think it is normal for a man to stand his ground, so don't need to comment on it. I'd say I don't think about it a lot, I try not to anyway, but if I do think about it, it's frustrating. When I do think about it, I find myself consciously making an effort to really strike that balance, and figure out the best route to take, and not come across emotional and weak, or as too strong and bitchy. It's so old now.

I've experienced several things serving in this position that I didn't experience in previous leadership positions on campus. One is definitely figuring out how to strike that balance in being the right amount of strong. Another is realizing it is a very lonely role being on top. I guess you don't really realize it until you're in the role. It's been pretty lonely since the beginning, but I guess in different ways. I remember sitting in my office one day, and I had answered off all my emails, and I was just sitting there, and I thought okay, what do I do next? It was only the first week or two and it was just me, all alone. And I didn't know what to do. And then I realized okay, now you're in this role, you need to take charge of it. Even being all alone, I need to not be afraid to move forward on my own. And then, there are other times, you are not the most well-liked person in the room. You're saying to the team, no, we can't spend money on that, or no, I don't think that represents student well, so we're not going to do that. And so, sometimes being the person who is not liked the most in the room singles you out, and it makes you realize that you are kind of alone in this position. Sometimes it's also lonely because I can't really talk to people that I work with, or some of my really good friends about what's going on because it is either private, or its personnel related. For instance, maybe one of my vice presidents is just being really obnoxious one day, and I want to tell one of my other vice presidents about that. Well, obviously I'm not going to do that, it's just toxic for the

environment, but that can also contribute to the position feeling pretty lonely. So yeah, it's a lonely position, but at the same time if you surround yourself with good people, they'll help you not feel lonely all the time too.

I've been blessed by being able to interact with some really great women in this role. Seeing other women in leadership roles, and seeing them be positive, and command the room, has been really beneficial to me. I work with a woman administrator who is pretty amazing in my eyes. She's super confident, she always speaks her mind, but at the same time, she's really compassionate, and she is a really good listener. She is one of my biggest role models and I really benefit by being able to see a powerful woman be powerful, and not shy away from that. I think just seeing somebody that you can relate with in just gender alone is extremely empowering. Seeing a woman in a powerful position and realizing that could be me someday. This is really important because a lot of the world is still male dominated. What is it, like 10% of CEO's are women? So, it's still uncommon to see women in high facets of power, and so it feels good to see somebody succeeding in leadership that you can kind of model yourself after. I love having women to look up to and to talk to about my position. They're very personable, and so they're easy to relate to, and have good conversations with, while also knowing that they're a high-level executive in charge of all of this stuff on campus. They're still able to take it down a notch and just be super down to earth in talking with me. They're not going to look at me differently because I'm a student, or because I'm a woman, and they'll give me the time of day. I'm so grateful for those interactions, and those connections, as they have definitely helped me in processing the challenges I've faced in my own position, as well as inspired me a bit to be more like them.

Before becoming president, I never saw myself being president. I never saw the title president before or after my name. If I didn't have people giving me encouragement and mentoring me, I wouldn't be in the place where I am. I never would have believed that I'm capable and I never would have had the courage to run for student body president. And now, having had the experience, I see that I'm capable. Now, I see that I can lead, and I can lead well. My own experience has taught me how important it is to support women. This is something that is extremely important to me in the future. I want to advocate for women and empower them to do more, to accomplish more, and know they are not limited to certain things because of their gender. I don't think I would be where I am without the support of others, so I know I need to play a role in pushing other women to believe in themselves. I have benefited so much from having strong female role models that I hope I can be that person for other women.

Thinking about my future, I know I need to aspire to the top of the hierarchy because I would like to be in a position where I can empower more women. That's something that's really been placed in my heart over the past year. I think about how few women are in top leadership positions. And I think about how capable we are. There are now more women college graduates than there are men college graduates; yet, there so few occupying some of the biggest leadership positions. I have realized I don't want to be complacent and settle in my career. I'm heading for the top. I want to continue to work my way up and be able to lead others and empower other women along the way. This has been a revelation to me this year knowing what it feels like to be in a top leadership position at Rainier, and having that experience being only 21 years old. Through this position, I was able to adapt, and learn, and flourish, and this experience has prepared me to do it again in my career. And I know I will continue to develop in my leadership

ability with more experiences and then be even better prepared to handle some of the challenges that I will face in the future.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of interviews with 20 women student body presidents from across the country about their experiences serving as student body president and their future aspirations for elite leadership roles. Five major themes emerged from the data analysis process: (a) she carries tremendous responsibility as student body president, (b) she leads focusing on people and making things better, (c) she must navigate the contextual factors of gender and the environment, (d) she develops strengthened confidence in her leadership ability, and (e) she aspires to lead in the future. With each major theme, subthemes were identified and discussed throughout the findings.

As previously described, participants were interviewed at three different times during their tenure as student body president. Their first interview occurred shortly after being inaugurated as student body president (July/August/September). The second interview took place near the end of their first semester as president (November/December) and the final interview was conducted a couple of months prior to the end of their tenure as student body president (January/February). The findings in this section include quotes from any of the three interviews. The appropriate interview number is provided with each quote (e.g., Interview 1, Interview 2, Interview 3). Additionally, to protect the identities of the women who participated in the study, university-specific details have been removed from participant quotes.

Table 2

Participant Profile

Pseudonym	Institution Classification	State of Institution	Year in School	Race/Ethnicity
Alexis	Medium private	NC	Senior	Black/African American
Brooke S.	Large public	OK	Senior	Black/African American
Casey	Large public	NC	Senior	Black/African American
Catalina	Small private	NC	Senior	Hispanic/Latino
Diana	Large public	TX	Junior	Hispanic/Latino
Emma	Large public	WI	Senior	Black/African American
Kelly	Large public	KS	Senior	White
Lauren	Large private	TX	Senior	White
Leslie K.	Large private	MA	Senior	Asian
Lilly	Medium public	AK	Sophomore	White
Maia	Medium public	NY	Senior	Black/African American
Margaret T.	Large public	TX	Junior	Asian
Meredith	Large public	TN	Senior	White
Morrissey	Medium private	FL	Senior	White
Nicole	Medium public	KS	Junior	Asian
Rose	Large public	FL	Senior	White & American Indian
Ruth W.	Small private	IA	Junior	White
Sonia	Large public	NC	Senior	Hispanic/Latino
Tracy C.	Large public	AZ	Senior	White
Viktoria A.	Small private	IL	Senior	White

She Carries Tremendous Responsibility as Student Body President

The first theme that emerged from the findings was the tremendous sense of responsibility women felt in relation to their duty as student body president. Within this theme, three subthemes emerged: (a) power of the presidency, (b) working in the spotlight, and (c) constrained by time.

Power of the Presidency

Throughout the interview process, the women continually spoke about feeling the power of their student body presidency. They felt the power of their position through the tremendous responsibilities that came along with the sheer weight and immensity of the role, the ability to affect real change on campus, having expert status in student government, feeling accountable for the ultimate actions of student government, and serving as the official voice of the student body. As the women discovered the power of the presidency, they also found they had real enjoyment in being in charge of these incredible responsibilities.

Many of the women described not being able to truly understand the immensity of the president position until they were actually serving in it. And even serving in the role, sometimes they were still surprised by the weight of it. Feeling this power of the presidency was a result of the breadth and depth of the responsibilities that fell under the student body president, including serving as the chief decision-maker of the largest student-run organization on their campus, representing all members of the student body and the duty to serve as their official voice, being called upon to give prepared and impromptu speeches to small and large audiences, attending high profile university events, and leading a large team of their peers within student government. Meredith explained that the previous student body president may have described the experience to her, but until she felt it herself, she didn't fully comprehend the scale.

You think you know what it means to be student body president. You might talk to the student body president about what it currently means, but you have no idea what it means until you step into that role yourself. Until you are in the office the first day alone, and you look at your calendar, and you look at your email and you see that you have 20

emails of meetings that you need to go to, and people that you need to appoint to things.

You just have no idea what it means. (Interview 1)

Some of the women described feeling a little intimidated by the scale of their position. Brooke S. explained, “I remember after I got elected I thought, wait, I'm actually president over 25,000 students and a whole exec team, and senate, and all that kind of stuff” (Interview 1). Over time, Brooke S. became more accustomed to the power of the position but was sometimes still surprised by it. “Sometimes I forget... I know it sounds a little weird... sometimes I'll wake up and I'm like, wow, I'm student body president. Last year, I was a senator. It's interesting feeling like I'm the top student leader (Interview 2). Like other women, Lauren was also sometimes taken aback by the fact she was student body president.

It's weird to think about me being in this top position when I interact with freshmen or sophomores. I was amazed to have met the student body president of a huge school like [mine]... It puts things in perspective of wow, this is an incredible opportunity. What did I do to get here? And then how do I treat this position knowing that there are still many people who'd love to be in my place? Or remembering how I felt as a freshman interacting with the student body president. (Interview 2)

Many of the participants described some of the large speeches they gave as a part of their position duties and realized those experiences also helped them to understand more fully their immense duty as student body president. Through these speeches, they had a unique position to be able to speak on behalf of the student body, as well as craft their own message to a large audience. Catalina described giving a speech at her university's convocation.

I think what really makes it stand out more for me is that I used that time... as a call to action to the students to let them know that SG is really motivated and we're excited

about the things we have planned and... we can actually be an agent for change. I think that's when I realized for the first time... it's when it finally felt real, that wow, I'm in this position. And I'm on this platform where I can make my voice heard in order to make this place the best it can be. It's not just a dream anymore. It's really here. (Interview 2)

Morrissey discussed giving a speech to students and parents at her university's annual family weekend. She did not realize the impact of her speech until parents came to talk to her after and told her they saw her as a role model for their own children at the institution.

I got to do a speech at family weekend... a 10-minute speech on who I was and how my role was important to the school. I was just talking about student government, and what I was doing with it, and how it's shaped me... I didn't really think I was doing anything special. Then I had all these parents come up to me... [telling me] how eloquently I spoke, and how passionate I was, and how they wish their kid would get involved in student government... For me personally, being able to have that opportunity and seeing how it resonated with people. I don't know. It just made me feel kind of fuzzy inside. I was pretty happy after that. (Interview 2)

The women were excited by their ability to affect real change on campus through the power of their role as president. This power to create change as president was more significant than leadership roles they had previously played on campus. Brooke S. discussed the difference between what she was able to accomplish as a senator versus being student body president.

When I was a senator, I worked to write legislation and all this kind of stuff, but I feel in this role as president, I really can make change on campus... it is one of my favorite things because I'm like, wow, I actually get a whole year to make a difference on this

campus that I've been wanting to for the last three years... Just being able to have this platform on campus and actually being able to do something with it. (Interview 2)

Alexis recognized the power she had through student government to make change versus her previous student organization involvement.

Of course, I loved being vice president of the college democrats. Of course, I loved being a [university] feminist. I loved all of those organizations, and they all had an impact on campus. But not in the way that SG has awarded me the opportunity to make change at an institutional and cultural level on this campus. (Interview 2)

A few women compared the accomplishments of student government to other departments on campus. Emma was proud of the real change student government was able to affect during her presidency.

I would say my biggest accomplishment has truly been being able to... lead the organization. This year we've done more than I think [student government] has ever done at [my institution]. I've made sure that our organization has done more good this year than I think we ever have in the past... I'm very happy with how it turned out and the success that we have been having with all of the things that we are doing... As students here, we operate almost an entire department on this campus. And the amount of work that we get done and stuff we impact is comparable to any other department on campus. (Emma, Interview 3)

Several women felt they were looked at to be the expert in student government, whether it be based on them serving in the top student leader position in student government or the fact they had the most experience in student government in general. Whatever the reason, they felt the power of this responsibility being the one who was looked at to know the answers. Lilly

explained that a large part of her job, since she had been in student government the longest, was working with new senators and preparing them for their role.

We don't really have a great institutional memory, so since I'm one of the people that's been there the longest, I see a lot of things that aren't necessarily in my job description, but I'm telling people how things run and how we do things. Since most of our senators are new... it's a lot of... showing people how to do things. (Interview 2)

Lilly later explained the responsibility and pressure that comes along with being the top leader in student government.

I just had a realization that this is it. I'm the top person here, there's no one else to go to... You have to figure out for yourself what you want to do. I have to figure out what I think will work best... It's definitely a lot of responsibility and yeah, it's really hard...

It's exciting to be that person, but also just a lot of pressure. (Interview 3)

Emma dealt with a lot of professional staff turnover at her institution, as well as new executive board members, so she felt the responsibility of training fell on her based on her past experiences in student government.

We have a lot of change within the executive board and within... our professional staff advisors. And that's been really, really stressful because I've been the only one who has experience with the executive board and how our student government works on the back end. I've been doing a lot of training and just trying to get the new folks to make sure they feel confident.... A lot of it falls back on me being able to answer the questions and being able to be available all of the time. (Interview 1)

Some women felt they took on the responsibility of everything that happened in student government, positive and negative. Since they served in the top student leader position, they felt

accountable for all of its actions. For some, this responsibility could sometimes be intimidating or nerve-wracking. Kelly described:

I guess now, it's just kind of different, because people look to you to know all the answers. So, when you're in an organization for so long, and then, all the sudden you're at the top of it, it's just a switch of mindset I would say... You have to focus on a lot of different things... You're where the buck stops now. And, as a twenty-year-old, and having that responsibility, it's a little intimidating. (Interview 2)

Ruth W. similarly stated:

I guess one of the things I always knew, but I don't know if I was 100% prepared for, is everything that happens in SG, everyone looks to you. If it's good or it's bad. It's not the body as a whole, as much as it's a reflection of me and my work. I'm always really careful of what goes on and what projects we go into, and the emails we send. Because even if it's not me sending the email, it's one of my representatives or one of my executive members, so I think there's a lot more responsibility than I thought that comes with it... I didn't realize how much of everything that SG does is going to be a direct reflection of me, and so, I'm always so nervous something is going to go wrong and it'll come down on SG as a whole and then down on me. (Interview 2)

Women also felt the power of the presidency when they were called upon to serve as the voice of the students to high-level administrators at their institution, as well as by trustees, donors, and alumni. Based on their high-level leadership position, these women were typically called upon to represent the student body in numerous ways, including regularly meeting with their university president/chancellor and chief student affairs officer, attending and providing input at their university governing board meetings, and being invited to serve on university staff

committees and task forces. They were also often expected to be present at various events across campus, including high-profile events such as fundraising galas, alumni tailgates, and football games in the university president's box. Meredith was a bit surprised about the variety of areas where she would be deeply involved as student body president. She described the assortment of activities she participated in:

Today, I got called into this meeting to talk about the design space for [the new student union being built on campus] ... Its little things like that that pop up. Obviously, it would make sense for me to be the one to go to it. I didn't realize how many meetings you just have to get called for... A lot of times... it's just being a student voice in the room, and it's been good because I have been valuable... It's not like it's there just for show... I sit on the alumni board for [my university] ... it has a tailgate [for football games] every Saturday. They kind of expect me to go to those. You give up tailgating with your friends to go tailgate with alumni... I've given up my games, so I can go try to get more money for the university or try to make connections... so I can tell alumni what we're doing is valuable. I've been to a lot of cool, nice dinners... Cool things that only the student body president, or only the top student leaders would get to do... I didn't realize how many meetings... the student body president always sits on... I didn't realize how much of my time would be spent or would be used of me just being in the room, or me just being there interacting. (Interview 2)

Many of the women had a seat on their university's governing board because of the power of their position. Ruth W. enjoyed the unique opportunity of attending these meetings as student body president.

We had the [university governing board] on campus for our university, and one of the cool things about being president is when the [university governing board] comes, I get to go and speak to them directly... it's always really neat talking to them because they have so much influence in the school, and they always want to hear our opinions on the things we're working on. They want... to get our advice on projects to pursue in the future... This recent meeting actually, I was asked... to come and speak in front of the entire board. So, that was something that I wouldn't have been able to do and been able to influence without being the president. (Interview 2)

The women took the responsibility of serving as the voice of students seriously. They recognized the power of their voice in this position, as well as the responsibility that comes along with using their voice. Brooke S. explained:

Because I have this title as president, people listen... I get to be the one to go to the administration and they know that I'm the voice of the students, so they're actually going to listen and not just brush me aside... With that comes with responsibility of really taking what students are saying and taking it to administration because I know they're going to listen to me. (Interview 2)

Although many of the women felt the power of the presidency was a bit daunting at first, they enjoyed the responsibility of being in charge and knew they were the right person for the job. Alexis explained that it can be tough sometimes, but overall, she still liked the responsibility. "I enjoy responsibility, even though sometimes it might be bad, I still like shouldering it" (Interview 1). Morrissey knew she was the best person to shoulder the responsibility. "I kind of like having the power and the control of this organization just because I know what I want for it and I think I'm the best equipped to make it what it should be"

(Interview 2). Catalina sees herself as a natural leader who takes charge. “I see myself as that person leading a group and helping move things the way they need to move” (Interview 2).

Some women felt serving in the student body president role confirmed their desire to take on the responsibility of leadership.

I think... [being in charge] is important to me. I realized that in the last couple of months that sort of the difference between being in charge and being the one being told to do things, it is sort of liberating... I don't have to push someone else's agenda, and I can be working on my own. And I think that is a really great thing... I can work on what is important, and I can direct other people to be working on what I think is important.

(Lilly, Interview 2)

I love it because... I really like to get things done... I'm always wanting to take on the projects that are really meaningful to me, or that can make a big impact... I've always like to like lead and make the decisions, rather than have to follow the leader. So definitely being SG president has reinforced that. (Ruth W., Interview 2)

As far as being in a leadership role... yes, I want to do that. I think I am definitely my best when I'm in charge, when I'm directing and when I'm... on the forefront of those things, when I'm setting the strategic plan and those leadership goals. (Meredith, Interview 3)

Nearly all the women expressed recognizing the power of their presidency. Despite many of the women being surprised, and some a little intimidated, at the power and responsibility of the presidency at first, they settled a bit more into it after months of experience,

and most really enjoyed the power of the presidency. The women were especially struck and excited by their strong ability to affect change on campus, which they felt was unique to their position as student body president. The large number of responsibilities, as well as the variety of all they were involved in through their role as student body president, contributed to them feeling the power of the presidency. They were often looked to as the experts within student government based on their position and past experience, which further contributed to feeling the immensity of the president position. Additionally, high-level administrators were often soliciting their thoughts and presence as the ultimate representative of the student body based on their duty to serve as the voice of students at their institution. As the women reflected on the power of their presidency, the next subtheme of working in the spotlight emerged.

Working in the Spotlight

Serving in the student body president position, most women felt they were continually working in the spotlight based on the visibility of their position. The visibility of the student body president position was taken seriously by the women as they recognized their responsibility to represent the position, student government, and the greater university in a positive way. For many, this sense of responsibility working in the spotlight affected the activities they participated in with friends, their participation in class, their dress, as well as the general way they presented themselves. Overall, women described working in the spotlight as a necessary aspect to being student body president and a positive experience. Yet from time to time, it could be a challenge, including many women feeling a bit lonely at the top.

The women were recognized on- and off-campus due to their visibility as student body presidents, whether or not they were serving in their official capacities of the role. Many students, staff, faculty, and alumni knew who they were based on their position. This resulted in

lots of recognition and hellos on campus, as well as, more importantly, being contacted by many as the one who may be able to resolve a vast number of university issues. For the most part, the women enjoyed this recognition. Nicole stated, “It’s cool to be able to go to an event and have people recognize you in that role” (Interview 2). Brooke S. felt similarly when she described being recognized on campus. “People know you on campus. I’m not a famous person or anything like that, but people do come up to me like, ‘Are you president? You’re the president!’” (Interview 2). Sonia was not only recognized on campus, but after this initial recognition was also approached by students who needed her help.

It's a big campus, but I often get recognized as student body president, even in class and stuff... It's like I have somewhat of a name recognition, which is really weird... In class, someone came up to me and said, “Hey, are you the student body president?” I was like, “I am, yeah. What can I do for you?” Then they just started asking questions about stuff. So, I feel like I have a better connection with students. (Interview 1)

The women felt a level of responsibility that came along with this recognition. Morrissey described feeling a duty to positively represent student government and her institution because of being recognized through the significance of the president role.

People trust you and people come to you with questions because we are the top organization on campus... I'm the leader of the organization, so I have to make sure that I'm just portraying our university and our organization in the best light. Overall, it's just been a really good experience. It's nice to have people know who you are and have administrators and professors know the role that you play. They look at you differently saying, “Oh. Wow, that's a pretty big deal. She's pretty serious about her stuff.” (Interview 2)

Similarly, Diana explained the importance of maintaining a positive image for herself and student government.

Ever since I got in this position, I feel that I am in a fishbowl and people are always going to be watching you... But it has helped me be more accountable... Being in a university position, being elected, people know your name... I find it's very important that you maintain that image for yourself and for the organization as a whole. (Interview 3)

Carrying the responsibility of working in the spotlight is something Margaret T. thought about consciously in her role. She realized that holding the president position meant she was more than just a student, rather she had the additional responsibility of representing the office of student body president in a professional way.

I would say that it sometimes can feel... like everything you're doing is being watched and sometimes that is the case. Even previous to when you were in this position, decisions that you made when you were younger... are always questioned... Everyone looks at it very critically, or maybe you just have feelings of that yourself... Anything you do has to be professional, like photos you post on your social media. You're not just a college student, you're also representing an office. (Interview 2)

Many of the women described at least one example of having to think intentionally about their actions based on the visibility of their role. For instance, some described having to contemplate what social activities they participated in with friends based on how others recognized them in the student body president position. They had to think consciously about what fellow students might think about them staying out late at night or being at a party or bar. Kelly stated, "Yeah, I don't think you can really go anywhere without people assuming you're

there as student body president” (Interview 2). Alexis described the moment when she first realized the responsibility that came along with working in the spotlight as president.

Now, I'm used to it [feeling in the spotlight]. But at the beginning, I forgot. I remember one time, I was out at a party with my friends, and I was... having a good time, and some guy said something about me being the student body president. And, that's when it registered. I'm not just a student anymore... I can't walk around campus at night with my friends, having a good time, being a little crazy, and someone not recognize me. That was definitely a memorable moment for me this year. That was when I realized that I was not just a student. (Interview 2)

Rose had similar experiences, but also found it really important that the student body still see her as a student. She tried to strike a balance between still being seen as a student by her peers, while also being seen as professional by university staff. Working in the spotlight as president made her think more intentionally about things she had not had to worry about previously.

I used to go out a lot... when I became president, people thought I changed... People want to see me out because they want to know, if I'm still around... But then also, sometimes when I'm out, they will say, “Are you even allowed to be here? What are you doing, with that drink in your hand?” I'm saying, “I'm 22. What do you mean, what am I doing?” But then also, at football games, like tailgates and stuff. I used to drink and have a really good time, but now, if that was on camera, and someone took a picture, then I would be done... So, I don't do that... It feels weird, because I'm thinking, oh, I shouldn't be doing this. But then also thinking, I should be a student. And then advisors are at the tailgates... and so, I don't like to drink at tailgates, because I don't want them to see me. But then the students are saying, “Where are you? Why weren't you here?” It's

hard to say, “Oh, I don't feel comfortable,” but I never really admitted it. Because as a student, I should be comfortable. I'm fine. But, with the administrators there, it feels awkward. (Interview 3)

The sense of responsibility to act in a professional manner resulted in some women feeling a bit of pressure about how they were dressing on campus. Because they were regularly recognized through their role, some felt they had to put more effort into how they looked on campus than they had in previous leadership positions on campus.

This year, I have felt this type of pressure... to wear better clothes throughout the week to class. So, I put makeup on every day and... just wear jeans and a nice shirt. I don't have to be business professional every day, but being kind of casual cute just because now everyone knows me by name and they can just point me out. I don't want them pointing me out and saying, “Wow, the student body president looks like that today,” or something like that. (Brooke S., Interview 2)

A lot of people do look towards me. A lot of people do watch me, and I've had to make sure that any setting that I'm in, I kind of stay professional or I try to look nice... I know a lot of students do look at that. I remember one day I just wanted to wear a t-shirt and a pair of jeans and somebody said, “oh, [Casey] are you okay?” I'm like, “Yeah, everything's fine. What's wrong?” They said, “Oh, you just don't have your usual get up on” and I'm like, oh, wow, I didn't know that you all were looking at that as an official aspect of what I do. (Casey, Interview 2)

In addition to some feeling pressure in the way they presented themselves through dress on campus, a few others felt some pressure discussing current issues in the classroom. For

Lauren, she had to take into account how she, as student body president, may possibly alienate others if she were to participate in a current issues discussion in class. Instead, based on her recognizable position, she decided to keep her opinions to herself.

I'm in a public policy class. We were debating really hot topic issues. I just chose to sit back and be silent, possibly get a lower grade on participation because it wasn't right for me as the student body president to speak to some of those issues because I may alienate some of my constituents, or say something that could be taken out of context. It's hard. It's very hard, but I think also it's made me more... aware of how... people hear certain things, or they find a sense in certain actions or words, just judging by what people have said. (Interview 2)

Casey felt additional pressures of working in the spotlight based on being the first African American president at her institution. She felt people were especially focused on the tone and setting in which she made statements about controversial issues on campus.

Being an African American woman in the position and being the first African American woman in that position, I think that is where most of the eyes come from. People are always, not skeptical, but they are always looking to see how I will handle certain things, or how I will respond to certain things just because of the stereotypes from the different connotations that come with me in general. I definitely can say... any time there has been anything kind of controversial on campus and it's time for me to make a statement, or time for me to voice how I feel, everyone is looking at the tone of how I do it. Everyone is looking at the wording of how I did it. Everyone is looking at the setting. (Interview 2)

Several women felt a bit lonely working in the spotlight. They understood the responsibility and were willing to make the sacrifices they needed to make to best represent the position. However, because this visibility was really unique to the student body president position, this spotlight was not something their peers were experiencing. Lauren described some of the sacrifices she had to make being so visible as president.

I remember talking to the student body president last year... She mentioned the position could be very lonely because you are almost always on display. People are always watching you. You can't exactly go and celebrate all of your best friends' birthdays because you don't want to make a fool of yourself or you don't want to be a headline the next morning. So, I've definitely felt that... everyone is certainly watching you and listening. (Interview 2)

Catalina also had to make sacrifices working in the spotlight, but felt they were worth it to hold the larger responsibility of being president.

I think the hardest thing... it gets kind of lonely sometimes when you get to be the leader. Especially... when you're living in a fishbowl... Sometimes I just want to go out and be crazy and do whatever I want. And I can't always do that. And sometimes it's hard because your friends can still do that... When you're sitting at home and you're seeing all your friends on Snapchat having a grand old time doing crazy things that you know you can't do, it's kind of like, dang, this sucks... My awareness is a lot higher and I have to remember my obligation to the students that elected me... this is something that I have worked for for so long and I know it's what I'm meant to be in and I'm here. And so, I think whenever I get those feelings of being in the spotlight, or I think it's a negative

thing, I always remind myself why I wanted this job and why I wanted to be in this role for so long... I really need to keep being on my best game. (Interview 2)

Some others described feeling lonely being in the top leadership position. Tracy C. knew she had a responsibility as a leader to not vent or complain about her staff to others, but not being able to vent contributed to her feelings of being alone as student body president.

I keep reminding myself that sometimes it's lonely when you're at the top, because I can't really talk to people that I work with, or some of my really good friends about what's going on. Because it is either private or its personnel related. Or, you know, one of my vice presidents is just being really obnoxious today, and I wanted to tell one of my other vice presidents that. Obviously, I'm not going to do that, it's just toxic for the environment. So, I think that, more than anything else, is lonely. (Interview 3)

Kelly found that some were intimidated by her position as president, especially being a woman in the position.

It is a very lonely role, being on top. And everybody says that, you know, you hear that all the time, but I guess you don't really realize it until you're in the role. I'd say, a lot of people are intimidated by the president in general, and so people kind of steer clear of developing relationships with you. Just because they're thinking, oh, well she's, I don't know, powerful or whatever. And I think a lot of times women get that worse than men do because it's kind of natural for the man to take those leadership roles, but for a woman to be in the position, it's a lot different. (Interview 3)

Some women felt lonely because no one really understood their role as president and they often had to be the one to deliver bad news.

At the end of the day, nobody knows how much work you have to put into it, you know. Nobody knows that at the end of the day you're the bad guy because you had to fire somebody... They don't get that because it's not up to them. They tell me to do it. If there's an issue, I have to send the email, I have to call them in for a meeting. It's not like other people are doing the bad guy stuff. So that is definitely, definitely super lonely.

(Morrissey, Interview 3)

Meredith also sometimes felt alone in her position based on the nature of sometimes having to be the unpopular person in the room, but found it helpful to think about the support she received from her cabinet members.

A lot of times, you are not the most well-liked person in the room. And just because sometimes you have to be the asshole in the room, and say no, we can't spend money on that or no, I don't think that represents student well, so we're not going to do that... And so being sometimes the person who is not liked the most in the room, singles you out and it makes you realize that you're kind of alone in this position. But then I realize that I have [my executive board] and I know that they're going to back me up, I know that we're going to make decisions together, and that part helps. (Interview 3)

Most women felt working in the spotlight was an understandable aspect of serving in a high-profile leadership position and were willing to adopt behaviors to help them be most professional representing their role. As a result of this increased visibility, some women thought a bit differently about the activities they participated in with friends, others thought a bit more about the way they dressed on campus, and some thought more intentionally about their tone and message in speaking about potentially controversial issues. In their positions, these women saw themselves as more than just a student at their institution. They felt a tremendous responsibility

to represent not only themselves, but also their student government and institution, in a positive light because of their office as student body president. As the women reflected on the responsibility they felt to positively represent themselves while working in the spotlight of the presidency, they also discussed the time commitments of the position. The subtheme of time constraints emerged.

Constrained by Time

All the women felt tremendous responsibility to their role as student body president. They each wanted to fulfill their campaign promises, address campus issues, and serve as change-makers on their campuses. Yet, many of them described feeling constrained by the limits of time. They felt their short one-year term was not enough time to accomplish all of their goals. Additionally, it was often a 24/7 responsibility, which resulted in many women having less time for academics, sleep, and relationships. Yet despite the time constraints, women were happy with their decision to prioritize the responsibilities of the presidency.

One of the motivating factors for a few of the women to run for president was their desire to accomplish more by gaining more time in office. They realized they were unable to accomplish all they wanted to accomplish in their previous role in student government and needed more time. Emma stated, “The thing that I learned... it's really hard to do... a big project in a year. There's a lot of things in my vice presidency that I wasn't able to finish” (Interview 1). Agreeing with this sentiment, Rose said, “You can't get anything done in a year” (Interview 1). Leslie K. felt like she had a responsibility to the student body to extend her time working on important projects.

I realized that the long-term changes that I wanted to create for students on campus... reached beyond my purview as student body VP. They would not happen in my one-year

term limit... If I really want to see these long-term projects happen... I'm going to run for president... Because there's still more to do. (Interview 1)

Many women came into the president position concerned about the constraints of time. Since their term as president was only a year, they expected to be challenged to fulfill all the promises they made during their campaign. In this regard, Maia stated, "As far as challenges, time... is one of our biggest ones. Realizing that we only have a year" (Interview 1). Similarly, Casey said, "We ran on a few things we want to get done. We know time is limited... it really does go by quickly" (Interview 1). In this same vein, Lilly stated,

I feel like one year is such a short time and I have so many things that I want to do... I'm wondering what I can actually get done in that time. It's just a lot of pressure... I want to accomplish a lot of things. (Interview 1)

As they began to approach the end of their tenure as president, many women still felt constrained by a finite amount of time. They continued to feel the responsibility and heightened pressure to accomplish their goals. Brooke S. felt she was running out of time in her tenure.

Since I am student body president, I feel like I have a responsibility... A year seems like so long, but now that I'm here, I'm like, man, I'm running out of time to do all these things I want to do for the campus. I feel I have a responsibility to check off the whole list. (Interview 2)

Alexis felt time was one of the biggest barriers to her presidency.

Time gets in the way, in terms of not having enough. I feel like there are a lot of things that I want to do, but my term is only a year, which seems like a really long time, but it's really not... I wish I had more time for sure... Towards the end, it gets harder and harder as time runs out. (Interview 3)

Many women described processes on their campuses that slowed them down. Kelly realized that it took a lot longer to make things happen on a university campus than she had originally anticipated.

As a senator, I would look at the executive group, and I would be thinking, why aren't you getting this done? But I don't think anybody realizes it until you're in the position because suddenly you realize, oh it does take three months to be able to have one thing change... Because a year sounds like a long time, but it's not a long time at all. Yeah, because you think that you can get so much done in the 12 months that you're in office, but it takes you two months to even get acclimated to what the heck you're supposed to be doing and then ten months to go in your school year, and it's hard to figure it all out... It's definitely been a reality check for figuring out how long it really does take to get stuff to happen. (Interview 3)

Similarly, Lauren discussed the slow pace of change in higher education.

We want to get as much done as we can. Obviously, there's the realization in the term of how long some of these projects take... This is higher education. And sometimes that's a little bit slower industry to make something happen. There's one project that we've been working on since May of last year and it may just start to come about in two weeks from now. We've been working on it every single week. It was something that I thought would be established in a month at this point last year. (Interview 3)

Margaret T. also felt the pressure of time, but described the confidence boost she experienced in being able to achieve some of her goals at certain points during her presidency.

I'd say that going in, there's always this kind of fear when it comes to initiatives because you're promising really big things. But, at the same time you're not entirely sure how

you're going to push this in just a time span of a year... that's really all you have...

You're trying to make the changes you promised the student body in literally less than a year... so you need to hit the ground running... Then when you're actually in it and... you hit those accomplishments... you kind of get to gauge whether or not you're going to get that done in a year... Now that I'm in the position, I feel much more confident because I know that I have accomplished some of the mile markers that I promised students and... I know exactly where we need to be, and I know the timeline. (Interview 2)

Some women thought about the legacies of their positions. Nicole tried to think about how she could prepare next year's student leaders to take on some of the work her administration had started.

We know that some of those [goals] are going to take more than a year... One of the things that I've been trying to do really well this year is documenting how things have gone with different events. What I wish I would have known before I went into them, what I've learned after them. And just making sure I keep thorough account of things, so that when I pass the position on to someone else, they can continue what we started. I think that's really important in the progress that we've made this year. (Interview 3)

Casey had the realization that she was not going to be able to complete everything she was working on due to the limits of time, but she hoped to come back to campus years from now and see the changes that she had started.

I'm thinking, wow, this is going to take a lot more than a year, and somebody else might have to lead the initiative that I set the groundwork for. And I feel like that's what has been, more than anything, is that certain things might not get done next year, might not

get done two years from now, but five to ten years from now, I'll be able to come back to my university and say, hey, I did that. I would say that time, you don't have enough of that. I didn't have enough of it. That was one of the things that I was fighting against.

(Interview 3)

Meredith knew time was going to pass quickly in her term, so like Nicole and Casey, found it helpful to think about how things could be carried on past her tenure.

Going into it, you know you have one year. So, that is definitely a challenge. But it's something that you know going into it. So... I kind of tapered by expectations going into it. I tried to do things, or start conversations that I knew could be carried on. Stuff that wasn't just that this administration would only ever see this, so things that could be bought into for generations to come. (Interview 3)

Along with feeling constrained by the limits of their one-year term, women were particularly aware of the time demands of the position on their daily lives. More than half of the women, especially the women serving at large institutions, described their president position as a 24/7 responsibility. Even though their student government bylaws or policies stated they were to work approximately 10-20 hours per week, many felt they worked well beyond those hours and often found themselves serving in the position at all hours of the day. Table 3 provides a glance at the number of hours each of the women typically committed to student government each week in comparison to the number of hours they were required to work based on their student government bylaws or policies. The women described continually carrying out duties as related to the position, such as attending meetings, responding to emails, meeting with students and administrators, writing up reports, being present at events on campus, and strategizing next steps to take in the position. Meredith explained the constant commitment. "It's a 24-hour job. It's

weekends, it's nights. Sometimes, I'll be answering emails at 3:00 a.m. just so I can get caught back up" (Interview 2). Others echoed Meredith's statement.

I'll go to class and then someone will ask me a question about something, or I will be home...and my friends will Snapchat me and it will turn into a business email. You're always on, you can't really turn it off. (Sonia, Interview 2)

I work 24/7... I could be in class, but this email [related to student government] just came in. I need to answer these questions for that person... So, I won't pay attention in class, and I'll do it. If I had homework, I'll push the homework off to the side... I'm always checking my phone. I'll go to the gym and I'll start running on the treadmill, but, oh, there's an email from the dean. Then, all of sudden, I'm walking on the treadmill and answering emails, or answering a text message. (Rose, Interview 3)

Along with describing the 24/7 commitment of the position, many women also recognized they had made a conscious choice that the presidency was going to be their priority. They knew this choice meant that they were going to make sacrifices in other areas of their lives to have the time to take on the responsibility the president position required. Margaret T. explained that prioritizing the presidency meant that it's challenging to maintain other aspects of life, such as keeping up with classwork, spending time with family and friends, getting enough sleep, and finding time for fun.

If your goal is to be a really good student body president, it's going to be very hard to balance those things and you're most likely going to end up prioritizing stuff with student government over other things. It's a really interesting balance because for student body presidents, sometimes you just need that break away... but you're always feeling like

there's no time for anything. If you're looking to be a good student body president, you're probably going to spend the majority of your time focusing on student government.

(Interview 2)

Table 3

Hours Worked by Participants in the Student Body President Role

Pseudonym	Institution Classification	Hours/Week According to SG Policies	Typical Hours/Week Worked
Alexis	Medium private	10	20+
Brooke S.	Large public	N/A*	20-25
Casey	Large public	5	25-30
Catalina	Small private	5	8-10
Diana	Large public	5	28-30
Emma	Large public	N/A*	17-20
Kelly	Large public	20	40+
Lauren	Large private	N/A*	30-40
Leslie K.	Large private	40	40+
Lilly	Medium public	15	25-30
Maia	Medium public	N/A*	15+
Margaret T.	Large public	20	40+
Meredith	Large public	N/A*	40+
Morrissey	Medium private	9	20-25+
Nicole	Medium public	20	25-30
Rose	Large public	20	30+
Ruth W.	Small private	N/A*	10
Sonia	Large public	20	40+
Tracy C.	Large public	20	30-40
Viktorija A.	Small private	N/A*	10-15

*Indicates that the woman's student government does not require a specific number of hours to be worked each week as president

Meredith concurred, “It really does force you... to cut a couple things out. There's just no way you can do everything” (Interview 2). Similarly, other women described their deliberate choice to prioritize the presidency knowing that would mean they would have less time for other activities.

It’s like you have decide what is important in your life. Student government definitely is a priority for me. I'm most passionate about it... It's definitely taken away from some things... I had to quit some other organizations because I just don't have time. I'm trying to do so much extra work in student government that it definitely takes away from some of the other things. (Morrissey, Interview 2).

I'm no longer as involved... as I was... And I think that was a distinctive choice I had to make when I decided to run for student body president. This role was going to be my first and foremost responsibility. (Leslie K., Interview 2)

Keeping up with their academic workload was particularly challenging for several of the women. Lilly knew she should put classwork first, but often did not because of the responsibilities of her president position.

Well I know school is supposed to come first, but it definitely doesn't... That happens for me when we have a meeting during my class... [I think] okay, can I go to class? Can I try and find someone else [to go to the meeting]? They say, “We have class, too.” Then we're comparing which classes we have, to see who should skip. I mean, I definitely have skipped class to do student government things. It's difficult. (Interview 2)

Some explained not being able to put as much time towards school work as they have in the past, or as compared to their peers. Lauren explained,

There have definitely been... [times] I haven't done as well as I would have liked because [I] don't have as much time as other students in the class to prepare for tests or to do four rounds of edits with a paper or whatever. That still is a big priority to me... doing well in my classes. Finding that time, even if it's late at night to devote to studying and waking up early to look over a few things before a test. Then going back to the [president] position, right after that test. (Interview 2)

Diana took less credits to better be able to focus on being a good president. “My presidency has been my number one priority this year. I took less classes... I have the responsibility to fulfil this duty and I want to do it to the best of my ability” (Interview 3). Several women also described the struggle of administrators forgetting they also had the responsibility of being a student, along with being student body president.

“It's an odd position to have, just because, I think a lot of people, students and faculty alike, forget that we are students... People [administrators] say, “Well we have this meeting that you need to be at,” and it's like, well I have class at that time. And a lot of times, people just don't regard that as being an important thing I guess, which is hard, just because... I'm trying get my degree, that's why I'm here, you know? And, so it's kind of hard to have that balance, between school, and work, and everything. (Kelly, Interview 2)

I think that sometimes it gets lost [that I'm still a student] ... Some people will talk to you and... treat me like I'm a professional staff member, and that I work here 40 hours a

week, and that's not the case. So, you have to do some reminding to people that, hey, I'm still a student and I have my GPA. (Emma, Interview 3)

I think... just a lack of understanding from both peers and administrators about the versatility of your role and the versatility of your life as a student... No one understand how this feels... I kind of expect a little bit more understanding in terms of how rigorous my schedule can be. But not getting that level of understanding from administrators I think has been frustrating. (Leslie K., Interview 3)

Similar to the sacrifices they had to make in relation to their academics, many women also described the sacrifices they have had to make in terms of sleep to keep up with the responsibilities of the presidency and other life duties. Emma stated, "There are a lot of nights of working until 2 a.m. and then waking up at 5 a.m." (Interview 2). Lauren found herself fortunate to be getting any sleep one particular week. "There are nights where I don't get too much sleep. This past week was one of those weeks where I was lucky to get three hours of sleep at night" (Interview 2). Similarly, Meredith said, "I probably don't sleep as much as I should" (Interview 2).

Despite some women recognizing they had a lack of sleep due to the demands of their presidency, there were a few women who specifically spoke about the concept of self-care and realized they needed to look out for their personal needs in order to be most effective as president.

It's kind of like self-care. I love my weekends to myself... It really allows me to get a head start on my projects and work for SG, and it also lets me see my friends that I don't

get to see all the time and go out with people, or even read a book by myself. So, I'm very, very possessive and territorial over my weekends. (Leslie K., Interview 2).

I always try to be home at a certain time during the week, or if I know that it's a busy week, I try to not schedule a ton of things... I always go to bed at a reasonable time, even if I'm catching up on reading and stuff like that... I just try my best to have enough self-care and have that constant. (Sonia, Interview 2)

While women were challenged with finding enough time for academic work and proper sleep, some also struggled to find time for relationships with family and friends because of the responsibilities of the presidency. Ruth W. thought the commitment to be president may have limited the time she was able to spend with people important to her.

It's actually had a really big impact, definitely. I don't spend enough time with my family and friends as I should, just because I do have a lot of other things going on, not just SG, but other things in my life, maybe SG now as president has put a larger strain on it. (Interview 2)

Casey felt similarly about the lack of time she had with family and friends due to the demands of the presidency.

I can say time with my family was definitely one of those things that I had to sacrifice, because I learned quickly that yes, you have your, you know, your day to day nonstop work where you have to go to your meetings and maybe meet with administrators, and then you have your social appearances some of which take place on the weekend. So, a block of that... I would have probably been with my family... Everyone pretty much

understood the position that I was in, but in retrospect, you know, that was definitely two things that my time was kind of sacrificed. Family time and friend time. (Interview 3)

Brooke S. knew being president put constraints on her time to spend with friends. “Taking up the SG [president] role... one of the things I lost the most is free time to hang out with friends” (Interview 2). For Meredith, it was a matter of figuring out her priorities and she knew that prioritizing the presidency may result in less time for relationships.

With the lack of free time I have, it really just forces you to look at what's important in your life. You know, obviously your friends are important, and working out is important, but it's like, what would you give up to do good in student government? (Interview 2)

A few women were challenged by the 24/7 responsibility of the position when they just needed some time away from the position while spending time with friends. Kelly described being out with friends and needing to take a break from talking about the position.

“It's been hard... A lot of times, people just view me as, [Kelly] as president, instead of just [Kelly]. So, that kind of makes it hard to separate myself... I was just at dinner with my friends the other day and they brought it up, and I said, “Can we not talk about this right now?” Just because, it's not something that I'm super interested in discussing at all times. So, I'd say it's been just difficult, just trying to manage that, and navigate that, because people are so interested in talking about it. And, I'm so interested in not talking about it all the time. (Interview 2)

Catalina dealt with a serious personal situation with her partner's family that required her to take time away from her role as president. She wondered if her gender had an impact on the expectation that she take time to step away from her position to provide family support.

I've been having to deal with supporting him [Catalina's partner] through that [family situation], and I think... being the woman in the relationship, I have more of that obligation to be there and be that support system for him. Rather than if it were the other way around, if there was a guy in my position, and his girlfriend was going through this, I think when it comes to things like that, women are just known to be stronger when it comes to the emotional things like that. And so, I feel like if the roles are reversed and it was a man serving in my role with his girlfriend, or fiancé dealing with these things, I don't think it would have played as much of an effect on him being a leader that it has for me. (Interview 2)

Although the women had to make many sacrifices in their lives, such as spending less time on academic work and relationships, to find the time to fulfill the 24/7 responsibilities of the presidency, overall, they were happy with their decision to prioritize the position. Tracy C.'s comments echoed the sentiments of many of the women. "My job is fun, and I would choose to do it on the weekends or after hours over almost anything else" (Interview 2). Lauren found her work as president to be rewarding.

Sometimes it kind of gets a hold of me where I'm like, oh man, this time demand is so intense... But overall, I would not trade it for anything. And I believe that the sacrifices that I've had to make with friends, or even when some homework assignment is not being as great as it could have been... it has been so rewarding in the long run. (Interview 3)

The women chose to prioritize the presidency not only because they enjoyed the role, but also because the work mattered to them. Catalina stated, "I want this so bad... It's not going to matter... that I miss one party isn't going to matter five years down the road. This, what I'm doing now as president, is" (Interview 2).

The women in this study made a conscious choice to prioritize the responsibilities of the presidency. Although many felt constrained by their one-year term limit, they remained committed to their student government work, as well as what they felt was a tremendous responsibility to meet the needs of their constituents. Along with feeling the constraints of their short term in office, women were also challenged by the time demands of the office. Because the women prioritized the presidency, the responsibilities of the role affected their time spent on class work, sleep, and relationships. Yet, the women understood these sacrifices and made them willingly knowing that they had a greater responsibility to the student body president position.

She Leads Focusing on People and Making Things Better

The second theme that emerged from the findings was the values the women espoused in their leadership throughout their student body presidency. Within this theme, two sub themes emerged: (a) prioritizing people and relationships and (b) enacting change.

Prioritizing People and Relationships

When discussing their styles of leadership, all women spoke about the importance of prioritizing people and relationships. They discussed how they sought to engage and empower those around them in their regular work as student body presidents. They also were proud of the relationships they were able to establish through their leadership role. The language the women used indicated their natural inclination was to lead in ways that prioritized the people around them. It was evident through the way they described their leadership and what they valued in their roles as leaders. Many of the leadership behaviors described by the women were consistent with the practices of transformational leadership, which seeks to create positive change in followers while working towards the end goal of developing people into leaders (Burns, 1978).

Many women discussed the importance of engaging others in the process of leadership. They valued the input and feedback from people around them and worked intentionally to insure people felt their voices were included and appreciated. Several women, like Nicole, solicited ideas from people. “I’ll go and talk to people, I’ll ask other people for their ideas. I don’t like just having ideas and not getting feedback, or like sitting with them and just having them be in my head” (Interview 1). Similarly, Meredith wanted to hear what students were thinking and felt her administration did a good job of that this year based on feedback she received from two students.

Throughout this year, we’ve done probably a better job than other SGAs have of actually reaching out to students. I was at the bar that one night, and I saw those two girls that came and sat down, and we talked about everything. And they said, “One thing that we like about you is that we know that we can be straight with you.” And I said, “What does that even mean?” And they said, “We can talk to you about things, we know we can reason with you and you actually listen to us...” For them to say that, that makes me think that they’re not the only people, because I didn’t even know who they were. And so that goes to show me that we’re probably doing a pretty good job of getting students to like us, and us tackling issues and talking about the things that students actually care about. (Interview 3)

Lauren strived to demonstrate to her constituents how she cared about them and their needs.

One of the skills [I’ve grown] would be ... just being able to connect with other students who may be so different... Going out of my way to just connect with student leaders and other students who may be more disenfranchised from the university. Truly setting up those relationships and showing that I do care, even outside of my position as student body president. (Lauren, Interview 3)

Brooke S. also wanted to demonstrate care for her constituents. She found it important that her administration was accessible and approachable, and communicated this through the symbol of an open window.

I like my [student government office] door closed, but I leave my window open. And I always joke... that even though my door is always closed that my window is open, so I have an open window policy. So, if you see my window open, I'm good. (Interview 3)

Similarly, Nicole explained:

We really make sure that students feel like they can come to us and voice their opinions and feel comfortable doing so... We have a main shared office space and then we have two offices in the back for the president and vice president to have their private offices. And I think last year, they [previous president and vice president] spent a lot of time in their offices with the door shut. They weren't really super approachable, but I prefer to spend my time in the office just out in the shared office space, so I think that, that's part of seeming more approachable. (Interview 3)

Many worked to involve others in decision-making. Sonia discussed her consistent practice of soliciting feedback from those around her when making decisions, as well as being authentic in those interactions.

With every decision... I always try to check in with my peers... check in with other student senators, and say, hey, does this make sense to you, or am I missing something? And I always try and validate everyone's feelings, because you should, and I think that even though you're supposed to be professional with everyone, that it stands to show a little bit of emotion and a little bit of your personality in there, even as a student leader. (Interview 2)

Meredith felt she was more contemplative in her decision-making and liked to involve others, while a male colleague in student government made quick decisions on his own.

One guy [SG colleague] ... takes a very, it's my decision, my decision, this is it, done.

I'm more, okay, well I need to talk to this person, this person, let me get their input, and I need to make sure each group feels represented and it's all the same... He just knew he made the right decision, he was done with it, and he said, "Okay, black, white, it's done."

For me, I definitely, I think things through a little bit more. I'm a little bit more strategic, and I'm more thoughtful... It's more black and white [for men] than I think for me, and they don't second guess themselves really. (Interview 2)

Like Meredith, several women brought up how they thought their gender may impact the ways they prioritize people in their leadership, but this concept will be discussed in more detail in a later subtheme entitled Gender Dynamics. Relevant to the current subtheme, some women felt their gender had an impact on the ways they prioritized people in making sure people felt their voices were heard by giving them space to participate.

I allow other people to be in the spotlight and take the lead. My first instinct is to always give attention to other people and listen, rather than be the first person to speak, which is complete opposite of the male president last year. My voice doesn't need to take up all the space in the room. I definitely have learned how to let other people speak first and let other people feel out what they want to say and what they want to do before I immediately start talking and filling in all the sentences and giving all the answers.

(Emma, Interview 1)

Maybe it's because I'm a woman, maybe it's because I'm a woman of color, but I definitely... know what it's like to feel ignored in a room and feel as though you're not being heard or feel as though you're only there to fill space or fill a very typecast role. So, I try to make sure that everyone in my cabinet doesn't feel that way... I try to compensate on that end and I think that aids me in being a leader that is able to listen to a lot of people. (Leslie K., Interview 1)

Along with soliciting feedback and engaging others in decision-making, many women worked to empower those around them through training and getting to know people on an individual level. They strived to impart some knowledge and provide the tools to their members to develop them into leaders. Tracy C. made a conscious effort going into her term to properly train the four vice presidents who reported to her, so they were empowered to do their jobs. She found that empowering her staff relieved some of the pressure of her own job.

I think it really made a world of difference to my role as being president because it's made it ten times easier. When you employ the people... with the knowledge and the ability to manage their teams, it makes it ten times easier... I trained those four vice presidents to know what to do and they kind of handle the rest... It's just been above and beyond what I anticipated. (Interview 2)

Ruth W. was concerned that students were not trained coming into student government, so worked with her advisor and executive team to build training to empower them to do their jobs.

There was no training procedure whatsoever when I came in, and that was a big problem because we had all these student representatives, but they had no idea what they were doing... Everyone's being really shy because they didn't know what to say, or if they were doing it right, or what they could actually vote on. I actually worked with my

advisor and my executive team and we did training... and we'll keep doing that every year from now on... We... set up an outline of how we're going to do it... It was really successful, definitely... now, we're not throwing them into it blind..., and we're thinking about things a bit more long-term. (Interview 3)

Some women worked to learn more about the people around them as individuals to best engage them in leadership. Recognizing the unique needs and traits of their team members helped them to utilize different strategies based on the individual, rather than assuming everyone could be developed in the same way. Catalina described utilizing some time at the beginning of her tenure as president to learn more about the skills and abilities of her team.

I've tried to take a step back and be more of an observer, and a listener, and a helper, and try to guide people in the right direction. And so, I definitely see... how people are different in their leadership abilities. (Interview 2)

Similarly, Tracy C. worked to identify the different styles of her team members and then tried out different strategies working with them.

I have been able to try different techniques. And really the best part has been learning different management styles based on the person you're managing, which is really difficult... I have four different people that I really have to invest time into and understand what works best for them. (Interview 2)

Casey prioritized learning about the work styles of those around her and what motivated them, so she would be best suited to engage them.

I like to learn about the people around me... I like to know who I'm working with on a personal level, so I know how to conduct myself around them. I might know that [student A] can take on a lot of tasks. He's going to get it done and just tell me he is

going to get done. But [student B] might not be able to do that. I might have to give him one task at one time and then come back when he gets done and say, “Okay, this is done? Great!” ... I know what people around me like intrinsic rewards and those who like extrinsic awards. I like to make sure that everyone feels as though they are welcomed, and they are recognized, and that they feel like they're working towards something.

(Interview 1)

Leslie K. thought about the specific skill sets of those around her and strategized how she could empower people by focusing on their strengths. She described empowering a young man who she knew had potential.

I've seen him since he... stepped into the senate chambers for the first time. He was always the kind of kid that was super quiet, but wanted to be involved, didn't really know how to, and I would always think... [he] has so much potential. I can see him really growing here... When I ran for VP, I knew he was really interested in finance, so I asked, do you want to be my campaign treasurer? ... And he was so thankful, and he did it. (Interview 1)

Several women described how they sought out ways to develop followers into leaders. They appreciated people encouraging them when they were younger, so tried to do the same with other students on campus. The women would provide them leadership opportunities in their student government administration and encourage them to believe in themselves as leaders.

When administrators need students they come to me, and I try not to go to the students that already have lots of things on their resume. I always try to get students that have leadership potential, maybe sophomores... Just so they can be more prepared and get a

look at what they are going to have to be doing on committees... I try to take younger students under my wing because I know that I was like them. (Brooke S., Interview 3)

I would have liked to experience the executive side of SG when I was a little bit younger in it, and I think that would have prepared me a little bit more for what I was going to do... So, I definitely recognized that when I was choosing my cabinet and I put three sophomores on my cabinet, and my chief of staff is actually a sophomore... You know, just having someone to believe in them... I'm just very encouraging... I end up telling them my journey, and how I got here and encouraging them... If there's something that you want to do, and you feel like you can do it, then do that. (Casey, Interview 3)

Catalina felt similarly and worked continually to develop the people around here, as she had been lucky to benefit from that mentorship from others. She found it important to prioritize people in her leadership.

A lot of the reason why I try to get back and mentor people, and be in these roles where I'm being an influence to people, it's because I have so many people in that role for me. And while I may never be able to see them again and thank them... I know I'll be able to instill that in someone else, and that's even more than giving them a thanks. Nothing in this world can be done by yourself... I feel like in terms of leadership, you have to think of people first because whatever you're doing, whether it be the leader of a business, or a sorority, or an organization like SG, it's not going to work if you don't have the people, and they're not happy, and if they don't feel like they're valued. They need to be as much a part of this process that you are as a leader. (Interview 3)

Emma realized she had a talent for developing students into leaders through her work in student government.

I'm good at helping other students realize their own leadership skills, and the possibilities and the opportunities that they have, and being able to help folks in that way. Just because of my own journey and where I've come and what I've learned. I think that I can help other students by being able to tell them about what I've been through and how I've gotten to the place that I have. And then inspiring other people continue to know that they have the ability to do these great things and they can too, even if they don't necessarily think that they are, or they're ready, or you know, all the reasons that people give up and stuff. I think that I'm good at bringing out the best in people and I think I learned that from being a part of [student government]. (Interview 3)

Along with prioritizing their fellow students in their presidency, many women also found it was important to prioritize another group of people on their campus: administrators.

They described the importance of creating strong relationships with administrators. Getting to know these administrators on a more personal level helped them to be more effective presidents. Meredith described the importance of building personal relationships with administrators to her role as president.

When the relationship is a little more than just professional, it sort of helps you because they have a better understanding of your thought process, where you're coming from. And so, the more I get to know someone... it definitely helps, because they know what I stand for, and they know that I have good intentions, and they know why I'm doing what I'm doing. And why I'm asking for these things to be done. (Interview 3)

Similarly, Kelly found her personal relationships with administrators helped her to be a more productive president.

I've developed a lot of relationships with the members of the president's executive team... I think that really helped with developing those relationships to be able to get things done later in the year because we could understand where they came from, and how they came into this position, and that kind of stuff, which really helped when I needed something done about parking, I could go to them and say hey, "Let's get this done." And it was a little bit easier because I knew the person, instead of just going into them and not knowing who they were, which was really good. (Interview 3)

Rose also found it important to get to know administrators personally. She found she used a different approach than the previous male student body president when it came to relationships with administrators.

The male president, last year, doing stuff, it was a different direction [than me]. Him talking to administrators, and to the trustees that we meet. I've always had more of a friendly relationship. "How's your family? How's this? Hi. How was your break?" But he was more, he was always about business. (Interview 3)

Lauren felt the biggest accomplishment of her presidency was the relationships she was able to establish with new high-level administrators at her institution.

I would say that my most successful component of my presidency has just been establishing relationships with our new leadership within the university. That was one thing that really motivated me to run in the first place. So, we had a new president come on... One of our biggest focuses was creating a relationship and showing that there was

trust between university administration, especially in light of what has gone on over the past two years... [and] student government. (Interview 3)

When reflecting on their leadership styles, it became clear than the women found numerous ways to prioritize people and relationships throughout their presidency. They found ways to engage those around them by involving them in decision-making and soliciting their feedback. They empowered those around them through training, getting to know them on an individual level, and developing followers as leaders. Many women also prioritized establishing personal relationships with administrators on campus. Brooke S. provided a statement that summed up her reason for leadership, but also represented the thoughts of many of the other women.

I'm really able to think about the overall why of why I am in leadership. And it's really people. It's about helping people... I will seek leadership positions because of the why... I'm really focused on my purpose in this world of helping people. (Interview 3)

As the women explored their reasons for seeking out leadership positions where they were able to prioritize people, the next subtheme of enacting change emerged.

Enacting Change

When describing why they were motivated to seek out leadership positions, nearly all the women expressed a desire to enact positive change in their communities. They also continued to discuss the concept of affecting change throughout their interviews as a critical value of who they were as leaders. The women sought out opportunities to make things better for those around them, as well as attempted to make a positive impact on the world. In describing their inclination to enact change, they also described themselves as hard workers with strong work

ethic. They considered themselves to be quite action-oriented and were proud of the outcomes of their hard work and persistence when it resulted in positive change for their campus.

Nearly all the women expressed a desire to enact change through leadership. They thought about their leadership in term of what types of positive change they could create on campus, as well as in the greater world. Catalina considered herself change-oriented.

I'm big on change. You know, if things aren't working and we can make them better, then let's do it... I want to be that person that really sets the tone for the group and is a role model and really paves the way to create change on campus and gets the students involved in that change. I'm someone who just wants to be in a position to help people and make the world a little bit better. (Interview 1)

Kelly felt pride from being able to see change on campus.

When I go to a meeting and I want something to change and it ends up happening, that feels really good. Seeing something actually get accomplished. I like that a lot... Or when I have something that I really want to see changed and it actually ends up changing, that feels really good. (Interview 2)

Similarly, Brooke S. felt serving in leadership positions was a way for her to affect change. "I think that running for office is the way that I can help change the world, maybe not the world, but my community (Interview 1). Viktoria A. found that making a positive impact on the world was a significant priority to her. "I realized that... helping better the world and things like that are really important to me in leadership" (Interview 1). Like many of the women, Margaret T. was specifically interested in leadership positions that could create change, rather than holding leadership positions just for the title of it.

I've always been a person that is attracted to leadership positions that bring positive change. The leadership position that would bring some kind of positive change, or I see that I can bring some kind of positive change in that leadership position. That's something that's very attractive to me. But just purely, do you just want a leadership position kind of thing is not really on my radar. But something that can bring positive change to something, then I'm very interested. (Interview 1)

Emma thought all her hard work was worth it when she was able to see the change that was being made. "I really, really... loved being able to make a difference... If you look back and look at the work that you're doing and the change that you're making, it's undeniably worth it" (Interview 1). Leslie K. explained that one of her proudest accomplishments as president was finding ways to successfully communicate the changes student government was enacting for the student body during her term.

I mean at the end of the day, our success, and the faith that the student body puts in our ability to create change on campus, comes down to what they see us doing. They're not going to believe in the fact that we're a body that can solve, from the smallest problem over a class dispute, all the way to creating institutional change by advocating for more resources for survivors of sexual assault. They're not going to believe in that if they don't know that we've done so much, and we have a history of continuing to fight for them. (Interview 3)

To make this positive change, the women understood the importance of being hard working and action-oriented. Leslie K. explained that she does not like to complain about problems and instead focuses on what she can do.

You just have to want to make people's lives better... I've always been a very action-oriented person, to the point where it's annoying to a lot of my friends. I don't really like complaining. I'm just like, okay, but what are you going to do about it? (Interview 1)

Many of the women described their strong work ethic and persistence, which they felt were some of their strongest leadership traits. Margaret T. discussed her strengths as a leader.

I think one of my strengths is that if I promise something, that's going to happen. No matter how late I have to stay at the office, no matter how hard I have to work, how many meetings I have to book, how many classes I might miss. If I promise it, it's going to happen. So, I think that I'd say that would be one of my strengths is that my work ethic is high. (Interview 1)

Likewise, Lauren felt she was a hard worker. “What I see in myself is the ability to give 110%. To go beyond what is expected of me... You're just doing it out of a willingness to give your all in whatever you do (Interview 1). Maia described her ability to persist in her work as a great asset.

You have to be able to just keep going and push for what you want, even when you're getting that push-back from whoever is involved. So, being persistent and being able to just drive and find the support and keep going, even though sometimes you'll feel defeated. (Interview 1)

Several women said that a motivating factor for them continually working hard and persisting was their desire to make things happen. They were action-oriented. Ruth W. stated, “Well, for me, I mean, I love it because I, I don't know, I really like to get things done” (Interview 2). In a similar vein, Morrissey explained:

I like when you just do stuff and take control of something to just make it happen... I'm maneuvering things around and making phone calls and trying to get our platform ideas into reality. Things like that, times where you are taking the reins. (Morrissey, Interview 2)

Numerous women described their most memorable moments in the presidency as being times they were able to see the change that resulted because of their hard work. For example, Margaret T. stated:

Recently we actually got four new full-time employees approved for [the mental health office on campus], which increases our ratio to one to 2000-something now and so that's really, really improved, and I think that was my most memorable moment... I was incredibly happy, felt like all the hard work that we had put in had finally produced some kind of result. It's still not where we need it to be and so we're still working towards getting it to where we need to be. But, at least that we're there, we're showing improvement. (Interview 2)

Overall, most women described themselves as change and action-oriented. They were the student leaders on campus who consistently stepped up and made things happen. They found enjoyment in being able to enact positive change on their campus community, as well as make the world a little better. They considered themselves to be hard working and persistent and to have strong work ethic. Many described the pride they felt when they experienced some of the successes of their hard work.

She Must Navigate the Contextual Factors of Gender and the Environment

The next theme that emerged from the findings was the context in which women had to navigate as student body presidents on their respective campuses. Within this theme, two

subthemes emerged: (a) navigating gender dynamics and (b) dealing with a tense national climate.

Navigating Gender Dynamics

When discussing gender and its potential impact on the presidency, many of the participants felt that gender dynamics were in play. For most, it was not common for women to be serving in the student body president position at their institution. It was especially unusual on several campuses for women to be running for student body president on a dual female ticket. Regarding gender and leadership in the student body presidency, nearly everyone was quick to point out that they felt they had the same capabilities of men in leadership positions. Yet, they did feel they had to deal with some situations that their male peers would likely not face, such as the perceived gender role incongruity and the double bind. Many also found that men and women often had different leadership styles on campus.

For most participants, women student body presidents were not typical at their institutions. Table 4 provides a history of women in the student body president role at each participant's institution. Only three women reported that women commonly served as president. Several women described being the first woman president in the past decade; and a few were one of only a handful of women to have served in their student government's history of 100 years. Some described being the only woman to run in their student body president elections. Diana stated, "I was the only woman running among six different candidates" (Interview 1). Catalina ran against a male opponent and found the opposing campaign tried to frame being male as their advantage. "Some of the people that were obviously rooting for my [male] opponent... tried to use that to their advantage saying, 'do you really want girls' " (Interview 1). Margaret T. ran

against three male opponents in her student body president election and described the challenge of being one of the only women student body presidents at her university.

Being the first [woman] student body president in 13 years was also challenging because... I didn't have anyone to look up to. Is running a campaign different when it comes to gender? Do I need to dress more conservatively? Those decisions were going through my head. I remember consulting several people during the election about who I should choose as vice president. They said a female-female ticket is never going to win. They literally told me that, and I said, "No, I think I can do it." (Interview 2)

Similar to Margaret T., other women found that a dual female ticket was an unusual occurrence for their campus and they were proud to run with a woman vice president. Morrissey ran on a dual female ticket the first time she ran for student body president and found it was not the norm. "My junior year I ran with another girl, so it was a two-girl ticket, which was pretty ballsy, and we were the only ones (Interview 1). Two women running on the same ticket was also unusual at Catalina's institution. "We ran on a dual female ticket. That was something that hasn't really been the trend before... This was something that really helped us stand out" (Interview 1). Leslie K. found her vice president and she were the first at her institution to run on a dual female ticket, as well as the first women of color to do it together. "I had done my research... Two women had never run together. There had never been an all-female ticket ever" (Interview 1). Meredith ran against a dual female ticket in her presidential election and was disappointed to hear students on campus saying that a dual female ticket would never win.

It became two females and I didn't think much of it, but then people started saying things to me like, "They'll never win. Even though it's wrong, they'll never win because they are two women." And I just thought, huh, that's kind of rough. (Interview 1)

Alexis did not run on a ticket with another woman, but she was happy to be running against a female opponent, which was also unusual on her campus. “There was a lot of focus on how it was two women running for the position and kind of what a big deal that was” (Interview 1). Kelly was also happy to be running against another woman as it meant whoever won would be a woman. “The other person who was running was also a female, which was cool, because no matter who won, it was going to be a female who was in charge” (Interview 1).

Table 4

History of Women in the Student Body President Role

Pseudonym	Institution Classification	Status of Women in Student Body President Role as Reported by Participants
Alexis	Medium private	First woman of color to be elected as president
Brooke S.	Large public	Third woman president and second African American president since the 1970s
Casey	Large public	Eighth woman president in 50 years and first African American president
Catalina	Small private	First woman president in the past 7-10 years
Diana	Large public	First woman president in 3 years; although women have served previously, the position has been predominantly held by men
Emma	Large public	One of the first African American woman presidents; although women have served previously, the position has been predominantly held by White men
Kelly	Large public	First woman president in the past 8-10 years
Lauren	Large private	Fourth woman president in more than 100 years
Leslie K.	Large private	First woman president in the past 10 years and the first all-woman ticket to run
Lilly	Medium public	Approximately the fourth woman president in almost 100 years

Table 1 (continued).

Maia	Medium public	First woman president in three years; history is unknown prior
Margaret T.	Large public	First woman president in the past 13 years
Meredith	Large public	Eighth woman president in almost 100 years
Morrissey	Medium private	One of many women to serve as president
Nicole	Medium public	First all-woman ticket and first all-woman minority ticket to win; although women have served previously, the position has been predominantly held by men
Rose	Large public	Second woman president in the past 10 years
Ruth W.	Small private	First woman president in the past 7 years
Sonia	Large public	Eighth woman president in almost 100 years and first Latina president
Tracy C.	Large public	Sixth woman in a row to serve as president
Viktorija A.	Small private	One of many women to serve as president

While serving as student body president, most women described instances of experiencing the double bind. No matter how well the women performed as leaders, they still had to analyze many of their actions because they were often evaluated against a masculine standard of leadership. Women explained wanting to not be perceived as too soft, and therefore weak, while also not wanting to be perceived as too strong, and therefore bossy or bitchy. Women described their intention to attempt to strike that balance.

People obviously say things like “She's too aggressive, she's too this...” and if you're too aggressive, you might be too, for lack of a better word, bitchy, right? And then that's also a concern. Or, “She's too soft, she doesn't know how to say no.” Or whatever. It's

showing the student body that I'm not too aggressive, but I'm aggressive enough to say no and stand up for what's right. (Margaret T., Interview 1)

I think all women are always thinking about how they come off to others when they're in a position of power. It's definitely in my head. I say it all the time. I don't want to come off as naggy or bitchy. I want to come off as just a regular peer. And it's always true what they say, when a man does it, it's successful, but when a woman does it, it's bitching. I mean, that's always in my head, making sure that I'm in command of the room without coming off as too naggy or whatever, but also being strong. (Morrissey, Interview 3)

Even with communicating with people... with my other colleagues in student government. I feel as though I should be able to just be like, this needs to be done. I always have to ask myself, if I was a guy, I would totally be comfortable doing that. But I have to phrase it in like, "Hey, this is great, but if you could add this here." I'm trying to get out of that, but there's always that concept for, you know, pardon my French, you're just worried about always seeming bitchy. Or bossy... It's just so old now.

(Leslie K., Interview 1)

Nicole discussed being strategic in the way she worded things as a woman. "I feel like men can be more aggressive and it's more acceptable when they're in leadership roles, but with women, you really have to word what you say really carefully, or it can be misconstrued" (Interview 1).

Meredith described thinking intentionally about the way she worded things in email.

I think I'm very cognizant... I try not to use three exclamation points. I don't say, "I just wanted to check in." I say, "I wanted to check in." And I catch myself going back and correcting some of those things. And then also, I catch myself thinking, if this were [a male colleague], how would he be doing this? (Interview 3)

There were specific experiences the women recounted, which highlighted the double bind they experienced in the role as president. Margaret T. described a time when she was participating in a campaign debate running for student body president.

During the debate I would get feedback from my team during the water breaks and there was one section I remember coming off the stage and they were going, "You're too aggressive." And then there was another section where I'm getting off the stage and they were saying, "Okay, this was okay, you were a little soft." And there's never that perfect balance. I remember that being a very stressful situation, being on the stage with three other men, and trying to tiptoe that line of what a woman has to come off as to be liked and respected by the crowds. (Interview 1)

Morrissey discussed the difference between holding her team members accountable versus her male vice president holding them accountable.

I feel like a lot of people, unfortunately, resonate more with male leaders... Can you believe that a majority of senators were scared of me? I was just like, why? ... Because I confront people, even if it's just a simple email saying, "Hey, I heard you do this. Please, going forward, let's not try to do that," and then I'll put a smiley face. People still think, "Oh, that was a mean email." But then when [my male vice president] does it, they say, "Oh, it's really cool. [male vice president's] fine. He's so chill." (Interview 2)

Lauren described being strategic in the way she approached people, as compared to men.

I know that one thing that I have to be careful about... If I think a decision needs to be made, I am not exactly the softest in my response, which is typical for men. They can kind of be harsh and be polite, but for women, we're kind expected to be a little bit nicer in our approach, a little bit kinder, even if we are trying to make the same decisions. So, I take that into account with my interactions... I have to be very strategic about how I say something because I don't want to be portrayed in a certain way. I still want to be kind of nurturing, I guess in a way, to those to see a role model in me... There is a stigma associated with females maybe addressing conflict in some ways, addressing challenges. (Interview 2)

One woman, Kelly, discussed working intentionally to temper her emotions in her role as president, as she was concerned her emotions would be interpreted as weakness.

I usually let my emotions be seen. And I've worked on it a lot this year. But last year was really, really hard for me in SGA, I cried every once in a while, because it was really terrible, and it took a really big toll on me. So, because of that, I was seen as weak, which is frustrating because a man could be upset, and maybe he doesn't cry, but people respect him for it, but as a woman if you cry, oh, that's three strikes and you're out. So, I'd say it's been difficult to be able to navigate because you do want to come off strong, but you don't want to come off as a bitch. I do consciously make an effort to really strike that balance, and figure out the best route to take, and not come across bad. It's hard.

(Interview 3)

Brooke S. described the internal dialogue she has in her head about being perceived as too aggressive or too weak, especially as a woman of color.

When it comes to being aggressive, I've actually had to have conversations with people using that word with me, or with other females in organizations saying, "Don't use the word aggressive. What is about us that you feel is aggressive?" And especially, the conversations that I have had with that word are with women of color. I feel like we always get the word aggressive, when we are really just talking about something that is important. And we're madder than you are because it affects us in different ways than it affects you. And so, I have to battle. I have to think, am I being aggressive? No, you're not being aggressive. Are you being too emotional? No, you're not being too emotional. And I wonder, I don't think that some of my male counterparts have to deal with that, just from the conversations that I have had, they don't... Sometimes I don't mind looking too aggressive because I just really don't care. If I feel this type of way about this, I'm going to say it. But weakness... I don't like to look weak, and so sometimes I'm just thinking that in my head, am I being weak here? Are people going to think that they can walk over me because I am a woman? So, I think I have to be stronger. I have to be more aggressive because I don't want to look weak... I'm a woman and a woman of color, and so they already expect you to be a certain way, so those are battles that I need to deal with inside myself. (Interview 3)

In addition to experiencing the double bind in their role as president, some women also described other instances of their gender having an impact on their experience. Several women had experiences when their male vice president was perceived to be the president. Rose said, "When we announced that we were running, everyone just assumed I was the vice president and he was the president" (Interview 1). Similarly, Morrissey stated, "Sometimes if we walk into a room before anyone hears us speak, they might assume [male vice president] is the point of

contact, and he's not" (Interview 2). Diana was also assumed not to be president. "If you have a meeting, you walk in the room. People are like, 'Oh hi, who are you? Vice President? Secretary?'" (Interview 1). She later described a faculty meeting she attended where the assumption was made that the president was a man.

In a meeting in faculty senate, my executive assistant was there to give my report, and someone had said, "Well, where is the president. Where is he?" I just thought that was really rude saying, "Where is he?" So, my assistant said, "It's a she." And everyone was quiet, and then the meeting awkwardly went on. And it got back to me, and I just found it a little upsetting. (Interview 3)

Kelly had similar experiences.

When I have meetings and my vice president goes. He's a male. People will always shake his hand and then they'll still either ignore me, or they won't shake my hand at all, or they'll shake my hand really timidly. That's always annoying. (Interview 1)

Leslie K. asked a male to run as her vice president and when he said no, she thought it may have had to do with her gender.

I had asked him to run with me and it was so interesting, because I never want to be that person to think gender played a role, but I genuinely think it did, because it was just so clear... I just felt as though, had I been a man asking another man to run with me, it would have been a yes, versus, and that's what was said to me, "I think I can do a better job than you." And this was someone younger than me, someone with less experience.

(Interview 1)

A few women described experiences they do not think a male would have had to experience in their same position.

At the beginning of the year, we had our annual convocation and...we had to do a little [SG] speech update. Everything was great. I remember getting off stage and someone said, “[Casey], you did so well. Your voice was so stern. It wasn't squeaky or shrill at all.” I was just kind of thinking, hmmm... What if that had been said to a male in the position? Was my voice expected to be squeaky or shrill or anything like that? (Casey, Interview 1)

When I meet some older members of the community, whether they be trustees or board of visitors... some older gentleman that I'll meet will say, “Wow, you're such a polished, classy young lady.” Or something like that. And I'm like, are you just saying that because I'm a girl, or would you say that to a guy too? People tell me a lot that I'm well-spoken and that I have a great presence about me. And a part of me wonders is that because I'm wearing this nice dress and these cute shoes? ... Or is it because you really think I'm a great leader. (Catalina, Interview 2)

Literally the campus newspaper, the second day, had asked a question after winning [the presidential election], which I don't think they've asked any other male candidates. Just saying, “Oh there's a lot of rumors about how you, sorry I have to ask this, but there's a lot of rumors about how you may have rigged the election.” Which is almost impossible. It's almost like, it's kind of like telling you, “Oh, we didn't believe you could win.” (Margaret T., Interview 2)

Some women also described situations that may be different if they were a man in the president position.

I sat at a lunch and it was older men, and they were making jokes about getting presents for their wives. They wished that there was just some online website that they could go into and they could just put in their wife's sizes and favorite brands and preferences that would just turn into gifts. I think they thought that was very funny, I didn't think it was very funny. I thought, oh if there had been another male student here, he probably would have thought that was funny, I guess that's why they thought that would have been cool. (Meredith, Interview 2)

Last year, [the male student body president] wanted to get to know all the trustees, and I'll probably do the same thing. We can meet with them and talk to them about what they do for business... If you're a trustee, you're usually very successful. He wanted to meet them... so, he asked to go to lunch with a trustee, and the trustee asked him out to a cigar bar... So, they went to a cigar bar. I don't think that that trustee would ever ask me to go to a cigar bar. Also, I don't think I would go. (Rose, Interview 1)

Leslie K. was frustrated that women are not seen as strategic decision makers as compared to men.

I think we got to the point in our organization where women are finally being seen as capable leaders and individuals, and frankly, women who can run shit. But I don't think we're still being viewed as strategic figures. I don't think we're still being viewed as someone who can make a strategy decision at a committee meeting... I think there is such a dichotomy in the way that... their leadership is interpreted, where... the conscientious of women in their role is, I think, often being interpreted as, "Oh, she's just operational and... She's very organized... She has it altogether." It's like right, but we should also be valuing women for their ability to negotiate on decisions that need to be

made. I do think that women are viewed differently that way, in terms of what they're complimented on. I don't think men are complimented on their organizational skills. I think men are complimented on their ability to negotiate in meetings, where women never get that credit even if they say the exact same thing with the exact same mannerism. (Interview 2)

A few women felt they were not taken as seriously being a woman in the student body president position.

Even though women have been in that position before, I think it's still something that intimidates people. Even females... I think subconsciously we internalize a lot of male misogyny in a lot of ways... I still feel a little bit of ... not quite as taken ... just treated and taken as seriously as like, a male would be, in those types of positions... And, so it's very subtle, but I do think that those are going to be things that come up. (Viktoria A., Interview 1)

I think it's hard to be taken seriously. I obviously take this position very seriously, but there are things that the previous [male] president would have done that people would have just been like, "Okay," and followed him, and I even myself saw him as very much... someone who is clearly above me. But I don't think that people see me as that... I don't think that people would ever look at me the way that they looked at him. (Alexis, Interview 1)

While some of the gendered experiences were negative for the women, they also described some positive experiences they had that they attributed to gender. Although several

women felt they were not taken as seriously in the president role because they were a woman, a few felt they were absolutely taken seriously.

It [being a woman] totally helps me. I totally feel like I'm able to connect. People are more gracious with me, as a woman. Especially with female administrators. It's more super casual and it's just a very easygoing conversation. I was talking to the previous [male] president about this recently and I have a better relationship at this point with our advisor, who's a female, than he did throughout the course of a year, and I think it's because she just feels more comfortable around me and is willing to be more open with me about certain university policies that she wasn't with a male president. So, I feel bad complaining about it, because I don't think it's hurting me... You have to question whether you're being taken just as seriously, and I haven't felt that that's not the case. I think I'm taken pretty seriously, but I think it's kind of helped me. (Leslie K., Interview 1)

At all of these meetings that I'm going to, all of our administrators... I'm the only woman in the room. But... I've never felt that I've been not taken seriously or dismissed at all. I think that when I sit in those meetings, I think the administrators are excellent about valuing my opinion equally... I think that they all value my opinion just as equally as if it was a man in my position. (Ruth W., Interview 1)

Others felt their university had high expectations for a woman in office. Lauren explained that her university had not elected a woman student body president in quite some time, so the university was happy about the change.

She was the first student body president in 20 years that was a female... so whenever [the previous female student body president] was elected, a lot of people turned to her and said, “Wow, here we have a woman, now we're going to get stuff done.” A lot of people had that same mindset for me. (Interview 1)

Emma also found her campus to be happy a woman was serving in office.

When students find out there is a female student body president, I haven't had any type of negative, or even people being shocked. I have had a lot of people who say congratulations. Definitely not expecting it, but I have also had a lot of students come up to me and say, “I didn't realize I could be president” ... I'm pretty much exactly the opposite of what you would expect to be student body president. I'm an African American woman who is a [non-political science] major... So, I guess I have been an inspiration to some people. (Interview 2)

Maia said that women were taking over on her campus.

Majority of my board, surprisingly, is actually women. As of right now, we only have one male on our board. So, women are taking over. It's just the reality. We have women active in multiple departments on campus, leadership positions, and positions of power that we normally would not have... It's a great thing. (Interview 1)

Along with reflecting on their gendered experiences, women also thought about the leadership styles of men and women. For the most part, women felt that women and men had different ways of leading on their campuses. Catalina described her efforts to get to know her team members through one-on-one meetings, in contrast to the previous male student body president who took a more business-like approach to these meetings. She felt that as a woman,

she prioritized creating relationships with her senators. Catalina was more relationship-oriented, while the men were more task-oriented.

When I had one-on-one meetings [with senators], I was more like, “Oh, how are you?” And wanting to know about them personally. Whereas I remember last year, when we [herself and the previous male student body president] would meet one on one, it was very business-oriented. Whereas I'm concerned about my senator's total well-being, not just how they are in the senate. But also, how's their life outside? How is their family? How are their friends? ... Women are more in tune with emotional cues, whereas men are, let's just get to the business and get it done. (Interview 2)

Alexis explained that her male senators wanted to rush to action, whereas her female senators were more likely to think through the effects of their actions before they took them. The rush to action by the men was not about creating change that really helped people, rather it was about making a quick decision and being done with it. The women were more concerned about gaining input and buy-in from others. Through their process of involving others, the women demonstrated how they prioritized people in the ways they tried to enact change on their campus.

Whenever there is an initiative that a senator wants to do, almost always, when she's a female senator, she has talked to a couple people, she's talked about organizations she wants to partner with before she's ready to do this... Whenever he [male student government representative] wants to do something, he'll just do it, won't even ask, just up and do it. And I noticed that, across the board, in the senate... There's always that immediate, that gratification factor in male senators, of, “I want to do this now, why aren't we doing this?” versus my female senators, who are saying, “Let's think through

this, what organization are we trying to represent, and how can we provide the best outcome possible?" instead of just acting without thinking. (Interview 2)

Brooke S. had similar experiences working with men on her campus. She described men being frustrated with women because the women wanted to think through how people were going to feel about decisions and women took the time to gather input. The women prioritized people when making decisions, while the men wanted to take quick action without thinking about the potential impact on the people.

I guess we [women] lead more with emotions behind things. And I feel like sometimes that gets in the way of how we work together because some of the men that we work with, they get frustrated by how much we want to think about this issue or... how much we keep talking about, "Well, we don't want it to be like that. We don't want people to feel like this. We want people to feel like they're heard." Some of the men that we work with say, "That's just not how it's supposed to go. Let's just get this done and... it doesn't really matter if this happens this way." They [men] hadn't really wanted to take the time to... just sit down and talk with these people... They think that's counterproductive or unproductive. (Interview 2)

A few women did not feel that men and women had different ways of leading on their campus.

Margaret said, "I think they're pretty equal... I wouldn't say that there's a big difference."

Similarly, Emma stated:

I see so many leadership styles in both [genders] that come into play in our own student government. I don't see a divide based on gender at all... So, across the board, I would say that is more based on the student themselves, rather than on their gender. (Interview 2)

Along with navigating the gender dynamics on their campus and in their role as student body president, the women also had to navigate the complex context of a university influenced by the national climate, which will be explored in the next section.

Dealing with a Tense National Climate

Few people would argue that the last few years have been without conflict based on the nation's political climate. There are big divides in this country stemming from political party and an endless debate on a countless number of social issues. Many of the women in this study discussed the impact of the national political climate on their own campuses, as well as their presidency. Some felt their own campus student government elections mirrored aspects of the national presidential election of 2016. As student body presidents, they felt it was important to represent their entire student body, even when some constituents had not voted for them. Some were challenged by this, especially when representing their constituents meant they needed to suppress some of their own personal views. Others felt they were voted into office to take personal stands on social issues, so they did. All of the women described at least one social issue they dealt with as student body president, with many discussing several. The social issues discussed by the women included topics related to, but not limited to: Charlottesville, race relations, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), campus police practices, Title IX and sexual assault on campus, mental health, college affordability, transgender rights, and university divestment in fossil fuels.

All the women ran for student body president in 2017, between the months of February and April, which was anywhere from three to five months after the hotly contested presidential election of November 2016. This was an election where the United States had its first woman, Hillary Clinton, nominated as a major party presidential candidate. And Hillary Clinton lost this

election. Some women were affected by watching the first woman run for president. Brooke S. explained how she tried to be especially personal and approachable during her student body president campaign because of how she saw Hillary Clinton treated. “I’m thinking of how during the presidential campaign when people were saying that Hillary was too stone-faced and where they were giving a harder time because she was a woman” (Interview 1). Based on watching Hillary Clinton, Lauren recognized it was harder for a woman to be in a leadership position.

One thing that I especially saw in the election, having Hillary Clinton step in as the first female representative going for the office of president, was that whenever there were debates, people were quick to label her one way or the other. I saw it’s harder for a woman to step in because if you’re too soft, then you’re weak and if you’re too strong, you’re just labeled a certain five letter word. (Interview 1)

Margaret T. was the first woman student president in 13 years at her institution, yet, during her campaign, she tried not to call attention to gender.

I tried not to focus on it [lack of female student body presidents in the past]. I knew that, because our campaign season was very parallel with Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton’s campaign, and a lot of the criticism that Hillary Clinton got, not that I agree with it, was that she ran because “Oh, I’m a woman. I’m a woman. I will be the first female president” et cetera... and so, I didn’t want them to associate with that or somehow make a subconscious link, and so I didn’t focus on that. (Interview 1)

Several other women discussed the role the U.S. presidential election in 2016 had in their own election in spring of 2017, as well as the impact on their presidency. These women did not intentionally aim to bring national politics into their elections, but it happened nevertheless. Sonia felt that the male candidates she ran against brought political rhetoric into the campaign.

I think as much as people tried not to make it a national climate, political thing, that's what it ended up being, especially because of my opponent in the run off... It was a ticket of two women of color, against two white men. And they only ran because there was not a republican ticket in the election. So, they themselves decided to make it political, which then brought on the national rhetoric into this election. So that was the biggest problem that we faced, was trying to get over that hump and trying to convince students that no, I am not Hillary Clinton. No, this is not an actual local government election. But a lot of the decisions that we do make are important, so maybe you shouldn't take into account actual political affiliation with this... So that was kind of, as much as I hate to say, that it was reflected, mirrored from the national climate, it really was. That wasn't necessarily a narrative that I had started, but it's one that I ended up being dragged into. (Interview 1)

Kelly thought divides based on political lines did not have a place in student government, but found student leaders divided into liberal and conservative camps on her campus this past year, which likely was influenced by the national climate.

I'd actually say that we're like a micro version of what's happening nationally... our campus is pretty divided as far as it goes with racism and those sort of issues. And so, we are still very much falling in line with what's happening nationally. People are scared, and I think people have turned national politics into campus politics... That's kind of what caused all the contention, was just disagreement on politics. I'm conservative, but not like a Trump fan by any means... and the people who were in charge of student government the last couple of years were very liberal, and so we disagreed on that and that turned into us not being able to agree on anything, which I don't think should ever

happen, because student government shouldn't be focused on people's politics, but that's kind of what happened. (Interview 1)

Some women discovered that students were excited to vote for them in light of what happened in the U.S. presidential election. Emma found voters to be excited to vote for her as a woman, and a woman of color.

It was weird because the election for our school happened shortly after the presidential election for our country. It was very parallel to that one. I think everyone was a little triggered after what had happened with Trump being elected. It was kind of situation people where we don't want these other people leading campus. We really want you leading our campus... Students, especially students of color, have been really excited to see someone like me as president, especially because my work since sophomore year has been really, really focused on students of color and their experiences on our campus... Also, I have conversations with different women and they're really excited to see what I'm doing and to see a person like me in a leadership position. I also had the conversation with some men on campus who are like, "I'm so glad that a woman is leading..." I definitely know that it's having a positive impact on these people viewing [student government] in general. (Interview 1)

Similarly, some women found their campuses wanting to vote for women because of the lack of women they have seen in the past in the student body president position and the voters' desire for change.

Some people really wanted to see change because often times it's just male figures running in this position... Just saying out of my mouth that I was running for president, people like to see that. They wanted to see more of it and... they're like, "Okay, I'm

voting for you. Good work and go along.” So, I think that's how they had initiated me as leader, because they wanted me to be in that position. (Diana, Interview 1)

Leslie K. found herself surprised when some men were excited to vote for a woman in the campus election.

If I'm being 100% honest, if I saw a guy who looked like a total frat bro, I would totally approach him differently. That's so on me that I'm judging him and how he's going to perceive me, even before he does. But I was so pleasantly surprised that there were multiple times I'd go up to someone like that, and I'd try to make a gender-neutral pitch and he'd say, “Oh, I heard you're the first. I heard we haven't elected a female president in 10 years. That's why I'm voting for you.” I'd say, “Oh, my God. I just totally judged you based on your appearance.” (Interview 1)

Just as some several women described the impact of the national presidential election of 2016 on their own student body presidential election in 2017, many also described the impact of the 2016 election on their own student body presidency. Alexis described the struggle of being student body president shortly after the national presidential election of 2016. She, like many other women in the study, had the expectation that finding the balance of representing all the student body, while also representing her own values, was going to be a challenge going into the presidency.

Over history, there have been lots of times where college campuses have been very tumultuous places. They've been places of tipping to one side or tipping to the other, but I happen to be the student body president the year after one of the most difficult elections in a while that is affecting college campuses, and affected college campuses immediately. It's going to be complicated to represent the whole student body, but also make sure that

we're standing for not just [my university's] values, but my values, as just a person in this world. I think this is going to be one of the hardest times to be a student leader on campuses, for all student body presidents everywhere... People are going to be looking to us and making sure that we're responding correctly. Everyone has a different idea of what that might look like. (Interview 1)

Tracy C. also expected to be challenged by balancing her own personal values and student government values in her presidency.

I think with this weekend stuff that happened [in Charlottesville] ... I think we're all on the same page that it's just wrong. That's going to definitely be a challenge... How do we, as a student government, deal with this? ... It's going to be really interesting to have those people bring those concerns to me and I'm going to have to decide what's my personal feeling about this and what's our student government feeling because there's a big difference between that. And that line, I'm going to have to find I think as I go, you know, step by step throughout the year. (Interview 1)

Like Alexis and Tracy C., other women anticipated the challenge of leading student government in the current national political environment. Lauren stated:

I think one of the biggest challenges with where our nation is at, is looking internally to how we approach diversity and inclusion... There's definitely a place for every student at [my university], but sometimes it's easier to find that community than it is for others. And you just have everyone looking at that because of the events in Charlottesville. Because of other events that transpired with the election. So that's one that I really see [my university] going through, our student body looking at as a whole, and also student government looking at internally. (Interview 1)

Some women found the responsibility of representing all to be a different concept from previous leadership positions. In the past, Alexis served in campus leadership roles where she was able to take strong stances on social issues based on what she personally thought was right and wrong. As student body president, she was not able to take those stances as easily. She understood her duty to represent all her constituents, but was still challenged by it.

That's one thing that's hard to navigate, for sure. It's just, serving this position, being who I am, but also having to represent *all* students, and not being able to adjust everything as much as I would like to... it's just not something that I would be able to do from this position, which, in many cases, I hate, because that's very much who I am... I know, I have very strong views on most things. It's hard, because I know I have to represent all students, and not just myself and my personal views. Even if I feel a certain way, other students might not. But with that, I've always thought that I was elected, not just based on representing the students, but what I believe in. It's okay to draw that line. There may be some students who disagree with that, but that's okay, because I was elected to this position based off of what I believe. That's something I knew was going to be a problem, I knew for a fact, and it was. But I think this has been a good experience for me, because I think it will help me in the future with what I want to do, so that's another big thing. (Interview 2)

Kelly found it easier to advocate for constituents with minority views as a senator than president. As president, she felt her responsibility was to represent the majority of students even when it went against what she believed personally.

I think it's a very different story being president versus being a senator, because as a senator, you can advocate for people who aren't being advocated for on the senate floor,

but as president you really have to take a hard look at what the majority of students are feeling, because if you're advocating for something that the majority of students don't feel interested in, then you're not winning the battle. (Interview 3)

All the women dealt with social issues in their presidency in some form or another and had to think intentionally about the concept of representing all. Some described enacting change to better support students by updating university policies related to transgender rights or Title IX protections. Others discussed enacting change by incorporating more inclusive language in student handbooks or finding ways to institute new state laws on campus. Many described instances where they used their presidency to make a statement on an issue. While others discussed circumstances where they had to be strategic in using their voice to best represent *all* on their campus, which often meant they were tempering some of their own personal beliefs. Whatever the form, the women dealt with current social issues throughout their time as student body president. Leslie K. described using her president position as a means to give voice to certain social issues on her campus.

We're planning on releasing a statement on our commitment to advocating on behalf of survivors. So that support, it's never really waivered, but the more and more things that's happened in the world, we kind of... leverage our positions, our legitimacy of being spokespersons of the student body to release a statement, or to create a petition, or to create a coalition that addresses the matter at hand to reiterate our shared values... Yeah, I mean, it's disheartening to see so much happening in the world, but I think it does become important that student government play a role. (Interview 2)

In a later interview, Leslie K. discussed how she was guided by her personal values in crafting statements to the student body. Yet, she also thought intentionally about the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, viewpoints of the people who would be reading these statements.

We were writing a statement together on Charlottesville, and just the heightened environment of tension around race... I was talking to my VP about the need to publish a statement because it affected [university] students. We were absolutely both on the same page in terms of, "Yes. This is an important statement. Yes, these are things we want to hit on it." But then we struggled... The biggest contention in writing that piece was the inclusion of a line that said, "Silence is violence." My VP felt very strongly that should be included because she felt as though that is what this is about, that if you're not speaking out against acts of racial violence that in and of itself is violent. I struggled with that approach. I said, "Not every student on campus feels that way, and I think that if someone reads that, their first reaction to that is feeling antagonized..." We went back and forth on it and we ended up coming up with a [another] phrase. I absolutely felt very strongly that the statement should be published, and that we as leaders ought to represent ourselves, and in the capacity that we were elected, to say that what happened is wrong and that we should strive to create a community of tolerance and equity. But at the same time, I want to balance that by being cognizant of the majority of students who might read a phrase out of context, even if I believe in it, and take that to interpret something that they may not believe in. That was just one instance where we tried to, I did try to moderate that, and balance it as much as possible to end up representing my views, but in a way in which it still feels that those views are being represented. (Interview 3)

Another woman, Sonia, also discussed using her voice as president to advocate for a social issue. She utilized her position to demonstrate support for enacting change related to a controversial issue. She also found she was better prepared to defend the change she was proposing after gaining the experience of serving in the president role for several months.

I wrote an opinion, an op-ed about it in the school newspaper that garnered a lot of attention in the campus community, but also amongst conservatives nationally as well. So, I was kind of in that spotlight for a hot second... There was a lot of pushback, a lot of confrontations happening, and my name was mentioned a lot of times. And it was one of those moments where I wasn't planning on speaking [about the issue at an event], but it was a moment when I had to think on my feet immediately to kind of just defend the integrity of myself, and of the school, and of this position. It was a really cool moment because I felt like I did a good job, but it was also... I don't think it would be something that I was prepared to do [earlier]. I think these months have kind of ... I guess polished me in the way to prepare to stand up on my toes at any moment. (Interview 2)

Many women felt empowered by taking a stand on a social issue. Nicole was proud that even though many people around her did not support her choice to take a stand, or the position she took, she still knew it was the right thing to do.

My vice president and I decided that we're going to write a resolution in support of the undocumented students on our campus... We got a lot of backlash from it from a lot of the senate and just a lot of our peers... I know it made me feel especially empowered as a leader because I knew that even though some people didn't agree with what we were saying, or what we were putting up, that was something that we felt really strongly for, and something that we wanted to represent, and show those students on our campus, and

in our state, that we support them, and support them pursuing an education here. And that was just a really good learning experience too. Just in knowing that, even if some people don't agree, sometimes you just have to do things if you believe strongly for them.

(Interview 1)

Some women described banding together with other student body presidents across the United States to issue joint statements on topics such as Charlottesville, DACA, and sexual assault prevention. Viktoria A. described a joint statement she participated in as president.

With the things that happened at Charlottesville, Virginia... a bunch of [SG] presidents came together and wrote a letter standing in solidarity with the students... who protested the white supremacists going on campus... Just making a commitment to advocate for the marginalized communities on campus, and to not be silent in the face of injustice... And so I signed that... Afterward I sent an email to the student body... I said, I signed this, this is something really important to all of us. This is part of our values of our institution... That was something really exciting for me... It was something that I could take action on and do something about. Maybe that's something that's too political for the president of the college to do, but I could, and I think the student body would really value that. (Interview 1)

While slightly more than half the women described using their voice as president to take a stand on social issues, the remaining women felt they had to be more strategic in their approach. There were no particular patterns in this difference in approach based on institutional type, rather it seemed to be based on the women's perspective of her role as student body president. Whereas some of the women expressed their personal views through statements made on social issues to the student body, others thought about representing students differently.

Brooke S. discussed the challenge of removing her own personal beliefs in a statement she released about DACA. Yet, she found it important to do this in order to be sure to best represent all students on her campus.

It was just hard because we had to be careful with... everything that we were saying in the statement. We had to kind of take away how we felt... If we agreed with Trump's [DACA] decision or not... We just had to... kind of remove ourselves from whatever side we were on. I remember that was so hard... Trying to figure out how we were going to word this, and it just seemed like it would be so simple because I wanted to say this, this, and this, but we really had to be think, okay, we're representing all students. Even though this group is affected, we want to make them feel comfortable, but not want to make... any group, or any student on campus, feel like they were in the wrong for believing how they felt. That was the first time that I was hit with, one, releasing a statement that had my name on it, but also, two, removing my belief and really having to be the student body president for everyone and not just myself... what's been hardest is removing myself from how I feel personally about things. (Interview 2)

Casey had several experiences where the concept of representing all conflicted with her personal beliefs. One such incident involved a student who committed a racist act on campus. She had personal feelings about the act, but found it more important for her to represent all students in her role as student body president. And to Casey, representing all meant even that student. In her attempts to represent all, she found it helpful to look up to leaders who inspired her, like President Barack Obama, when dealing with those tough situations.

Personally... I had personal sentiments about that, but then I had to turn the other cheek at this and be like, well this is still a student, and so a lot of people were calling for that

student to be suspended and expelled from the [state] system and I'm thinking... I still had to represent that student. That student was a fellow [university student]. What if that would have been me and I would have done something that was horrific, but that I did not know, or maybe I didn't know how it affects a group of people, would I want my whole life gone because of that? ... So, it's definitely in that, where I felt like my personal has kind of been compromised a little bit, but then I look at other leaders, and I think about how many times Barack Obama probably dealt with this, and how many times you know, people didn't consider him an American citizen, and how many times he probably would have wanted to say, "Because you said this about me, I'm not going to represent you as president." But he didn't. He made sure he kept the proper decorum and stuff to represent everyone. So, he's one of my inspirations. (Interview 3)

Lauren discussed providing support to all students even if she felt one side was wrong.

At student government, what we try to do is be supportive of these individuals... That's something that I was very conscientious going into my term. It was how important it was to be a resource for both sides, even if one was in the wrong, whether they knew it or not before the event took place... It's definitely interesting being the leader on campus at this time in our nation's history. (Interview 2)

Another woman explained how the political environment of her state could impact the way she addressed some issues. Meredith understood the history of actions her state legislature had made to defund particular programs on her campus based on things these programs had promoted, which the state legislature did not support. She strategically used this knowledge in her work as president. Meredith described a conversation she had with one of her constituents who was asking her about her supposed inaction supporting DACA students. Her student government had

just released a statement supporting DACA students, but the constituent did not feel that Meredith had done enough in her role as president to support DACA students.

[Talking to her constituent] “First of all, we don't take a stance on political issues since this is a student government, but I see how this issue does directly affect our students. Just like you, I support DACA, and DACA students.” He says, “Well why haven't you said anything?” I said, “Look, have you thought about the implications of me saying something? Our state is extremely conservative... What do you think is going to happen if state legislature sees that I said a statement about something like this?” ... He says, “Okay, yeah, yeah. I do see that.” I said, “Honestly, I'm afraid that if I do something like this, then the next thing is the state will get involved and DACA students will be in danger.” He says, “Oh, I see that now. I see that now.” It's kind of just, I want him to know that I do care about him, and I do care about DACA students... I had to politely educate him on the fact of, here's what's going to happen if I do this. (Interview 1)

Nearly all of the women in this study mentioned the 2016 presidential election in their interviews. Some women felt the impact of the 2016 election in their student government presidential elections and described their campus being a microcosm of what they saw happening nationally. Others felt that many of the issues they dealt with as president were connected to what was happening in national politics and that it was a particularly challenging time to be student body president. All women described instances of dealing with social issues in the president role, including issues related to DACA, Charlottesville, and Title IX, among many others. Some used their position as president to provide voice and take a stand on enacting change related to some issues, while others had to be strategic in their use of voice based on their need to represent all.

She Develops Strengthened Confidence in Her Leadership Ability

The fourth theme that emerged from the findings was the women's strengthened confidence in their ability to serve as student body president, as well their ability to lead generally. Within this theme, three sub themes emerged: (a) gaining direct experience in practicing leadership, (b) receiving positive reinforcement, (c) observing others practice leadership.

Gaining Direct Experience in Practicing Leadership

All women discussed the importance of gaining direct experience as instrumental to strengthening confidence in their leadership ability as student body president. Nearly all said it contributed the most significantly to their boost in confidence. Yet, many began their tenure questioning their abilities to lead. However, doing the job and experiencing success were some of the means, by which they were able to gain direct experience in practicing leadership, therefore increasing their confidence.

The women explained learning the most about leadership from actually practicing leadership, but many women explained initial apprehension at being able to effectively serve as student body president. They questioned themselves and their capabilities. Several women almost did not run for the president position because of these feelings of apprehension. Emma doubted herself and her capability to be president.

I do have the times when I'm doing things, and thinking, I don't know what I'm doing. I do still doubt myself and then when I was considering running for the presidency and was really not sure, I had a lot of doubt... thinking I wasn't capable of being anything more than vice president. (Interview 1)

Lauren also doubted her capability to be president. “Never thought I wanted to be a student body president. Never thought that I was capable” (Interview 1). Diana felt intimidated when she won the presidential election. “It was really intimidating... I didn’t picture myself and when I did get the results, I still didn’t believe it” (Interview 1). Kelly described feeling like an imposter during her first few months as president. “Like probably most other women... I do think that I struggle with believing that I should be in charge or I feel like somebody's going to find me out... I feel like an imposter in this position” (Interview 1). One of the areas Brooke S. hoped she could improve in herself was her confidence.

I hope to grow... confidence in my leadership abilities and my leadership skills. I feel like when I run for things that I am sort of overcoming my fear, but it doesn't take away that I am fearful. I would like to get rid of that. (Interview 1)

Although many of the women questioned their confidence as they began their position, as they worked some time doing the job as president, they felt more confident. Emma described how figuring out the job helped her build confidence in herself.

Although I always have a lot of work, I am constantly working on it. Everything kind of comes with repetition. So, as you do more things, meetings, interviews, as you do it more, it all becomes to make more sense. It’s almost like second nature in all that I do. I knew that going into the school year and being student body president was going to be insane. And I definitely struggled a bit with my confidence, thinking, can I do this? Are people going to take me seriously? But after the first couple of senate meetings, I really shook that because I realized that regardless of whether or not I know what I’m doing, I need to have confidence in myself. (Emma, Interview 2)

Diana concurred, “I’d say that being president, doing it, I’m much more familiar with the duties, and how things work around campus. So that makes me feel much more confident” (Interview 3). Lauren spoke about how she never expected to be the person who knew how to do the job of student body president, but by doing the job, she became that person.

It's definitely weird. I never would have considered myself for this position, even a year ago. I didn't think I was capable. I didn't think I was that person who can have all the answers and could be the go-to person on things like public speaking, all these things that you would think would be so obvious for someone who serves in this position.

(Interview 2)

In a later interview, Lauren continued to explain how she came into the position feeling insecure in her capabilities to do the job, especially as a woman, but gaining experience in the various aspects of the role provided boosts to her confidence.

Coming in with a little bit of insecurity, which, I think is so common for female leaders. We second guess ourselves, we always ask for other’s opinions, and always kind of doubt what we can do. Especially in relation to our male counterparts who are always over confident it seems. But stepping into a role that I never saw myself in before I started to run. With all the different demands of speaking to 4000 people, with sending an email to former CEOs, with helping out in raising alumni donations, and that sort of thing.

There's so many things that I always felt that I was incapable of doing, or that I wasn't the best for the job. There are so many people that I thought would be better that sort of thing. After I've done that thing, it's one of those reflections of, wow! It was something I was thinking that I was scared of, that I did not want to do, that I thought about making an excuse for, that I did anyways because I know people were counting on me. And to

have successfully done it is a huge confidence booster. And just continues to affirm how capable not only I am, but that so many others are. (Lauren, Interview 3)

Viktoria A. felt empowered learning all the ins and outs of her role and her university. “It’s pretty empowering... Once you get a lot of stuff done, I feel like I’m able to learn a lot about both the school and myself and just government and leadership and community organizing and such” (Interview 2). Lilly said it plainly, “I got more confident the more I did the job... You’re only going to figure out what works by doing it” (Interview 2). Alexis found she was able to gain experience doing the job as president that she likely would not have gotten if she was not in the position.

I was asked to serve on the presidential search committee... There's only two students on the committee, and the rest of it was faculty members, [governing board] members. And, that really pushed me out of my shell, because, for me, to speak up in a room with people who were, obviously, way more accomplished... I think that was a really, really great experience. I'm not sure if I would've got that experience as just a regular student. I think yes, it's made me more assertive, more outspoken... I think this position has really helped me in articulating my position on a number of tough issues, that I wouldn't have necessarily been able to do as well, before this position gave me the opportunity.

(Interview 2)

Although nearly all the women described feeling increased levels of confidence throughout their student body presidency, many still experienced ebbs and flows of confidence throughout their tenure. Brooke S. felt her confidence decreased a bit after the way she handled a situation, but then was able to talk herself up again and realize she was capable. In the past,

she had turned to others to provide those encouraging words, but as president, she realized she was able to provide that encouragement to herself, which in turn, built her confidence.

I feel there are things that have happened... to where my confidence level dropped a little bit. We had a situation happen with a committee and I felt like I could have confused them and that came from my communication skills that aren't so great... So, I took that as something that maybe I'm not a good leader, so I really had to check myself. It made me feel self-conscious for a while, so I really to check myself and say "Okay, this is what happened, now fix it, do better in this situation." So, I think that, me coming out of that self-conscious type has also built my confidence a little bit. I feel like in the past, I would stay in that you know, whoa is me type of thing. But me kind of having to rely on myself to bring back that confidence, instead of going to my vice president and asking, "Okay, am I still a good leader?" But instead, I was thinking to myself, okay, people mess up, people may have not gotten the exact message that you wanted to get across, but whatever, how are you going to fix it? I feel like before being in the president role, I never would have had that type of maturity before, so me knowing that about myself has built my confidence. (Interview 3)

Casey also learned to be less hard on herself in the president position and instead focus on her successes.

I'm coming down toward the end of my tenure... and over the last six or so weeks, I've had the opportunity to kind of, stop being so critical of myself. Stop being so hard on myself saying, "Man, I can't do this, I can't do this." And instead look at stuff that I've done... all of the stuff that I was able to accomplish... So that's what I feel like has

boosted my confidence a little bit more and in that final stretch of my tenure. (Interview 3)

Similarly, Emma stated:

I guess I'm very good at looking at what I've done and being proud of everything that I've done, whether it's big or small... I'm very good now at making sure that I take a step back and recognize my own accomplishments, and I give myself credit, and I don't come down too hard on myself because I've done it before enough, and I think sometimes we can all be our hardest critics, and that can be detrimental to ourselves. To being able to take a step back and really be proud of ourselves. And that's boosted my confidence. (Interview 3)

Several women gave examples of the specific skills they had built as a result of gaining direct experience as student body president. They knew they had grown through the process and that the process had contributed to their own strengthened belief in themselves as leaders.

Several felt they improved their public speaking skills.

I used to get really, really nervous before my speeches. Before, I couldn't even eat before because I would feel so nauseous. But now, I don't even think about it... It's making those little adjustments... I feel like I have grown, and confidence has grown. (Diana, Interview 3)

I definitely can tell that my public speaking skills have gotten better. That used to be one of my worst. I thought it was one of my worst qualities. I would just get so nervous before I would do any type of public speaking that I would just psych myself out. It was awful. But with this role, and campaigning and everything, you get over that fear

quickly, because you do six public speaking engagements in one night, and you realize that you really do have something to offer. So, I think it helps with my confidence.

(Meredith, Interview 3)

Along with building public speaking skills, many felt they became stronger communicators in other ways. They felt especially able to more effectively communicate and work with the different types of people they interacted with in the role of president.

Working with every type of person since I've been president. You know, I've always felt like I'm able to work with anyone, but on a regular day when I have my open office hours, just anyone who walks in. I had someone walk in, they're a freshman and... I say, "Okay, so let's see what we can do." So that's different from, you know, my executive cabinet... I would definitely say that's been a huge, a huge skill that I've learned, and one of the skills that I'm very appreciative of gaining of my role here. (Casey, Interview 3)

I'm a lot more comfortable speaking my mind and being exactly, you know, who I am in bigger meetings with people who maybe have really fancy titles and you know, are in charge of this X, Y, and Z, this huge thing that's going on. I'm still able to be myself and bring the perspective that's important. And I used to be terrified in meetings like that... talking to the chancellor, or talking to someone who, you know, handles millions of dollars, or is a big donor. That was really tough for me so, I'm a lot better at doing that.

(Emma, Interview 3)

Brooke S. thought failing a few times helped her to get better at communicating in the role. She described stumbling in her communication efforts and then trying to be better the next time.

No one can really prepare you for this role... At the beginning, I didn't know what to do in certain situations... I feel like when things were happening is when I developed all of these skills. I wasn't prepared for them and I feel like I failed at them. I feel like I got better at communication because I stuttered so many times... You go out there, and you mess up, and you feel embarrassed, and you learn how to do it, and hopefully someone forgot about the last time... All the experience has taught me the best. (Interview 3)

Several women discussed the hard decisions they made as student body president.

Making these tough decisions was not something they had experienced in previous leadership positions, but in the president role, they had to make these types of decisions regularly, which helped them to be better decision-makers, therefore increasing their confidence.

I've had, now, the experience of making tough decisions and tough calls... I'm reminded so many times that people are looking towards me as a final authority on things, not just because of the position but also because of my experience... As the year went on... I had to make decision after decision and I was proud to have stood by the ones that I made. I slowly realized that, yes, I am right for this role, I shouldn't be doubting myself, and honestly at the end of the day, I would trust myself out of anybody else to make calls. So, I think my confidence has definitely increased. (Leslie K., Interview 2)

I feel super confident now. I've dealt with difficult situations and difficult decisions, and I guess through that whole experience I have, you know, grown my leadership, stood my ground, and I feel very grateful... I know now that I am able to lead successfully and confidently. (Sonia, Interview 3)

Despite questioning themselves and their capabilities to lead at the beginning of their tenure as student body president, all the women described feelings of increased confidence as they continued in their term as student body president. They felt gaining direct experience doing the job contributed the most to their increased levels of confidence. Throughout their time serving in the position, some women described learning how to be less critical of themselves and instead focusing on their successes. Women described gaining skills in public speaking, communicating with diverse audiences, and decision-making through their direct experience doing the job as president. Along with gaining direct experience, many women described the importance of receiving positive reinforcement, which further contributed to their strengthened confidence.

Receiving Positive Reinforcement

Many of the women in this study received positive reinforcement from others, including administrators and fellow students, which contributed to increased confidence. They received this positive reinforcement by being encouraged by others and receiving positive feedback. Being encouraged to take on a leadership role was mentioned by many of the women as a factor pushing them toward pursuing the role of student body president. Knowing that someone believed in them boosted their confidence and helped them believe they could be successful in leadership. They received this encouragement from many people, including fellow students, administrators, former student body presidents, and student government colleagues at other universities. Many got involved in their first leadership positions because they believed in the power of enacting change through an organization, but their later decisions to take on progressive leadership responsibilities were often due to the encouragement they received from

those around them. During their presidency, many women also felt the positive feedback they received from others contributed to increased levels of confidence.

Diana had not considered running for the office of student body president until she was encouraged by a peer. “I really, really didn't think of running, I had the notion in my mind and the past president... he really pushed me and empowered me to do it” (Interview 1). Lauren did not feel ready for the student body president position and it was the encouragement of others that eventually gave her the boost she needed to pursue the position.

I had a lot of people come to me and say “[Lauren], you can do this, you don't exactly have to have all the answers, but you have to ask the right questions and already you're being voice for the students. You should step into this role.” ... I remember speaking to my [student body] president at the time... She said “You're capable, you can do this, when I see my successor, I see you. It is your decision, just know that.” ... I said okay, if everyone's coming to me and everyone's seen this in me, who am I to say that I'm incapable? ... Because I have so many people coming to me and saying that I was capable of serving in this role, I thought that people saw something in me that I didn't necessarily see in myself... I never really saw myself in this role. (Interview 2)

A few women referenced a statistic of which they were aware that stated women have to be asked a certain amount of times to gain the confidence to run for a position, yet still needed to be asked many times.

They talk about how getting a female student body presidential run is also really difficult because she has to be asked 7 times before she feels confident enough to run versus a man where they're asked once, and they run. And so, for me, a lot of people had to say

“[Margaret], you're qualified to run” to even get me to run. And I realized that after that, it was a lot more than seven asks. (Margaret T., Interview 2)

When election time came around, people had started to really push me towards running for election and taking more of an executive decision role... There is a statistic that women have to be asked 8 times before they agree to run for a position and that was definitely true, and I think I had a number that was more than eight. I think I was probably up to 15 or 20 times. I was like alright, maybe this is something I can do. (Emma, Interview 2)

Along with receiving the encouragement to run for student body president, they also valued this encouragement throughout their term. During their presidency, women received positive feedback from others, including administrators and fellow students, which boosted their confidence in themselves. Ruth W. felt empowered by the support she received from administrators. “Seeing administrators respect me, and then giving me that attention, not ignoring me, not brushing me off. That really helped me” (Interview 3). Kelly described the positive feedback she received from her university’s governing board.

I think that one of the most memorable [moments], probably, meeting with the campus [governing board], and hearing from them that I'm doing a good job. That just means a lot to me, just because they are such influential people in the state, and also for higher education in general. So, I would say that just hearing from them that I'm doing a good job, is definitely what sticks with me a lot. (Interview 2)

Lauren has a similar experience with her university’s governing board.

I would say that one of the things that boosted my confidence the most followed our [university governing board] presentation this October... These are all the most successful alumni and supporters of our university. That's CEOs, doctors, that sort. So, in October, we kind of changed our presentation style. We went out and we had more of a dialogue with these decision makers of our campus. We came in, we were extremely well-researched... I felt really good about it. I happened to meet up with a lot of those [university governing board members] that following week... and they all were so encouraging. They said how proud they were of the way that I've led this administration, the way that I've led the organization, and the way that I've advocated for the university itself, which went a long way for me, just thinking back on my first presentation to them, sophomore year, where I was scared to death and did not know what to say and how to say it. I've been confidently speaking to what I think is most important and getting that support along the way was absolutely incredible. (Interview 2)

Ruth W. described the boost in confidence she received when the president of her university agreed to write her a recommendation letter. She had a close relationship with him based on her role as student body president and representing the voice of students to him.

I had the chance to apply for a really prestigious scholarship at the school and I needed really good references for it, so I actually approached the president of the university to see if he would write me a letter of recommendation... I had that connection with him and I asked him to write me that letter of recommendation. He did, and I ended up getting this scholarship because of it... I guess I felt valued that the president would do that and believe in me. (Interview 1)

Many women appreciated the support and guidance provided by their student government advisors. Viktoria A.'s close relationship with her advisor contributed to her increased confidence in her ability to do the job.

I have a lot of support from our vice president for student development, who is the one in charge of SG. I guess you could say mentor. Her and I are really close... She's someone who would really be able to check in with me, like if I need guidance consultation or anything. I feel confident about that and our relationship. (Viktoria A., Interview 1)

Some found the positive words from their advisors to be particularly useful in building up their confidence. These advisors were attuned to the women being too hard on themselves in the role and provided the encouragement the women needed to hear. Casey was struggling a bit in her confidence during her term and appreciated the support of her advisor. "I had a conversation around Christmas time... and that's when my advisor came to me, and she says, 'You know, [Casey], you've done an amazing job, and I'm so happy' " (Interview 3). Catalina was also questioning her ability to be an effective president and was boosted by the words of her advisor.

I asked my advisor for feedback and... she said, "[Catalina,] you've been doing it the whole time... I think you're just being really hard on yourself..." I said, "It's hard because I did compare myself a lot to [the former male student body president] ... and look at what he did when he was president... I didn't get any of this done. This sucks." She said, "[Catalina,] think about it. When he was president, who was the one getting things done? Why were things getting done? Because, you were the one that did it... Last semester, you did a great job..." I feel optimistic... especially having that conversation with [my advisor]. I've asked her for more feedback and I want her to give me more feedback. (Interview 3)

Several women described the impact of hearing positive feedback from their fellow students. Tracy C. said, “I think [my student government staff’s] confidence in me has encouraged me to have confidence in myself” (Interview 3). Meredith described the confidence boost she received when she heard positive comments from some of her colleagues in student government.

A lot of times I was nervous about how... every two weeks, we stand up and do a little [presidential] report... I'm making my report, I'm thinking, hmm are they going to care about this? ... Are they going to understand what this is? Are they going to like it? I was worried that they weren't going to like what I was doing, or they were going to feel like I wasn't doing enough. I put a lot of thought of how I was to give that report every week. I had a couple of people come up to me that I really wasn't that close to... and they're saying, “Oh my gosh, thank you so much. Every time you stand up and give your report I didn't realize exactly how much you have to do. I don't know how you do it all. We think you're amazing.” ... I knew I was doing enough, but I was just worried that maybe people... didn't think it was enough... That was good to know that I was doing enough, and that I was portraying it in a way where they appreciated it. (Meredith, Interview 2)

Nicole was also affected by the positive feedback she received from other students.

It’s been cool to see that people will come up to me and say, “Hey, I’ve been seeing the work you’ve been doing and you’re doing a really good job. You’re really inspiring me to push myself to try to be better so that I can be a better leader” (Interview 3)

Emma found students’ belief in her inspired her to continue to work hard in the role. She was also happy that others were inspired by her to potentially take on leadership roles in the future.

That's made a really big difference... Its hearing positive feedback from other people, you know, other people are amazed by the job that I do, or you know, are just shocked that I'm able to do everything I am, and they're honored to meet me, all of a sudden. Especially as a woman of color... I don't fit in the box, and I think that when people get a chance to kind of see me in my role, it inspires them to then be that. It inspires me to need to work hard and... gives me confidence. (Interview 3)

Sonia found the support of her fellow students to be really meaningful.

I didn't really know how many supporters in student government, or in general, I had. And so people tell me about it saying, "[Sonia], you don't understand, people would do anything for you." It's really meaningful because it's people that are watching me constantly work and know that I am an ethical person and I do my best. I am very appreciative because I know that I would not be as successful if I didn't have people supporting me... and I knew that getting that support system would be more difficult because I was a woman of color. It helps me feel more secure in my leadership. (Sonia, Interview 3)

Casey also felt a confidence boost when people, who originally were questioning her ability to be president, told her she was great in the role.

I remember when I was running, I had a couple people saying, "What is she actually going to do?" or "Is she actually prepared to do this?" or "Is she actually qualified?" And I guess the greatest success is hearing, almost a year later since first being elected, that I changed some of the ways that SG runs, made it more efficient. I went ahead and... have given them 110%. Some of the same people were doubting me have come up to me and

said, “[Casey], wow, you've been such a great leader in this position.” I've had people tell me I'm one of the best student body presidents. (Interview 3)

Many of the women in this study described the strong impact of receiving various forms of positive reinforcement from administrators and fellow students on their campus. Being encouraged to run for office, as well receiving positive feedback from administrators, student government advisors, governing board members, and students, while serving as president, contributed to their increased feelings of confidence. In addition to gaining direct experience and receiving positive reinforcement impacting confidence levels, women also discussed the next subtheme of observing others practice leadership as important.

Observing Others Practice Leadership

Many women discussed the importance of observing others practice leadership, particularly women, to increase confidence in their leadership abilities. Many were grateful to have positive female role models in their lives. They benefited through having conversations with these women and watching them as leaders. Observing their peers practice leadership was also mentioned as critical to some of the women's experiences developing their own personal leadership style and building confidence in their role as student body president.

The women valued female role models in their lives. They were grateful to have women to look up to that often served in high-level, high-powered positions. Several women appreciated having women as university presidents at their institution and their ability to interact with them through their role as student body president.

Something that was really, really helpful is here at my university, we have a president and she's female... she's a great mentor. And she's actually done great in turning the university, and she got listed as a 100 most influential in the world in [a magazine] and

she has exemplified both great leadership skills and she's also another female to look up to. That gave me more confidence, watching a woman. (Diana, Interview 1)

It was announced that our new university president would also be a woman for the first time in our history. So, that caused a lot of excitement... and everyone was saying, “Wow, here we have a student body president and a university president who are both women” and that gave me a good model to see how to be a female leader and get to work on stuff with our university president... One of the things that I admire so much about our university president, is that she really is able to strike that balance where she cares for you, you can tell she cares for you, she's motherly, but in that same way, she's not afraid to discipline. (Lauren, Interview 1)

Kelly learned from being able to watch her vice president of student affairs who she felt was a strong woman in power. “She's definitely a role model of mine because she's shown me what it means to be a powerful woman and have thick skin and not let the haters get to you” (Interview 3). Tracy C. was glad to be surrounded by women leaders at her institution and what she was able to learn from them.

Our culture at [my university] is pretty cool because if you look at our executive team for the entire university, our president's a woman, and I want to say six or seven out of nine of our VPs are women... It's pretty great... I couldn't have asked for this role at a better university... because I think my experience would be a lot different if it was all men. But I'm able to learn from these women and see them being so strong and empowered that I can kind of mirror that in my own microcosm of student government. (Interview 1)

In a later interview, Tracy C. continued to describe why it was so important for her to see women leaders. Observing them in high-level positions helped her to imagine herself in those positions. She also found women leaders on campus to be more relatable than the men.

I've been blessed with some really great women role models. I try to tell everybody I can how great that is. It really does make a difference. I think the most simple I can say it is that it is just seeing somebody that you can relate to in just gender alone—a woman that is in a powerful position, and I could be that someday. Or, I have the opportunity to do that, too. It matters, because a lot of the world is still male dominated. What is it, like 13% of CEO's are women? So, it's still uncommon to see women in high facets of power, and so it feels good to see somebody succeeding that you can kind of model yourself after... They're very personable, and so they're easy to relate to, and have good conversations, while also knowing that they're a high-level executive in charge of all of this stuff on campus. They're still so able to take it down a notch and just be super down to earth. They're not going to look at me differently because I'm a student, or because I'm a woman, and they'll give me the time of day. It's a little bit different from the men in high positions of power. (Interview 3)

Similarly, Morrissey also described why it was so valuable to have female role models in her life.

Anytime I see a strong female leader I get super excited... It's just like everything to me... If I see more female leaders then I feel more comfortable in what I'm doing... It's cool to be the only girl sometimes, but you want to see other people like you in the mix. You know, when you see Congress only elect men, to me that makes me feel like maybe I shouldn't run for Congress because there's no women. But then the more women that

are there, then you feel more welcome... It's inspiring a little bit. And I think it's cool to take pointers from other females... They're not going to talk down to you, or be a sexist, or be gross. It's kind of nice to find some companionship with girls doing the same thing as you. (Interview 3)

Ruth W. found it valuable to observe the qualities her female advisor exhibited through her leadership on campus.

Seeing other women in leadership roles and seeing them be positive and command the room is important. My advisor... She's super confident. She always says her mind, but at the same time she's really compassionate, and she is a really good listener... Learning from her... that definitely helped. (Interview 3)

Lauren identified with her university's first ever women president who wanted people to know that she was president because she was qualified, not because she was a woman.

I'm the fourth female [student body] president in our university. It's the first time that... the university president is female. So, there was a lot of attention that we got just because of our gender. For the most part, it was very positive, where people were saying, "Oh, wow, look at you, you're breaking the glass ceiling." All of this, but I really resonated with what our university president had said. Whenever people make a big deal about her being the first female president at [my university], she says, "I would have had this position regardless of my gender. Yes, it is an incredible opportunity to be a female... but know that I'm fully capable based on my talent alone." I felt the same way with this position in student government. I didn't get it just because of a 56% female student body are voting against the men. It has very much to do with them identifying with my platform and identifying with who I was as a person. (Interview 2)

Women also appreciated female role models they got to know through sororities and at home. Kelly looked up to a former student body president who she met through her sorority. She enjoyed being able to speak to someone who understood the unique position of student body president.

I have a sorority sister who was president ten years ago, here at [my university], and so she's kind of been my mentor through all of this. She gets it, where most people don't. She gets being in this position, but she also gets being a woman in this position.

(Interview 1)

Lilly's older sister was a former student body president, so in speaking with her, Lilly gained confidence in her ability to run for the president role.

I feel like when I told her I was running, she said, "You're going to do great." And that, "Yes, you can really do it." And I think that was a good motivator for me because I really look up to my sister. I think she is brilliant, and amazing, and if she thinks that I'm good, then I've got this. (Interview 1)

Along with having female role models to look up to, the women also described the importance of observing their peers practice leadership. Several women described at least one student who they had been able to directly observe in a leadership role. This direct observation not only taught these women how to be more effective in their own leadership, but also helped them gain confidence. Morrissey described looking up to a previous women student body president.

When I came in, the president at the time... was just total pure inspiration. I don't mean to be cheesy, because she was only three years older than me, but she was such a boss bitch. She was so awesome and I freakin' loved her. She ran the school so hard core and

everyone looked up to her. I just loved that. I thought she was so cool, and I thought, oh my God, everyone respects this girl, they don't think she's bossy and mean. They think she is a leader. So... I want to run, and I want to do it exactly like she did it. (Interview 1)

Lauren also learned from observing the leadership styles of former student body presidents, which in turn, influenced her own leadership.

As soon as I came to [my university,] there were some people who just really led people well, and who I was inspired by, and I was motivated by, and started to try to try some of their leadership style as my own. [Rob] who was student body president two years ago, who was always so positive and so encouraging, and always relied on his faith, even in the midst of stuff, disgruntled senators, hot debates that were going on. And of course [Audrey], who served last year who was able to really mentor me and who was able to lead an organization of 120 so well... And to see how she was able to balance it, or even at times where she felt like she didn't have it all together, was still able to show that she had that control to others that were kind of looking to her. They definitely played a big role in how I tried to implement leadership. (Interview 3)

Emma learned from watching the students she worked with in student government.

Other people, like people in student involvement, that I've got to work with that are just very, they're amazing. They're everything that I want to be, and they stand up for themselves and for folks that can't stand up for themselves, and they are here because they love it, and they want to help people, and that's something I try to do, and that's something that I'm really proud to be a part of. (Interview 3)

A few women also described learning from fellow students that they did not want to emulate as leaders. Casey expressed disappointment with the leadership styles of some around her.

“Sometimes watching people, it’s more thinking, I don’t like the way they’re doing things... the way they carry themselves... I did not appreciate their learning, or their leadership style

(Interview 3). Brooke S. found she learned from the positive and negative leadership qualities of her peers.

I think the most training that I got was from watching other leaders. And so, I’ve watched leaders that I want to be like, and leaders that I don’t want to be like. For the leaders that I don’t want to be like, there are things that I change, so I’m not like this or that. I feel like I’m a person that takes a little bit from everybody. (Interview 3)

Similarly, Tracy C. stated:

I’ve definitely spent a good amount of my last four years observing the student body presidents... It’s been a lot of observing to see what I would not want to do... I think there’s been a lot of opportunities to see where we’re lacking in leadership and student government, and so that’s been the biggest, probably, observation of leaders that I’ve made in this realm.

The women described the importance of observing others practice leadership in developing confidence in their own leadership. They valued having strong female role models to look up to and learned from watching them serve in powerful high-level positions. Watching women in powerful positions also helped them to see these positions as more accessible to other women, like themselves. The women also benefited from observing their peers practice leadership. They were able to incorporate some of the positive qualities into their own leadership style, and learned which negative qualities of leaders they did not want to emulate.

She Aspires to Lead in the Future

The final theme that emerged from the findings was the ways in which women described their aspirations for future leadership positions. Within this theme, two sub themes emerged: (a) solidified leadership interests and (b) uplifting other women.

Solidified Leadership Interests

The ways in which the women described their aspirations for future leadership positions changed over the time they served as student body president. At the beginning of their term, many of the women recognized their attraction to leadership positions and assumed they would continue to seek out leadership positions in their future careers. Several pointed out their interest in leading to bring positive change, rather than holding a leadership position for the title of it. At this early point in their tenure, many of the women recognized that they gravitated towards leadership because they liked to be in charge, as well as be in a position where they could develop the people around them and/or advocate for others. A few women did not necessarily expect to seek out leadership positions in their future career.

As the women continued in their tenure of student body president, nearly all of them described their aspirations for leadership positions strengthening over time. Many felt serving as student body president solidified their interest in pursuing leadership positions. There were several reasons for these aspirations being solidified depending on the woman, and many women cited a few reasons for their increased interest. Some saw their strong ability to enact real change on their campus and could envision themselves enacting real change in their future careers. Others realized their own talent and potential to be an effective leader through the student body presidency and felt they developed a set of skills that was preparing them to take on future high-level leadership roles. Some women also felt the student body president position

gave them a realistic look at what it was like to hold a high-level leadership position, which could better prepare them for future roles.

Some women described having aspirations for elite leadership positions at the beginning of their term as president that then solidified over time as they continued to gain experience in the position. Catalina began her term knowing she was always going to aspire to high-level leadership positions in the future. “I see myself in an executive level position, higher up, and helping to run the organization” (Interview 1). Through gaining experience in the president position, her leadership interests had solidified and she realized the impact she could have as a leader.

Being in this role has definitely strengthened those aspirations for me. Being in this role, I've been able to interact a lot more with different leaders, and I think my approach to mentorship and just being a part of other organizations has changed a lot... And I think leadership is something that I realize is a lot more is natural to me. And I feel like it's something that I can't let go to waste... I see myself as being that person leading a group and helping things move the way they need to move. And so, I think that's definitely been strengthened since I've been in this role because I've really been able to see my potential and what kind of impact it can have on people just in this short time that I've served. (Interview 2)

Similarly, Alexis envisioned high-level leadership positions in her future, as she knew she liked to be in charge. “I think, and my mom always says this, that I'm not happy unless I'm telling people what to do. I don't know if that's true, but I do like being in charge” (Interview 1). Yet, her aspirations for leadership strengthened as she continued in the position of student body

president. As a result of her experience in the collegiate elite leadership position, she began to see herself running for elected office in the future.

[Serving as student body president] has definitely made me want to do more leadership positions, if that makes sense. So, coming into this position, my plan for the future was to, and still is, go to law school, be a civil rights and social justice attorney, and work as an attorney rest of my life. But as the year is going on, the more I realize that I think I want to run for office one day... I think this experience has helped me realize that, not only do I, of course, like being in charge and in front of things, but I like change from a policy standpoint. So, if I want to get something done, I think policy is the best way to do it. And this position, out of everything I've done on campus, has helped me realize that... This position has shown me that that's what I want to do. Now, I'm looking at law schools based on where I want to live and where I want to run for office. (Interview 2)

Leslie K. also developed increased aspirations to hold political office while serving as student body president.

When I first joined the organization, I joined SG as a finance major wanting to stay in that field. Even last fall, when I was student body vice president, I was still very content and happy with my decision to work in investment management. I think this role, and then maybe it's compounded with what's going on in the federal landscape that wants me to play a more active role in society, but I do think that I see myself moving towards higher level leadership positions in the government space in my future because I've kind of seen the value of doing it at a pretty low level... But, yeah, I do think that the experience in terms of how I interact with constituents, and advocate for policy changes,

has positively impacted my willingness to pursue government or high-level leadership in the future. (Interview 2)

At the beginning of the terms, some women were not sure if they would seek out elite leadership positions in their future career. When Lauren began as student body president, she was not thinking about pursuing high-level leadership positions in the future. She found it more likely college students would take on leadership roles because of the nature of the college-environment, but did not necessarily anticipate that to be the same in the workplace.

I think that often times, there's so many leaders that may not necessarily have the official title in their name. When I think about my future, I don't necessarily see myself saying, "I'm going to be president of some volunteer society or chair of this board in the community" or whatever... I think that in the university setting, you're likelier to go after the leadership positions for various reasons; whether it's that pressure within the organization itself, the resume builder, just a desire to serve, and of the natural incentive to have that position right beside your name. But when you get to a full-time job that may not necessarily be the case... So, I don't really see it for the future, I don't know exactly what that looks like, but that's my vision of it. (Interview 1)

However, as Lauren gained experience as student body president and received a job offer, she developed aspirations for future leadership positions. She came to realize her talent and capabilities, as well as identified with being a female leader.

I would definitely say that having that job offer, seeing that organizational hierarchy within the career path, and also acknowledging my experience and my growth through this position, I'm definitely more likely to pursue those leadership positions, not exactly be complacent with just putting in long hours and not working my way up. Since I've

taken this position, and since I've been in a place where people are looking at me, and speaking to me about what it's like to be a female in this position, and also the differences of it, and what I've learned. Again, I have come to truly identify with being a woman in a leadership role... I've seen what I'm capable of. I've seen what I can do, how that's way more than I typically think of myself and my abilities. So, I guess I would say that I am more likely to pursue leadership position in the future, having been empowered through this position I currently hold. (Interview 2)

Over time, Tracy C.'s aspirations for elite leadership roles also increased. At the beginning of her term, she described the enjoyment she experienced in being a leader, but in her career, she anticipated transitioning to volunteer roles where she could give back to the community, rather than pursuing high-level leadership positions. As Tracy C. continued in the role of student body president, however, she was encouraged to continue seeking out leadership roles. Gaining experience as president gave her the confidence she needed to apply for a state-level student government leadership position.

It's [serving as student body president] definitely encouraged me to move on and move up. I actually just put my name in the hat, I guess, for the student regent role on my state-level, so it's the [governing board] who oversees the public universities. So that's kind of the step up in serving in my state at least. I definitely want to seek out more leadership positions, 100 percent. (Interview 2)

In her final interview, Tracy C. continued to communicate her increased desire to serve in high-level leadership positions in the future, as a result of her experiences serving as student body president.

I definitely have a desire [to pursue high-level leadership positions]. This [student body president position] has made me, even more than before, want that for my future. I really enjoy the level of leadership that I'm at, and being able to be responsible to a group of people, and also managing a group of people. I've gotten a lot of joy out of that. I'm all for it. I'm all on board. (Interview 3)

At the beginning of their terms, some women questioned their capability to hold elite leadership positions in their future career. In the first half of her term, Kelly was unsure about her future aspirations for leadership. Some days she was interested, as she knew she had a desire to enact change through leadership. She also felt a bit more comfortable working in the spotlight based on her experience in the position, as she developed a more realistic look at what it was like to deal with that kind of scrutiny in leadership. Yet, other days, she questioned her capabilities and having to continually work under the spotlight.

I would say that's kind of like a day to day situation [having aspirations for high-level leadership positions]. Because, one day I'll be like, yes this [serving as student body president] is really going to prepare me for the future. But then other days I'm thinking, is this really something that I'm interested in continuing? So, I think it's kind of day to day, but overall, I would say it's strengthened it, because I kind of realize what it really means to be in the spotlight like that. (Interview 2)

Over time, however, her aspirations for high-level leadership strengthened. As she gained direct experience in a collegiate elite leadership role, she realized her capability and grew confidence within herself. She also had made some of the sacrifices needed to be an effective student leader, and felt better prepared to handle these potential sacrifices in the future. Kelly also knew

she likely would face obstacles pursuing a career in male-dominated fields, but wanted to be that woman that could show people she could do it.

I definitely have a desire to [pursue high-level leadership positions]. I think this has shown me that I am capable to do it. Before I kind of thought I was, but I was always very unsure if I was capable... But I think through this role I've learned that I can do it... My dream in life is to be a United States Senator, but in getting there, I'd love to be a partner at a law firm. I think that'd be awesome. The field that I want to go into, patent law, is very lucrative and... it's just hard. There's not a lot of women in it because you have to have some sort of engineering background to be able to do it. So, you're already in a limited field being a woman in engineering. And then you go into law, which is also a very limited field for women, and you're kind of carrying the two together and you have even less women. So, I want to be that leader that shows people, yeah you can do it, and even if you're in that small group of people who are accomplishing it, you can get it done. So, I definitely want to be a high-level leader. So, this has kind of shown me that I can do it. I know the sacrifices. I know what it's like, which has made me really want to do it. (Interview 3)

Brooke S. described similar feelings to Kelly. Midway through her term, she was questioning her interest in continuing to serve in leadership roles. A part of her was attracted to leadership because of the positive impact she was able to have on campus; however, another part of her was wondering if she wanted to continue holding so much responsibility and being watched by others.

[Serving as student body president] made me want to serve in leadership positions even more because when I see how people react to things that we've put out and how people,

how it's benefited the campus... Seeing people react to what we're trying to do, that makes me want to go on to leadership positions... because I know that leadership positions, I can make certain change in the world that I want to. But then, on the other side, I've had times this semester that I'm thinking, I'm never going to run for anything ever again. I can't do this. Or I just really want to just live a life where I don't have to be watched. I don't have to have this responsibility. (Interview 2)

In her final interview, towards the end of her tenure as student body president, Brooke S. reflected on her desire to hold high-level leadership positions in the future. She remembered questioning whether she wanted to deal with the stress and responsibility of leadership in a previous interview. Yet, as she reflected on the reasons why she practiced leadership, she realized the reasons why outweighed the tough aspects of being a leader. She also recognized that gaining experience dealing with the pressures of her student body presidency took away some of the fear she associated with leadership positions in the future.

I remember thinking that I don't want to do any leadership positions. I think sometimes I do, sometimes I don't because I was more focused on the stress of it, and how I hadn't gotten a hold of it yet, and how I was worried about what people were thinking. I know if I'm a leader eventually in my career, I'm still going to have worry about what people are thinking, or dealing with confidence issues... and feeling like a stressed leader. And that is not really the purpose of leadership. And so, now, I feel like I will definitely pursue and seek out leadership roles in my future because I got to realize again why I have been doing this... I'm starting to realize that, despite all the outside factors, and the fact that people are going to look at you. Of course, they are going to look at you if you are the leader of that position, or that organization. But now that I know how to deal with

that, I'm really able to think about the overall why of why I am in leadership... So now, I think that in my future career, I will seek leadership positions because of the why, and not stop just because I'm scared of what comes along with these leadership positions... I think now I have a hold of all that... so I'm not really as scared anymore. (Interview 3)

Meredith, like Brooke S., also felt that gaining direct experience as student body president helped her to better understand some of the challenging aspects of holding elite leadership positions, and that experience would help her to know what to expect in the future.

I think I really would enjoy holding a place like a congressional officer. I would really enjoy being a leader of a hospital or something. I don't think this role has scared me from doing that. I think it's definitely pressed me so if, or when I do get to a more, like, high-profile role, I'll be able to take criticism better, and understand. A lot of skills I've developed, and experiences I've had, and the sacrifices I've made, I know it'll help me navigate those situations when I'm in the workforce, there. At least a lot of this stuff won't be as new to me, so that might help me, or that might entice me a little bit in taking up leadership roles, because I feel like if you can be a student body president at a very large school, you can do anything. (Interview 2)

Women's aspirations for future elite leadership positions changed over the time they served as student body president. At the beginning of their term, some envisioned holding elite leadership positions, while others were not sure holding those positions would be in their future. However, as a result of gaining experience in their role as student body president, the women described solidified leadership aspirations that strengthened over time. As the women described their strengthened aspirations for future high-level leadership positions, the next subtheme of uplifting other women emerged.

Uplifting Other Women

Many women benefited tremendously from having strong female role models and felt it was important that they pay that concept forward to do their part in uplifting other women. Several worked intentionally on their campuses to encourage some of the women around them to pursue leadership positions. They wanted to help their female peers recognize their own leadership aspirations by realizing their own potential. Many women also had heightened aspirations for leadership positions in the future, as they wanted to be positive role models for women. They recognized that women seeing more women serve in leadership positions may encourage these women to seek out more of these positions for themselves. They also wanted to be in a place later in their career to empower more women in leadership.

Some women worked on initiatives specifically designed to support women on their campuses. Catalina described a program she created to empower women to realize their potential to run for high-level leadership positions.

This initiative that we are working on... we really just want to come together and not focus on being competitive, but rather for us to think that we are women and we need to support each other, and we need to uplift each other. The goal would be to have more girls to realize their potential, and realizing their worth, and they can be running for these big leadership positions. (Interview 1)

Emma discussed the importance of supporting women on campus, so they felt encouraged to run for office.

I think as students start to redefine who we [women] are on campus, and talking about the things that were passionate about, that's where we're starting to see more people be more interested and be more motivated in being able to run for bigger positions. When you're

walking into a room and other women are supporting you and you're able to follow someone's lead and show them that is not very scary. I'm really excited to see where it's going. The women on campus are feeling more strong and united as women. (Interview 1)

Leslie K. found it important to find ways to empower women to pursue leadership roles. She described a specific woman who she mentored in student government who was concerned about sounding too ambitious.

There's a senator named [Anne] and she was a ball of sunshine. Wherever she goes she brings so much energy. I've been able to interact with her one to one on multiple levels. I've asked her about her ambitions and where she sees herself in the organization. It's so refreshing for me to hear her say, "I don't want to come across as too ambitious, but I would love to be president one day." And I say back, "You should never have the first part of that sentence. Never apologize for being ambitious." I've had those moments, and interactions with people like [Anne], or junior senators that I do think will carry on the organization. To me it's 30 minutes out of my day to get coffee with them, but I really hope that it sticks with them to never get apologetic for wanting things. (Interview 3)

Like several other women, Casey also encouraged her female peers to aim for the student body president position and have belief in themselves by focusing on their qualifications.

I've been a proponent of supporting women, you know, being the first African American female president here. I'm going to be a proponent. I had a young woman come talk to me the other day. She's Latina. She would be the first Latina president here. So, I said

to her, “You can do it. Don't let that stop you. If you want to be good, do that, and don't look at any other factor besides the fact that you're qualified.” (Interview 3)

Along with uplifting women on campus, many women also discussed the importance of supporting and encouraging women leaders in the workforce. Several described the importance of continuing in leadership positions to continue to elevate the numbers of women in leadership. Viktoria stated, “I will pursue leadership opportunities anyway that I can. I think it's very important, especially for women, to get more representation in there (Interview 2). Ruth W. explained that it was important for her to serve in leadership positions in the future to support women.

It's for my own personal gain and women in general... I'm the only woman on my executive board for the student government and I look at other executive boards for other organizations, and there is definitely female leadership, but overwhelmingly, it is male, and I want to make sure that women feel empowered, that they can sit in those roles. (Interview 3)

Similarly, Lauren also spoke about the importance of serving in future leadership roles in order to be a role model for other women.

I have come to truly identify with being a woman in a leadership role. I've come to understand how important it is for my children, especially, for other family members or friends, to see a role model because I definitely think that I wouldn't be in this position, or pursued a position like this, if it weren't for seeing my mom putting a lot of hard work and then being passed up for certain opportunities, so like defying a lot of odds. I hope to have that same experience for my daughters, eventually, and not be okay with the men

who are already in riding the escalator to the top and not being challenged in many ways.

(Interview 2)

In a later interview, Lauren continued to speak about empowering women in leadership.

I would like to be in a position where I can empower more women. I think that's something that's really been placed in my heart over the past year, is how few women are still in leadership positions. How capable we are. There are now more women college graduates than there are men college graduates going through. There so few occupying some of the biggest leadership positions. (Interview 3)

Diana knew it was due to the encouragement and mentorship she received from others that helped her develop the confidence to be president. She plans to provide this empowerment to other women in her future to help they know they are capable.

I never saw myself being president. I never saw the title president before or after my name, but if I didn't have those people giving me encouragement and mentoring me, I wouldn't be in the place where I am... So, I think it's important to support women and that's something that's important to me in the future. I want to advocate for women and hopefully empower them to do more, to accomplish more, and know they are not limited to certain things because of their gender. (Interview 3)

Similarly, Sonia said:

I feel like a lot of people put a risk on me, and saw something in me that I didn't see in myself, and I think that it's really important to highlight that in other women, so they see it themselves. I know at the end of the day that I have this confidence and I have these skills, but what does it matter if I don't see other women standing up there with me? That is something that I feel especially passionate about right now. Supporting other

women, and finding other women, and telling them that they are capable of doing these things and that they should have the confidence to do them. That is what I will be doing in the future. I will be supporting women, and especially supporting women of color. I will tell women to run for something, or will support women in business, or I will write about the importance of women, anything that I can get into to... I think that's really important. (Interview 3)

Many of the women found it important to uplift women on their campus, and in the workforce in the future. They knew they benefited from the support of others when they made the decision to run for the office of student body president, so they found it important to continue encouraging women to run for office and seek out other leadership positions. Several also felt a responsibility to continue to serve in high-level leadership positions to help increase the numbers of women in elite leadership.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences of college women who serve as student body presidents. This study was also designed to explore the ways in which women student body presidents describe their leadership aspirations for elite leadership positions over the course of their presidency. As a strong advocate for engaging women in leadership opportunities during their time in college, this study expands the understanding of how college women view their roles as student leaders on campus and the supports and barriers they experience in the presidency. It also does something unique in that it discovers how college women describe their aspirations for holding elite leadership positions over time, and how they feel their experiences as student body president shape those leadership aspirations. Women serving as student body president have made a choice and commitment to serve in a collegiate elite leadership position, so we can learn much from their experiences, as well as they ways in which they describe their future aspirations for elite leadership roles and how those descriptions may change over time. This increased understanding may help us create additional paths to elite leadership positions for other college women. This chapter discusses the research findings, implications for research and practice, and directions for future research.

Key Findings and Discussion

Given that no study has specifically explored the experiences of women student body presidents while they were serving in their position, this study adds new perspectives on the ways in which college women describe their experiences holding a collegiate elite leadership position. Additionally, the multiple interviews conducted with the women provide an in-depth perspective as to how women grow and develop as leaders during their time in office. Further, this growth and development contributes to the ways in which the women describe their

leadership aspirations over time. This basic qualitative study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of undergraduate women serving in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president?
2. How do undergraduate women describe their future leadership aspirations for elite leadership roles throughout their tenure as student body president?

The following seven key findings of this study answer these research questions.

1. Women student body presidents feel tremendous responsibility executing the duties of the presidency. Carrying this responsibility forces them to make sacrifices in their personal lives, as they find it important to perform these duties at a high level.
2. Women student body presidents are other-oriented in their leadership. They prioritize people and care about enacting change for the good of the people around them.
3. Women student body presidents navigate internal and external hurdles in their president role related to their gender and the national climate.
4. Women student body presidents develop strengthened confidence in their leadership abilities over time served in the president role.
5. Women student body presidents benefit and learn from watching others, especially female role models, practice leadership.
6. Women student body presidents describe increased leadership aspirations for elite leadership positions during the course of their tenure as president.
7. Women student body presidents develop an increased desire over time to serve in elite leadership positions to be able to provide additional encouragement and support to other women in pursuing leadership opportunities.

These key findings represent the experiences of 20 women who served as student body president in 2017-2018 at a variety of institutions across the country and answer the two research questions of this study which explored the experiences and future leadership aspirations of women student body presidents. It is important to note that each of these findings does not stand alone. Rather, the findings intersect with one another through the experiences had by the women holding a collegiate elite leadership role. The women were challenged throughout their term, but still found great enjoyment in holding such a significant leadership position on their campus, which was able to enact real change. They put an incredible amount of time into the role, often sacrificing other areas of their lives, but felt a tremendous sense of responsibility to do the job to the best of their ability. The visibility of the presidency often made the women feel like they were under constant scrutiny, but they felt the extra attention was worth it, as they knew their role enabled them to empower people unlike other leadership roles had allowed them to do in the past. The woman faced hurdles throughout their presidency, but felt these experiences helped prepare them for future leadership roles, which in turn, helped them see those future leadership positions as more realistic and attainable. Facing these hurdles in their presidency also further encouraged the women to uplift other women to pursue leadership opportunities, which made them want to continue to serve in leadership roles in their future careers to have this power to elevate other women. Overall, the key findings build upon one another to describe the experiences and future leadership aspirations of women student body presidents. The remainder of this discussion section will describe how the findings align with previous research on women's leadership and the theoretical framework for this study: SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002).

Women's Leadership

This study provides important data about the experiences of college women serving in the collegiate elite leadership role of student body president. It was clear the women in this study prioritized people in their work as student body president. This sentiment was expressed clearly by Brooke S. when she stated, "I'm really able to think about the overall why of why I am in leadership... It's about helping people." Each of the women gave examples of reaching out to others to solicit input and feedback on big decisions. They found it important to gather input and buy-in from others and cared about how their decisions were going to impact people. Nearly all the women found this approach of involving others in decision-making to be counter to the way the men on their campus made decisions. Meredith compared men and women's processes for decision-making. "[Male SG colleague] ... takes a very, it's my decision, my decision, this is it, done. I'm more... well, I need to talk to this person, this person, let me get their input, and I need to make sure each group feels represented." Meredith's experiences involving others in decision-making, as well as the experiences described by the other participants, are consistent with research on women that indicates that women, more than men, tend to be more inclusive and strive to bring the voices of more people into the decision-making process (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Wenniger & Conroy, 2001).

Research on women's leadership also indicates that women are more likely to practice transformational leadership behaviors than men, such as mentoring and developing followers as leaders (Eagly et al., 2003; Vinkenbunrg et al., 2011). This concept was largely expressed by the women as they described how they sought to empower other students in student government by getting to know them on an individual level and finding ways for their strengths to be best utilized through work on projects and committees. Casey explained, "I like to know who I'm

working with on a personal level.” This personal understanding of each individual would help Casey get the most from her team, as well as help her strategize how best to empower each of her members based on their personal motivations. Many women also described themselves as mentors who found ways to develop followers into leaders, such as Emma who said, “I’m good at helping other students realize their own leadership skills... I’m good at bringing out the best in people.” The women’s focus on the development of followers into leaders aligns with the findings on a previous study on college women serving in student leadership roles (Haber-Curran, 2013). Haber-Curran’s (2013) participants were also proud of the ways in which they contributed to the development of their organizational members. In the current study, finding ways to provide encouragement and opportunity to younger students was a priority to the women, as they were grateful for the students and administrators who had done that for them.

The women also valued their relationships with administrators and fellow student government colleagues in their role as student body president. Many worked intentionally to create personal relationships with administrators, as they felt it helped them to be more effective in their positions. Nearly half of the women explicitly pointed out that they felt these personal relationships were stronger because they were women. Rose explained the difference between her relationships with administrators versus the previous male student body president. “I’ve always had more of a friendly relationship... He was always about business.” Previous studies on female student leaders have demonstrated that women describe their leadership styles as relationship-oriented (Damell, 2013; Romano, 1996). The women in this study worked throughout their term to get to know administrators and student colleagues on a personal level and found these strong relationships helped them push forward initiatives and more successfully collaborate. This was evidenced by Kelly, when she said, “I think that really helped with

developing those relationships to be able to get things done later in the year... because I knew the person, instead of just going into them and not knowing who they were.” These leadership behaviors exhibited by the women are consistent with previous research that indicates that women’s leadership styles tend to be more collaborative and relationship-based, rather than autocratic and directive (Astin & Leland, 1991; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Helgesen, 2011; Kezar et al., 2006; Rosener, 1990). Relational leaders want to get people on board and not just tell people what to do. They recognize the critical role that people play in accomplishing goals, so they find ways to build relationships with people and get them to buy-in to these organizational goals (Melero, 2011; Merrill-Sands, Kickul, & Ingols, 2005). Catalina described the importance of involving others in leadership. “You have to think of people first because whatever you're doing... it's not going to work... if they don't feel... they're valued. They need to be as much a part of this process that you are as a leader.” The women in this study found ways to get to know the people they were working with in their role as student body president. This not only helped them in accomplishing goals, but they also proudly described building deep and meaningful relationships based on these connections, which they were confident would carry over to their time post-graduation.

Along with prioritizing people in their leadership, the women also had an intense focus on enacting change in their campus community. Many were motivated to pursue the student body presidency, as they had a strong desire to affect change for the betterment of others. This was articulated by Margaret when she said, “I've always been a person that is attracted to leadership positions that bring positive change.” There are several studies that corroborate the finding that women are attracted to leadership positions because of their interest in using the process of leadership to create change (Astin & Leland, 1991; Mink Salas, 2010; Spencer, 2004;

Zimmerman, 2007). The women in this study found great enjoyment in being able to use their power as president to impact things positively. This power and ability to affect real change was different than previous leadership positions they had held. Alexis was proud of her previous work in other student organizations but felt those experiences could not compare to the real change she was able to affect in her role as student body president. “I loved all of those organizations, and they all had an impact on campus. But not in the way that SG has awarded me the opportunity to make change at an institutional and cultural level on this campus.”

Particularly relevant to the women’s terms in office were the social issues they faced in their presidency, which were shaped by the national climate. More than half of the women described instances when they used their president position to make a statement on a current social issue, which in turn, was often advocating for enacting changes to policy or practice on campus. Women cared tremendously about advocating for change on their campuses related to these social issues. Some described making changes to student handbooks and university bathroom policies to help their campuses be more inclusive of transgender people. Others described advocating for changes to the resources their university and state provided for mental health services on campus. Some worked with administrators to address the rising costs of textbooks, as well increase access to open-source textbooks. Several women found it important to release statements on current issues, such as DACA and the White nationalist rallies held in Charlottesville. Viktoria A., like many of the women, felt it was crucial that she advocate for providing additional support and resources to the marginalized communities on her campus after the incidents in Charlottesville. She said about her Charlottesville statement, “It was something that I could take action on and do something about. Maybe that's something that's too political for the president of the college to do, but I could.” Several women found it important they play a

role in enacting the change they wanted to see in society by affecting change on their own campuses. They felt their desire to enact change was intensified by what they saw going on at the national level. Further, many found their experience enacting change as student body president helped them to see the ability they could have in the future to affect change at a higher level by holding leadership positions in the future. This was expressed by Leslie K. when she said, “I think this role... compounded with what's going on in the federal landscape... wants me to play a more active role in society. I do think that I see myself moving towards higher level leadership positions.” The next portion of this discussion section will describe how the findings align with the theoretical framework for this study: SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002).

Theoretical Framework: SCCT

SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) provides a useful theoretical framework to explore the experiences and future leadership aspirations of college women serving in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president. According to SCCT, individuals develop interests in career-related activities as a result of self-efficacy beliefs and positive outcome expectations. When individuals are exposed to, and engaged in, career-related activities, they enhance their self-efficacy beliefs as related to particular tasks and develop expectations about outcomes they will experience. People are more likely to develop interest in career-related activities in which they have high self-efficacy beliefs and positive outcome expectations. Thus, it can be theorized that women are more likely to develop aspirations for leadership positions when they see themselves as competent leaders and expect good things to result from their continued leadership. On the other hand, women are less likely to develop leadership aspirations when they question their competence and expect bad things to result from their continued leadership (Lent et al., 1994; 2002). The following two sections connect the findings of this study to two of

the core constructs of SCCT: self-efficacy (leader efficacy) and outcome expectations (leadership outcome expectations). The third section will connect the findings to background and environmental contexts, which are also theorized to impact career decisions (Lent et al., 1994; 2002).

Leader efficacy. Through multiple interviews with the women student body presidents in this study, it was clear that nearly all of them reported feelings of increased confidence in their leadership abilities each time we spoke. In other words, the women had increases in their leader efficacy over the time they served in a positional leadership role. At the beginning of the term, they found themselves questioning their capabilities, but as months passed serving in the role, the women's belief in their capacity to effectively lead improved. Past studies demonstrate that students' participation in positional leadership roles contribute to increased levels of leader efficacy and confidence (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Sax, 2008). This growth in confidence was evident in Lauren's remarks. "Coming in with a little bit of insecurity... is so common for female leaders... especially in relation to our male counterparts... But stepping into a role... and to have successfully done it, is a huge confidence booster." Dugan and Komives (2007) point out that the impact of positional leadership roles on leader efficacy can be even greater for women. This study used multiple interviews to explore some of the activities and experiences that women felt contributed to their increase in leader efficacy and confidence. Participants' descriptions of building leader efficacy were consistent with three of Bandura's (1997) factors considered critical in building self-efficacy beliefs: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion.

Enactive mastery experiences. Mastery experiences have the strongest influence on efficacy beliefs. As a person overcomes challenges and experiences success in a task, their level

of mastery increases, which consequently builds one's confidence in accomplishing the task (Bandura, 1997). The women in this study discussed the importance of gaining direct experience in practicing leadership as instrumental to strengthening confidence in their leadership ability, which is consistent with a previous study on female student leaders that found direct experience practicing leadership taught them best in how to be a leader (Romano, 1996). Many of the women in this study questioned their abilities as they begin the position, but as they continued doing the job, they gained more skills learning the ins and outs of the presidency; hence, they experienced a growth in confidence by increasing their leader efficacy. This growth was described by Diana when she said, "I'd say that being president, doing it, I'm much more familiar with the duties, and how things work around campus. So that makes me feel much more confident." Based on the experiences recounted by the participants, it can be understood that as the women gained more experience in their leadership role as student body president, their level of mastery increased, and they became more confident in their ability to lead. The more they practiced leadership in their role, the more mastery they experienced. Along with describing higher levels of confidence in their overall leadership capabilities, the women also described the growth they experienced in several areas, including improved communication, public speaking, negotiation, conflict management, and organization skills, which is consistent with several studies that have demonstrated the tremendous growth that students experience by gaining direct experience doing the job of student body president (Dias, 2009; Hellwig-Olson, 2000; May, 2009).

An important aspect of mastery experiences contributing to one's increased efficacy beliefs is that the task must be challenging enough that some challenges will have to be overcome, but the person will ultimately be successful in the task (Bandura, 1997). The women

all discussed that serving in the student body president was challenging and at times, quite difficult. Many were challenged in representing the student body when representing their constituents meant they needed to suppress some of their own views. This was expressed by Alexis when she said, “That’s one thing that's hard to navigate... because I know I have to represent all students, and not just myself and my personal views. Even if I feel a certain way, other students might not.” Yet, Alexis found her experience dealing with the challenges of representing all helped her learn how to navigate similar situations in the future. She stated, “I think this has been a good experience for me because I think it will help me in the future with what I want to do.” As she experienced success in overcoming the challenge of representing all in her presidency, she gained confidence in her ability to handle these types of situations in the future.

Many women were also challenged in the student body president position by making hard decisions. Yet, consistent with self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), overcoming the challenge of making hard decisions was cited by many of the women as something that contributed to their increased feelings of confidence. In the present study, the women felt they had not faced these tough decisions in previous leadership roles on campus, so being confronted by these challenging situations was testing their leadership abilities. However, as they continued to make decision after decision, they gained practice and faith in their ability to make the tough calls. Due to their ability to overcome these challenges, the women’s efficacy beliefs became stronger. Leslie K.’s remarks articulated her experience building confidence in dealing with some of the challenging aspects of being student body president. “I’ve had... the experience of making tough decisions and tough calls... Decision after decision... I slowly realized that, yes, I am right for this role, I shouldn't be doubting myself... So, I think my confidence has definitely increased.” Another

study researching the impact of student government participation on students found that developing decision-making skills was a positive outcome of students' participation (Kuh & Lund, 1994).

Vicarious experiences. Vicarious experiences are another means to develop efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Vicarious experiences allow people to evaluate their own capabilities in relation to someone else's by observing how others perform. The women explained benefiting greatly from watching others practice leadership. They learned a lot from observing previous student body presidents perform in the role, as well as other senior leaders on their campus. Many women especially learned from watching their female role models be strong leaders, which was consistent with Damell's (2013) study on former student body presidents that found that women were attracted to strong female role models. Seeing others engage in a task successfully can raise one's efficacy beliefs as the mere observation can demonstrate that if someone else can accomplish a particular task, then the task must be doable (Bandura, 1997). After watching a previous female student body president lead, Morrissey explained how she was inspired to run for office. "When I came in, the president at the time... was just total pure inspiration... I thought she was so cool, and I thought... I want to run, and I want to do it exactly like she did." In this study, the women student body presidents gained confidence by being able to observe other women be strong and powerful. Past research shows that women benefit from same-gender role models (Lockwood, 2006). The women in this study benefited by seeing their female role models be tough, but compassionate, thick-skinned, but approachable, and nurturing, but not afraid to hold people accountable. By watching these women be strong and powerful, they realized they could also be strong and powerful leaders as student body presidents, as well as later in their career. Tracy C. explained how watching female role models

practice leadership helped her to see herself in leadership positions in the future. “Seeing somebody that you can relate to in just gender alone—a woman that is in a powerful position... I could be that someday... It feels good to see somebody succeeding that you can kind of model yourself after.” Because women often face gender-related barriers in their careers, it may be critical for them to see other women who have been successful in leadership. By watching their female role models perform leadership, the participants were able to see someone else be successful in leadership and believed they could also be successful in leadership themselves.

Verbal persuasion. Verbal persuasion is a third way to strengthen one’s efficacy. It occurs when an individual receives positive feedback from credible and trustworthy people who they see as significant (Bandura, 1997). The women in this study described the importance of receiving encouragement from others, including fellow students and college administrators, in their decision to run for student body president, which aligns with previous studies on women student leaders that found that women are positively affected by receiving encouragement and validation when making the decision to run for office (Mink Salas, 2010; Zimmerman, 2017). The women often questioned their capability and qualifications to run for office, but the positive feedback they received from others helped them believe in themselves. Their confidence was boosted when they were encouraged by people they held in high esteem. This was expressed by Lauren when she explained it was the encouragement of others that eventually gave her the boost she needed to pursue the student body presidency. “I had a lot of people come to me and say... You should step into this role... I said okay, if everyone's coming to me and everyone's seen this in me, who am I to say that I'm incapable?”

Receiving positive feedback from others was also important to building their leader efficacy while serving in the position of student body president, which is consistent with a

previous study on female student leaders (Romano, 1996). Many women discussed the positive feedback they received from members of the governing bodies at their institutions as particularly effective at helping them build confidence within themselves. Through their role as student body president, they had several opportunities to present to, and interact with, members of their university governing board and high-level administrators. They were especially encouraged by hearing positive things about their performance from people who they perceived to have significant stature and credibility at the university. This was stated by Kelly. "Meeting with the campus [governing board], and hearing from them that I'm doing a good job. That just means a lot to me, just because they are such influential people." A few women felt this positive feedback provided them with a significant boost to their confidence, which then in turn, pushed them to pursue more advanced leadership roles, internships, and job opportunities. The positive reinforcement helped the women realize that they were viewed as valuable and credible leaders to the campus community.

As described previously, women's description of building leader efficacy was consistent with the factors Bandura (1997) considered critical in building self-efficacy beliefs, including enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, and verbal persuasion. SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) provides a model for us to demonstrate that increased leader efficacy leads to increased leadership aspirations and this was consistent with the women's descriptions of their experiences. As they continued to gain experience as student body president, observe others practice leadership, and receive positive feedback, they felt increased levels of confidence. They felt their capacity to lead had improved over their time in office. Along with this boost in confidence and leader efficacy, women also described their aspirations for leadership positions strengthening over time. Several women felt they had realized their own talent and potential to

be an effective leader through the student body presidency and felt they developed a set of skills that was preparing them to take on future high-level leadership roles. Consistent with SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) and Yeagley et al.'s (2010) study on the leadership aspirations of college women, leader efficacy contributed to increased leadership aspirations. As the women developed more leader efficacy within themselves, they also described stronger aspirations for leadership positions in the future. Catalina expressed this when she said, "Being in this role has definitely strengthened those aspirations for me... because I've really been able to see my potential and what kind of impact it can have on people just in this short time that I've served." The next section will describe the second core construct of SCCT: outcome expectations, and its impact on women's leadership aspirations.

Leadership outcome expectations. Outcome expectations during the women's student body presidency included mostly positive expectations. At the beginning of their term, when asked what they expected would happen as a result of them being president, most women expected they would accomplish their goals and be able to look back at their term with pride. They had the positive expectation that they would be successful in the role. Most of the women did not anticipate negative outcomes associated with their student body presidency. A couple anticipated working with administrators was going to be a potential barrier to their success but ended up creating successful relationships with administrators. A few anticipated having issues with relationships, especially in terms of balancing being president and being a friend. They valued relationships with people but were concerned about how their role as president may impact how people see them in their relationships. This struggle was expressed by Margaret T. when she said, "Friends are applying for positions and you have to make the call on what's best for the university and not best for your friend's feelings... and also, not feeling

massive amounts of guilt yourself.” This is consistent with studies that have found that college women anticipate relationship problems to be associated with leadership roles (Killeen et al., 2006; Lips, 2000; 2001), as well as with a study on female student leaders that found that one of the women’s biggest challenges being a leader on campus was balancing being a leader and a friend (Haber-Curran, 2013). However, as they continued in their roles, no women in this study described relationships problems as a significant challenge they faced, which is counter to the findings in previous studies. A few anticipated the challenge but did not face it in a way that they thought was significant. Instead most of the challenges in the women’s term as president were related to areas most of them had not necessarily expected going into the role, including the constraints of time and the visibility of the position.

The women put an incredible amount of time into the role, often sacrificing other areas of their lives, in order to do the job to the best of their ability. They felt constrained by time not only in their own personal lives based on the 24/7 nature of the job, but also in terms of how much they were able to accomplish during their term. Lilly expressed the pressure she felt in trying to accomplish all she set out to accomplish in her presidency. “I feel like one year is such a short time and I have so many things that I want to do... It's just a lot of pressure... I want to accomplish a lot of things.” The women were driven to achieve the promises they had made during their campaign to their constituents. They had set out to enact change in their presidency and were challenged when they faced the barrier of time. They were willing to give less time to their academics, sleep, and personal relationships in order to spend more time enacting change in their presidency. They cared about implementing positive change because of their focus on prioritizing people and the tremendous responsibility they felt in the power of the presidency.

The visibility of the presidency was also a challenge, as the public nature of their position often made the women feel like they were working in the spotlight and under constant scrutiny. Diana felt very visible in the role. “Ever since I got in this position, I feel that I am in a fishbowl and people are always going to be watching you... It’s very important that you maintain that image for yourself and for the organization.” The women’s experiences feeling like they were working in the spotlight are similar to previous studies on student body presidents that found students often felt a lack of privacy in the position (Dias, 2009; Hellwig-Olson, 2000; May, 2009). Further, May (2009) found the two women in his study of six participants felt they had higher levels of scrutiny placed on them as compared to their male peers because of their gender. The women in this study expressed similar sentiments as several felt they had to think more about their appearance in the role. They thought about their presentation in term of what they were wearing, and through their hair and make-up. Brooke S. stated, “I have felt this type of pressure... to wear better clothes throughout the week... I put makeup on every day... I don’t want them pointing me out and being like, ‘Wow, the student body president looks like that today.’ ” Some of the women of color also felt they were under closer scrutiny working as president. Casey said, “Being an African American woman in the position, and being the first African American woman in that position, I think that is where most of the eyes come from.” Another way the women found they were under scrutiny was in the way their leadership style was perceived by others. This perceived role incongruity and the double bind will be discussed in further detail in the next section about background and environmental contexts.

Although the women described the constraints of time and the visibility of the role as challenges they faced in their position, they felt a tremendous responsibility to do the job at a high level and felt these were some of the sacrifices necessary in holding a collegiate elite

leadership position. They also felt these experiences helped them to better expect what was to come in future elite leadership positions. They thought the experience dealing with the pressures and sacrifices necessary to be a successful student body president would better prepare them to handle the pressures and sacrifices of holding elite leadership positions in their careers. Kelly explained her increased desire to serve in elite leadership positions based on her experiences serving as student body president. “I definitely want to be a high-level leader... This has kind of shown me that I can do it. I know the sacrifices. I know what it’s like, which has made me really want to do it.” The women’s experiences of success in dealing with these challenges helped them to envision future leadership positions more concretely, as well as develop the expectation and confidence that they were capable of handling these challenges again in the future based on the skills they had developed throughout their term.

Another aspect of the experience the women did not necessarily expect going into the presidency was the enjoyment they would feel in holding such a powerful student leadership position on campus. They began their terms feeling quite overwhelmed by the immensity of the position, but as they gained experience in the role, they realized they really liked to be the one in charge. Several women were nervous upon leaving the position that it would be hard to give up the power of the presidency, especially because they likely would be starting all over again in the workforce upon graduation. Realizing they really liked being responsible for leading a large, multi-faceted organization like student government, and realizing they could be successful in the role, helped the women develop positive expectations for future leadership positions. Tracy C. discussed having increased leadership aspirations after serving as student body president. “This has made me, even more than before, want that for my future. I really enjoy the level of leadership... and also managing a group of people. I've gotten a lot of joy out of that.” Now that

the women in this study have experienced a position with such power and responsibility, they were looking forward to having the opportunity to serve in high-level leadership positions in the future. SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) theorizes that individuals are more likely to engage in activities that lead to positive outcomes; therefore, women developing positive outcome expectations about future leadership positions are more likely to engage in these leadership positions in the future. The women in this study described increased leadership aspirations as a result of developing a more realistic look at what it was like to hold an elite leadership positions. This realistic look at high-level leadership helped them to develop the positive expectation that they could now handle the challenges with the experience of student body president. The next section will explore the influence of background and environmental contexts on women's experiences as student body president.

Background and environmental contexts. Along with leader efficacy and leadership outcome expectations, this study also considered the background of participants, in terms of gender, and the environmental contexts the women dealt with in their student body presidency. Background and environmental contexts are theorized to impact one's self-efficacy according to SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002). In this study, gender intersected with the women's environment, which caused many of the women to experience hurdles in their role as student body president, including perceived role incongruity (Koenig et al., 2011) and the double bind (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Perceived role incongruity. The women in this study did not describe dealing with overt instances of gender discrimination in their role student body president. They felt they were treated equally on campus and, for the most part, felt their campus welcomed having a woman in such a high-profile student leadership position on campus. For most campuses though, having a

woman serve as student body president was still not typical. Only three women reported that women commonly served as president on their campus. And more often, the women described being the first woman to serve in the position in several years. This indicates that the glass ceiling (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986) may have been broken on each campus, although one could argue the glass ceiling is not truly broken until it is common for women to serve in this role. With the lack of women serving as student body president on most campuses, it is clear that college women are still navigating the leadership labyrinth (Eagly & Karau, 2007) in making their way to the student body presidency. The paths women took to the presidency were beyond the scope of this study, but past studies on this topic found that women who do run for student body president have a few similarities, including having a history of being involved in high school and college governance activities, possessing a desire to create positive change on campus, and being encouraged by others (Damell, 2013; Mink-Salas, 2010; Spencer, 2004; Zimmerman, 2017). The women in this study described similar experiences. Most described being quite involved in pre-college and college activities and all described their desire to enact change through their presidency. It also became very clear that in making the decision to run for president, most women in this study described the critical importance of the encouragement they received from others. They benefited from hearing that someone believed in them. This support boosted their confidence and helped them believe they could be successful in the role.

Interestingly, several women described being aware of a statistic that women often have to be asked several times before they make the choice to run for office; yet, they still described needing the encouragement from others to run. A few pointed out that they needed to be encouraged by many more than what this statistic indicated. Emma stated, “There is a statistic that women have to be asked 8 times before they agree to run... I think I had a number that was

more than eight. I think I was probably up to 15 or 20 times.” In following up with the statistic some of the women mentioned, I could not find empirical research that supported that women needed to be asked several times before they run for office. Instead, research conducted by Lawless and Fox (2008; 2010), noted researchers in women and politics, indicated that women are just as likely to run for office when they are encouraged by others; however, they are less likely to be asked to run for office than men (Lawless & Fox, 2008; 2010). This shows us that women still need to be encouraged to pursue leadership positions.

In regard to the women’s experiences campaigning, none of the women described experiencing a chilly climate toward women when they ran for president, as had been found in previous studies (Spencer, 2013). Yet, many did find it was unusual on their campus to have two women run on a dual female president and vice president ticket, or to have two women running against one another in the election. Leslie K. said, “Two women had never run together. There had never been an all-female ticket ever.” Additionally, many of the women did not have a lot of places to look to find good examples of women running for student body president. Margaret T. described the barrier of having a lack of women in the student body president position to model herself after. “Being the first [woman] student body president in 13 years was also challenging because... I didn’t have anyone to look up to. Is running a campaign different when it comes to gender?” This is similar to the barrier that many women face in the workplace due to second-generation gender bias. Second-generation gender bias refers to organizational structures and informal practices that favor men and disadvantage women, such as having a lack of female role models in the workplace (Ibarra et al., 2013). Second-generation gender bias does not deliberately exclude or harm women, rather it is a bias that creates an environment where women may fail to reach their full potential without men, or even women, noticing it. Although the

women in this study did not feel they faced a chilly climate in their election, many were still navigating uncharted territory, even when they did not realize that themselves. On most campuses it was unusual for women to be running for student body president; therefore, most did not have other women to look up to that had successfully run for office. Luckily, the women in this study made the choice to pursue the presidency; however, research demonstrates that second-generation bias, such as a lack of female role models, may inhibit women's advancement to leadership roles (Ibarra et al., 2013; Sturm, 2001), so how many college women are not making the choice to run for office because of this barrier? This is a further indication of the potential leadership labyrinth (Eagly & Karau, 2007) women must navigate in seeking out leadership positions.

Although women did not feel they dealt with issues of overt gender discrimination in the presidency, they did feel they had to face barriers that their male peers did not experience. Several women had experiences where their male vice president was assumed to be the president, which is consistent with Spencer's (2004) study on former female student body presidents, as well as research on women in the workplace that indicates women face challenges in being perceived by others as leaders (Koenig et al., 2011). There were many stories recounted where the women attended meetings where their male colleagues were greeted as president, and the women were either ignored or assumed to be the vice president or secretary. Diana said about this experience, "If you have a meeting, you walk in the room. People say, "Oh hi, who are you? Vice President? Secretary?" Several women felt this experience played into gender stereotypes that people have about leadership where they assume the man is in charge, while the woman plays a supportive role. This mismatch is consistent with Eagly and Karau's (2002) role incongruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders that posits that people evaluate women's

leadership potential less favorably based on their stereotypically held beliefs that connect masculinity with effective leadership. The women were not seen as student body presidents because people would make a quick assumption based on gender stereotypes where men are perceived to be the leader. This frustrated the women as they felt they were not being taken as seriously because of their gender. This sentiment is similar to the findings in two previous studies where college women felt they struggled with other's perceptions of gender role incongruity in the student body president position (Mink-Salas, 2010; Spencer, 2004)

Double bind. Most of the women explained experiencing the double bind as another one of the barriers they faced in leadership, as it often made them question themselves and think about how others were perceiving their leadership. Brooke S. explained her internal dialogue when thinking about her leadership. "I have to think, am I being aggressive? No, you're not being aggressive. Are you being too emotional? No, you're not being too emotional... I don't think that some of my male counterparts have to deal with that." The women described instances of trying to strike the right balance between not coming off as too strong in their leadership, and also being strong enough to not be seen as too weak. The women thought this experience was unique to them as women and likely not something their male peers were thinking about. Nicole expressed this when she said, "I feel like men can be more aggressive and it's more acceptable when they're in leadership roles, but with women, you really have to word what you say really carefully, or it can be misconstrued." This is consistent with the literature that indicates that women are often evaluated against a masculine standard of leadership and feel stuck in the double bind (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women are expected to exhibit communal characteristics, but when they act friendly, helpful, and sympathetic, they are not seen as a leader. On the other hand, when they practice agentic qualities typically associated with male

leaders, like being aggressive or ambitious, they come as too strong and are viewed unfavorably (Catalyst, 2007; Heilman, 2001; Koenig et al., 2011; Ridgeway, 2001). Women cannot win either way, and hence, find themselves stuck in the double bind (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007). As Kelly described, “It’s been difficult to be able to navigate because you do want to come off strong, but you don’t want to come off as a bitch. I do consciously make an effort to really strike that balance... It’s hard.”

The women’s experiences dealing with the double bind in this study are different than previous findings. Damell (2013) interviewed 14 women who had previously served as student body president and found her participants had not experienced the double bind in their student body presidencies; rather, they felt they had not experienced the double bind until later on in their careers in the workplace. There could be a couple of reasons for this divergence between studies. First, Damell (2013) interviewed women several years after they had served as student body president; therefore, they may have experienced more overt forms of gender bias in the workplace, which may have made anything gender-related they experienced in the student body presidency less memorable. Or perhaps the women did not realize this gender bias during their time in college as they were less attuned to it. Second, the women in the current study discussed the impact the 2016 U.S. presidential election had on their presidency where they saw a less qualified man win against a more qualified woman in Hillary Clinton. Several women saw Clinton treated unfairly based on her gender and perhaps were more cognizant of the gender-related issues they dealt with in their own presidency based on what they saw happening in the national context. Lauren described, “One thing that I especially saw in the [2016 U.S. presidential election] ... It’s harder for a woman to step in because if you’re too soft, then you’re weak and if you’re too strong, you’re just labeled a certain five letter word.” Another recent

study conducted on college women running for student body president found that the 2016 U.S. presidential election also had an impact on women's experience (Zimmerman, 2017).

Zimmerman (2017) found that her participants saw parallels between their campus elections and the U.S. presidential election, similar to the women in the present study. Some were worried to run against, and lose to, men who were less qualified, as they felt that is what happened in the national election with Clinton and Trump. Some of Zimmerman's (2017) participants were also told by other students they should not be running as women because very qualified men were running. None of the participants in the present study recounted that experience; however, some did find gender bias in their election process. A few found that their opponents' supporters thought being male was an advantage. Catalina stated, "Some of the people that were obviously rooting for my [male] opponent... tried to use that to their advantage saying like, 'do you really want girls?'" A few others also heard from peers that two women would not be able to win on a dual female president and vice president ticket. Meredith expressed this when she said, "It became two females and I didn't think much of it, but then people started saying things to me like, they'll never win... they'll never win because they are two women."

The women in this study described strategies they used to deal with the gender stereotypes they faced in their leadership. They thought strategically about their communication through speeches, email, and conversation in trying to strike the right balance. Margaret T. described having a team give her real-time feedback during a campaign debate about whether she was coming off as too aggressive or too soft to the audience in her responses. Morrissey tried to include smiley face emoticons in emails to her staff to come off friendlier, while Meredith took out exclamation points in her emails to demonstrate her strength. Some women tried to hide their emotions to not be seen as too weak, while others thought carefully about the words they

used when trying to hold staff accountable to not come off as too strong. Others tempered their reactions, so they would not be considered “bitchy.” This word came up often throughout the interviews, as the women knew people could be quick to judge female leaders in that way. This constant regulation in their lives indicates the continued ways that sexism affects women’s day-to-day lives and their leadership. In dealing with the gender stereotypes that women face in leadership, the women in this study benefited from being able to watch other women be strong and powerful leaders. As mentioned in the previous section on women building leader efficacy in their roles as president, the women credited female role models as a support that helped them deal with gender stereotypes in leadership. By watching other women in powerful leadership roles, they were able to gain some tips and tricks they could adapt in their own leadership style. Lauren expressed this when she said about one of her female role models, “She really is able to strike that balance where she cares for you, you can tell she cares for you, she's motherly, but in that same way, she's not afraid to discipline.” Watching women leaders also helped the women to see these positions as more attainable in their own future.

This study highlights some of the contextual factors that may have a positive and negative impact on women’s experiences in the student body presidency, as well as some of the contextual factors that may impact her aspirations for leadership positions the future. The women described receiving encouragement from others and being able to look up to female role models as two of the most important supports they received during their presidency. In addition to the barriers of feeling constrained by time and working in the spotlight, which were discussed in the leadership outcome expectations section, the women also faced barriers related to gender-based stereotypes, which caused them to have a continual internal dialogue with themselves about striking the right balance as a leader.

Reflections on Learning

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and future leadership aspirations of undergraduate women who serve as student body presidents. An amazing result of pursuing this study's purpose was the reflection and learning experienced by many of the women through their participation in the study. I acknowledge this reflection and learning by the participants was not the intent of my research, nor something I expected, but in my data analysis process, I found it to be quite powerful. One way that students learn through their experience is through the practice of reflection. Reflective practice, a term used most often in formal educational settings, "can be seen as both a structure to aid critical thinking and improve existing understanding and a method for promoting autonomous and deep learning through enquiry" (Clegg, 2012, p. 2). Reflection can assist people in being aware of their own learning and in turn, help people direct and change their learning. Throughout this study, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences with a variety of interview questions in three interviews. Through this reflection, participants were able to think about what they were learning during their student body presidency and how they could use that learning to shape their leadership style in the future. In closing the final interview, many of the women expressed an appreciation for participating in this study as it helped prompt their own reflection. Catalina stated, "I feel sad we're not going to chat anymore. It's nice to be able to talk through things with someone as it's nice way to reflect" (Interview 3). Similarly, Tracy C. said, "I've really enjoyed being able to talk to someone who was outside of my world here. It's been helpful in reflecting and looking at things in a different way with an outside perspective." (Interview 3). Brooke S. expressed similar sentiments when she said:

I've really loved having all these conversations because it's the only time that I've really been able to reflect on these experiences, and my leadership, and my time as president. It shows me how much I've gone through and learned through this experience. (Interview 3)

Through participation in the study, the women were prompted to reflect on their experiences in the student body president position at different points in time, which enabled them to think intentionally about what they were learning throughout their tenure. The multiple interviews gave women the opportunity to compare their expectations of serving as student body president to the reality of serving in the position, as well as reflect upon what they were challenged by in the position and how they overcame those challenges. This reflective practice enabled the women to maximize their learning. Clegg (2012) stated, "Expressing reflection means finding a 'voice' by which to express thoughts and inevitably this increases confidence and self-awareness in ability" (p. 3). The more the participants were asked about their experiences, the more they needed to look back and reflect upon their experiences and subsequently learn from those experiences. During the interviews, many of the women indicated that several of the interview questions addressed topics they had not been thinking about in their presidency thus far. For instance, when asked about her greatest success as president, Emma stated, "Oh my goodness, I need a second to get back into that reflection mode for our interview. I don't think about these things every day" (Interview 3). Through these interviews, participants were able to reflect on what they were learning in ways they likely would not have done had they not participated in the study.

To address trustworthiness in the study, I used the strategy of member checking, which is described in more detail in chapter three. After I conducted all three interviews, I sent a

summary of findings to each participant after the third interview to insure accuracy (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). Through member checking, I found that women found it helpful in reviewing the summary of findings that other women across the country were having similar experiences in the student body president position. In the position of student body president on their own campus, they felt a bit lonely at the top, but several women found it helpful knowing there were other women student body presidents across the country that had similar feelings. Additionally, through the member checking procedure, a few women were able to reflect on their experience in comparison to other women student body presidents and make additional revelations about their own leadership style. Some women realized some things about their own leadership they did not realize about themselves prior to reading the summary of findings. Through reflection, Meredith described her realization that she prioritized people and relationships in leadership.

What surprised me and opened my eyes was how I value and use relationships to make progress. Creating these strong relationships with people I work with has helped me so much in getting people to buy into my vision and it has also made it easier for those people to voice their opinions and concerns, and it makes what we do so much stronger. It also makes it more personal, so when something happens in the organization, it's truly difficult to not bring that into your personal life, which furthers the point of a 24/7 job. I completely believe that the reason we have been able to do so much is because of the relationships I've built and strengthened with my peers and also with administration. Molly also reflected on her experience in student government through the member checking procedure. While she felt her institution's student government may be fairly low profile in comparison to some of the other women in the study, she still found herself motivated by the

ability to enact change through her leadership, regardless of the lack of accountability through her institution.

If our student government produced no major legislation for the entire year, no students, or very few students, would notice. I have to hold myself accountable. A goal that I had at the beginning of my term was to boost our presence, particularly among students, but as other issues have come up, that goal fell by the wayside. I cared more about taking care of issues and solving problems than focusing on public relations.

Overall, the women learned a tremendous amount through their experience serving as student body president. I also believe that participation in this study helped them to intentionally reflect on their experiences as student body president, which further contributed to their learning.

This reflective practice may be particularly helpful for women serving in collegiate elite leadership roles. The participants in this study discussed the tremendous responsibility that came along with being student body president, along with the challenges of the constraints of time and working in the spotlight. Having the opportunity to reflect helped the participants take a moment to step aside from these tremendous duties to intentionally think about their experiences in the president role. Taking time to participate in this reflection can be powerful for the leadership development of women. Porter (2017) described the power of this reflection when she stated:

Reflection gives the brain an opportunity to pause amidst the chaos, untangle and sort through observations and experiences, consider multiple possible interpretations, and create meaning. This meaning becomes learning, which can then inform future mindsets and actions. For leaders, this “meaning making” is crucial to their ongoing growth and development. (p. 1)

Reflective practice could be especially powerful for women in collegiate elite leadership roles as they do not have as many role models to find support and may be challenged trying to be a role model for others while still being effective in this important and highly visible role. This reflection can help elevate women's learning in leadership.

Implications

This study has useful theoretical implications for research, as well as practical implications which are valuable for university administrators in supporting college women's leadership. The following sections outline the implications for each of these areas.

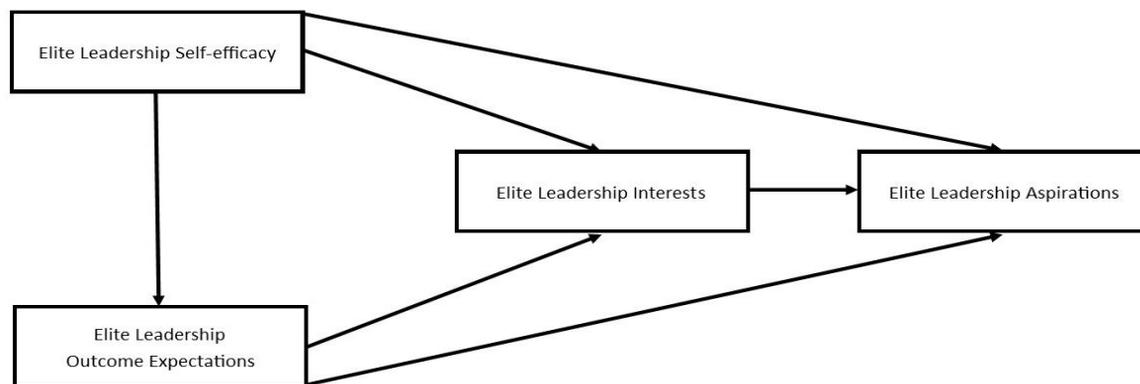
Theoretical Implications

The findings lead to important theoretical implications. First, the findings provide further support for using SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) in understanding the development of women's leadership aspirations. Yeagley et al.'s (2010) quantitative study using SCCT found that self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations contribute to increased leadership aspirations in women. This qualitative study found similar results; yet, in addition, this study was able to delve deeper into how women describe the learning experiences that shaped their leadership aspirations over time. A limitation of Yeagley et al.'s (2010) study was that the sample included first year students who likely did not have much leadership experience and may not have had as much personal insight in responding to the numerous questionnaires used in the study. Additionally, Yeagley et al.'s (2010) study only captured participant's responses at one point, rather than using longitudinal data that measured changes over time. This study aimed to further support the use of SCCT in studying women's leadership aspirations, while also making up for these limitations. By using a qualitative design, including a sample of participants with significant leadership experience in college, and interviewing participants three times during their tenure as student

body president, I was able to more closely explore women's experiences over time in a collegiate elite leadership positions, as well as compare the ways in which women described their leader efficacy, leadership outcome expectations, and leadership aspirations over time. As the women in this study grew more confident in their role as president (therefore developing increased leader efficacy), and realized they liked being in charge and could handle the challenges of leadership (therefore developing positive leadership outcome expectations), they described increased leadership aspirations, which is consistent with SCCT.

Because of the qualitative nature of this study, I also explored the aspects of the women's learning experiences they explained as having significant influence on their leader efficacy, leadership outcome expectations, and leadership aspirations. SCCT theorizes that learning experiences contribute to an individual's self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Consistent with SCCT, and as explained in the previous discussion section of this chapter, the women described the importance of several learning experiences to their own development of leader efficacy and positive leadership outcome expectations, including gaining direct experience in practicing leadership, receiving positive reinforcement, and observing others practicing leadership. The women also described their increased leader efficacy and increased positive leadership outcome expectations as contributing to their increased leadership aspirations. According to the SCCT model, and the adapted SCCT model used by Yeagley et al. (2010; see Figure 3 below), self-efficacy contributes to outcome expectations, and both self-efficacy and outcome expectations contribute to leadership aspirations. However, the results of this study indicate that there perhaps should also be an arrow pointing from outcome expectations to self-efficacy. Many women found that developing positive outcome expectations for leadership positions helped them grow confidence in their ability to lead. The women experienced success

in dealing with some of the challenges they faced in their presidency, including dealing with the time constraints and visibility of the position. By experiencing success in dealing with these challenges, the women were able to envision future leadership positions more concretely, as well as develop the expectation they could handle these challenges again in the future based on the skills they had developed throughout their term. By developing positive leadership outcome expectations, along with overcoming challenges in their presidency, they felt more confident in their ability to handle new challenges in their future.



*Figure 3. Adapted SCCT Model for College Women’s Aspirations for Elite Leadership Positions from “Modeling college women’s perceptions of elite leadership positions with Social Cognitive Career Theory,” by E. E. Yeagley, L. M. Subich, and D. M. Tokar, 2010, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 77, p. 32.*

Another important component to SCCT that this study explored, which Yeagley et al.’s (2010) did not include, was the contextual factors in participants’ background and environment. Background and environmental contexts are theorized to impact one’s self-efficacy according to SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002); therefore, it is an important component to include when studying women’s leadership experiences and leadership aspirations. Through the incorporation of these

contextual factors, I was able to learn more about the ways in which women's gender affected the experiences and future leadership aspirations of college women. In regard to gender, women did have gendered experiences while serving as student body president. Although no women described experiencing a chilly environment on campus while campaigning for student body president, many did find it was unusual for a women to be running for student body president on their campus, with several women indicating they were one of only a handful of women who had served in the role and several others explaining they were the first woman to serve in several years at their institution. This lack of women serving as student body president results in a lack of female role models serving in collegiate elite leadership positions, which may impact how attainable or realistic serving in high-level leadership positions may seem to other college women. Further, some women described experiences in which their male colleagues were assumed to be student body president, which plays into gender stereotypes that people have about men and women in leadership. Others described experiences in which previous male student body presidents were invited to events with governing board members that they felt they were not invited to because of their gender. This limits the informal networks women are involved in and potentially impacts the relationships they are able to establish in their role as president. Many women also felt they experienced the double bind in their presidency where they were consistently thinking about how others were perceiving their leadership. Were they being too aggressive? Were they being too weak? This continual internal dialogue often made them question themselves and their leadership and sometimes contributed to decreased levels of confidence and leader efficacy.

I saw these gendered experiences did play a role in the women's student body presidency. These gendered experiences created environmental barriers that the women had to face and

overcome in their presidency. At the beginning of their terms, many of the women questioned their confidence in their ability to lead and often attributed this lack of confidence to their being a woman. As Kelly said, “I have suffered from imposter syndrome, like probably most other women.” Participants experiencing the double bind knew the double bind was based on their gender. This experience with the double bind caused the women to analyze how they were being perceived and sometimes question themselves, which was something they did not feel their male peers were dealing with. Some women did not feel they were taken as seriously as men, and others had a lack of previous women student body president to model themselves after. These gendered experiences have an impact on women’s experiences in leadership. What became really apparent to me during my continued interviews with the women was how important it became to the women to pursue elite leadership positions in their future career, not only because of their increased leader efficacy and increased positive outcome expectations, but also because of their desire to uplift other women in overcoming the environmental barriers women face in leadership. Many of them had been positively affected by watching other women in leadership roles while serving as student body president and realized the importance of being that role model to other women. This aspect of women’s experiences is something that is not necessarily represented in SCCT. SCCT theorizes that environmental barriers and supports influence one’s self-efficacy (Lent et al., 1994; 2002), which is consistent with the results of this study. For example, in this study women faced environmental barriers through their gendered experiences. They also experienced environmental supports by having female role models. However, the SCCT model does not indicate the impact facing these environmental barriers and experiencing these environmental supports may have on women developing an increased desire to provide support and guidance to other women in navigating these same challenges. This increased desire

to provide this support to other women also influenced their increased leadership aspirations for the future, as the women wanted to be in a place where they could provide this support to other women. As Lauren stated, “I would like to be in a position where I can empower more women. I think that's something that's really been placed in my heart over the past year.” Results of this study indicate that women may develop increased leadership aspirations because they want to be in a position to better represent women in leadership, as well as be in a place to serve as role models and guides to other women. They faced gendered barriers in their leadership experiences and they want to use their own experiences to help uplift other women. This study serves as an example of how qualitative work can provide deeper insight into women’s experiences in leadership. Next, the practical implications of this study will be reviewed.

Practical Implications

The findings lead to several implications for practice in terms of creating a collegiate environment more conducive to developing women’s leadership and women’s leadership aspirations. Based on my experience interviewing the 20 women who were the focus of this study, I offer the following practices for implication.

Increase the number of women in collegiate elite leadership roles. Considering women are underrepresented in elite leadership roles across a variety of sectors in the United States (Catalyst, 2017a; Catalyst, 2017c; Catalyst, 2017d; White House Project, 2009), we must continue to find ways to increase the number of women in leadership. The results of this study demonstrate that women who serve as student body president develop strengthened confidence in their leadership ability as a result of serving in the role. Further, the women describe this heightened confidence as contributing to their future leadership aspirations. If college women develop increased confidence and leadership aspirations by serving in a collegiate elite

leadership role, we must find more opportunities for women to serve in these roles. I suggest two strategies to increase the number of women in collegiate elite leadership roles: (a) expand and formalize the encouragement provided to college women and (b) increase the number of collegiate elite leadership roles available to women.

Expand and formalize the encouragement provided to college women. Women are more likely to run for office when they are encouraged to do so; however, they are less likely to be asked than men (Lawless & Fox, 2008; 2010). The woman in this study described the strong impact the encouragement of others had on them making the decision to run for office, which is consistent with other studies on college women (Mink Salas, 2010; Zimmerman, 2017); therefore, we must find additional ways to provide this encouragement and support to women, as we know it works. It is likely that some administrators are casually encouraging some of the students they work with to consider seeking out leadership positions, but we are not doing this enough. Instead, we should find ways to formalize this process of encouragement. Institutions should host a semi-annual “Women Lead” awareness week where posters are hung around campus encouraging women to seek out leadership position. These posters can be both informational and inspirational. They should focus on the strengths of women in leadership and include information and photos of recognizable female leaders in society, as well photos of notable female student leaders on campus. Campuses could host a series of workshops focused on women’s leadership throughout the week, contents of which will be described in more detail later within this practical implication section. During this “Women Lead” awareness week, an email can be sent from the university president or chief student affairs officer to all faculty and staff on campus about the power of encouraging women to pursue leadership positions. This email could be a catchy infographic that simply states, “Society needs more women in

leadership! Women are more likely to seek out leadership roles when we encourage them; yet, are less likely to receive this encouragement. Think about the women you interact with at [university name]. Now think, who can you encourage to lead today?!” Department heads and directors at the institution can also incorporate “Women Lead” awareness week into their staff meetings where they facilitate a 10-minute discussion about the importance of encouraging women to seek out leadership positions and brainstorm a list of college women they can reach out to over the coming weeks. The women in this study indicated they needed to be told several times that they should consider running for office. As Margaret T. said, “For me, a lot of people had to say ‘[Margaret], you're qualified to run’ to even get me to run”; so we need to find ways to continually encourage our college women. Educating our campus communities about the power of providing encouragement to women could go a long way in helping more women feel they have the support in making the choice to lead.

Administrators should not be shy in providing this encouragement to women, and also offer themselves as resources to women in providing a space to discuss some of the challenges that women anticipate in holding leadership positions. From the findings of this study, we know that women face some barriers in collegiate leadership positions, such as gender bias, perceived role incongruity, feeling constrained by time, and potentially having a lack of women having had previously served in the student body presidency to model themselves after. We know women felt especially supported in their leadership positions by receiving positive feedback from administrators and being able to look up to female role models practicing leadership; therefore, we must find ways to connect these women with successful upper-class women, as well as women administrators in high-level leadership positions, which may help them to envision their

own selves in those positions. Connecting college women to female role models will be discussed in further detail later within this practical implication section.

Another strategy to provide this encouragement and support to college women would be to engage with national organizations, like Young Women Run or Running Start, which provide workshops and conferences that specifically encourage women to run for office and prepare them with the skills they will need to be successful. Campuses could solicit nominations from faculty and staff of college women they think would benefit from such programming. The women could then be contacted about their nomination by a high-level female leader at the institution. This contact would go a long way in demonstrating to the college women that others have belief in their leadership potential. Finally, the institution could provide funding to support conference travel and attendance.

There are also many more leadership positions available to women beyond political leadership, so creating similar workshops to Young Women Run or Running Start, designed to activate leadership interests in first- and second-year women, would be beneficial. Institutions could use a similar nomination process and ask faculty and staff who work primarily with underclassmen to provide the names of students who they recommend participating in the process. The nomination process helps in women being encouraged by others. This on-campus workshop series could help women gain self-awareness in learning about their own leadership style, as well as group-awareness in how to lead others. Further, these college women can be introduced to upper class women who currently serve in collegiate elite leadership positions, as well as women who serve as elite leaders at the institution, to expose them to potential female role models. As the women in this study described, women benefit from observing women practice leadership, so finding ways to connect the first- and second-year women to more

experienced women leaders can help leadership positions look more attainable. If they see other women successfully practicing leadership, they can believe they are capable of performing successfully as well. The next strategy I suggest to increase the number of women in collegiate elite leadership roles is to expand the number of leadership opportunities available to college women.

Expand the number of leadership opportunities available to college women. Women increase their leader efficacy when they participate in enactive mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997), such as gaining direct experience in practicing leadership. The more the women in this study gained experience practicing leadership as student body presidents, the more confident they became in their abilities. Lilly said simply, “I got more confident the more I did the job.” To assist in activating the leadership aspirations of women, we need to provide more opportunities for them to practice leadership. At each institution, there is only one person who is able to serve as the student body president each year; however, there are several other collegiate elite leadership positions that we should be encouraging college women to pursue. As mentioned in the previous strategy, faculty and staff need to be continually encouraging women to seek out these leadership positions. But beyond the collegiate elite leadership positions that already exist on campus, such as sorority president, student body vice president, college newspaper editor, and large student organization president, campuses also need to think strategically about new leadership opportunities they can create on campus. On many campuses, there are organizations on campus that are housed within departments. As an example, an alumni office many house an alumni ambassador group made up of students. I suggest that offices that house these student groups find ways to elevate the leadership responsibilities of the students involved in these groups. Staff should strategize in how to provide opportunities

through these groups for students to set the strategic direction of these groups, make consequential decisions, communicate externally on behalf of the group, and hold their peers accountable. As a student affairs professional who previously led a large department, I know these opportunities to elevate the responsibilities of students exist. It will likely take more work on behalf of the department and mean giving up control of the student group, but the benefits to students outweigh the sacrifice to departments. The women in this study came to the realization that they enjoyed the power of their presidency. As Meredith stated, "I am definitely my best when I'm in charge." Meredith, along with the other participants in this study found real enjoyment and gained confidence through the depth and breadth of their tremendous responsibilities; we must find ways to expand these types of opportunities for other women on campus. The next practical implication of this study is the expose college women to more female role models.

Expose college women to more female role models. Women benefit from female role models (Lockwood, 2006). They benefit by being able to watch strong and powerful women deal with the challenges of leadership, while also being successful in leadership. This observation can help women develop the confidence to envision their own selves in these elite leadership positions; therefore, contributing to their aspirations for those positions, as they seem more attainable. As Diana stated, "That gave me more confidence, watching a woman." One implication of this finding is that college women need more opportunity to have female role models. College women may benefit from their university developing an institutionalized way of exposing women to female role models. Many women in this study had the unique opportunity to interact with women in high-level leadership positions at their institutions, including presidents and vice presidents, governing board members, and deans, based on the

nature of their student body president position. They described the incredible learning they experienced through these interactions. However, this is not the typical experience of female student leaders on campus. Other student leaders do not have the opportunity as often, or in such a close fashion, to interact with these high-powered women, so finding ways to offer these opportunities to more college women is crucial. Ideally, universities should establish mentoring programs where college women are paired up with senior women at the institution. This mentoring programming could be run out of the university's leadership office, which would be responsible for building a Mentoring Guidebook. This guidebook would provide information to the mentors about the expectations and outcomes of the mentoring relationship. It should not be assumed that all women are equipped to be effective mentors; therefore, providing the mentors with the resources they need to be successful is critical. Every year, the institution's women elite leaders could be contacted to solicit their participation in the mentoring program and then matched with willing undergraduate women. The institution could partner with a corporate sponsor which could provide funding to print the Mentoring Guidebooks, as well as host a year-end luncheon recognizing the mentor relationships.

It is important to note that I recognize implementing a strategy like this will place further burden upon the few women who serve in elite leadership positions at an institution. To make up for this burden, I believe it is important that institutions put incentives in place for women to serve in these mentor roles. The incentives could vary depending on the needs of the women mentors but could include women receiving additional compensation or leave time and university recognition and awards. Ultimately, the institution needs to provide incentives that are of value to the women mentors and demonstrate that the institution prioritizes the service of mentoring. It is understood that many institutions may struggle in providing financial incentives

to mentors; however, the institution must be creative in developing non-financial incentives that are seen as valuable to mentors. For instance, institutions can provide annual mentoring awards to female mentors, but it is critical that these mentoring awards be highly visible and acknowledged by senior leaders who make final promotion and tenure decisions. Further, mentoring awards should come along with additional university incentives, such as free parking for a year and dinner with the university president. Through these incentives, university leadership must demonstrate that mentoring is viewed as a meaningful activity that is valued by the institution and that participation in mentoring will result in positive outcomes for the mentors.

Another great option that would require less time and resources would be to host ongoing workshops on campus where women who hold elite leadership positions at the institution would interact with female student leaders on campus. A great time to host one of these workshops would be during “Women Lead” awareness week, which was discussed previously. Yet, these workshops should not be limited to an awareness week and instead should be offered regularly throughout the year. Additionally, sororities and other women’s-related organizations should be reached out to host and participate in these workshops. Through these workshops, these elite leaders could speak to the college women about their leadership roles, as well as the successes they have experienced and challenges they have faced. These small interactions could go a far way in helping college women see leadership positions to be realistic and accessible. These conversations can take some of the mysteries of elite leadership away and help college women develop positive expectations about what happens as a result of serving in these powerful leadership positions. Further, college women could become more aware of the gender bias that women face in leadership. The women student body presidents in this study discussed some of

the gender bias they felt they faced in their roles and some expressed relief when they found out other women student body presidents were having similar struggles. As Tracy C. said, “It is just seeing somebody that you can relate to in just gender alone—a woman that is in a powerful position, and I could be that someday.” It is important for women to know they are not facing sexism alone in the student body presidency, or any other leadership position, but also know they do not have to accept it. Being connected to one another through shared experiences can help raise awareness of discriminatory practices and career barriers impacting women, as well as provide women the coaching in how they can overcome these challenges.

Universities can also extend this type of program by involving alumni. Some of the women in this study shared how they benefited by being able to look up to previous female student body presidents, while others were concerned there were no previous women in the position to model themselves after. This indicates the importance of college women not only having female role models, but also having access to female role models who have held similar collegiate elite leadership positions. Colleges could host an annual event where they invite former women student body presidents to have a roundtable discussion with the college women in student government to discuss the highlights and challenges they had in serving as student body president. This helps to demystify the experience of holding such a high-level position for college women, as well as provides them an opportunity to see this position as more realistic and attainable. The final implication for practice is to provide gender-based leadership programming.

Provide gender-based leadership programming. Women experience challenges in leadership related to their gender (Catalyst, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Koenig et al., 2011). The women in this study experienced challenges related to perceived role incongruity and the double

bind, which made them question themselves and their leadership. They found themselves often trying to strike the perfect balance between being strong, but not aggressive, and compassionate, but not weak. They also found themselves to be a bit lonely as president based on the nature of the positions. As Kelly stated, “It is a very lonely role, being on top.” College women beyond the student body presidency likely have these same struggles and internal conversations with themselves. Providing space for college women to discuss these challenges would be beneficial. Not only is it helpful for women to realize they are not experiencing these challenges alone, but it is also helpful in helping them to build strategies in countering these thoughts within themselves. The curriculum in this female-based leadership programming should be designed around gender and leadership, so women are able to connect some of the research on these topics to their own experiences. There should also be ample time for women to come together for dialogue with one another, as this shared community can help them to build a network of support and so they do not feel as lonely.

Institutions should turn to the expertise of women’s centers and women’s studies centers in providing this gender-specific leadership programming. We need to address gender discrimination head on and make women, and men (which will be discussed in further detail in the next paragraph), aware of the potential gender bias women are experiencing. Many women may be desensitized to the gender bias they face and just expect it as a part of their normal experience. Viktoria A. called it out when she said, “I think subconsciously we internalize a lot of male misogyny in a lot of ways.” Let us call out this discrimination for what it is. Further, we should highlight the advantages that women bring to leadership, so women are well-versed in the skills they bring to the table. In several women’s leadership trainings I have participated in, the training implied there were deficiencies that women must correct to be perceived positively in

leadership. We need to challenge this and provide better leadership programming to our women. Women bring great advantages to leadership. They tend to be more collaborative, participative, and relationship-oriented than men (Astin & Leland, 1991; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly et al., 2003; Helgesen, 2011; Rosener, 1990; Wenniger & Conroy, 2001) and tend to lead, more than men, with an emphasis on accomplishing organizational goals, rather than individual ones (Melero, 2011; Merrill-Sands, Kickul, & Ingols, 2005). Leadership programming should highlight what women bring to the table.

The focus should not only be in providing leadership programming geared to women. Leadership programming designed for the general student body should also include gender components. It is important for students of all genders to understand the core concepts of leadership, especially including how gender bias can impact men's and women's experiences in leadership and the benefits that women's leadership brings to organizations.

Directions for Future Research

While the results of this study provide a representation of the experiences and leadership aspirations of college women serving in the student body president role, we could benefit from learning more about women's experiences in leadership. This section will provide insight on some directions for potential future research.

For this study, I was particularly interested in women's experiences in the student body president position over time, especially in relation to how women's experiences as student body president may shape the way they describe their future leadership aspirations over time. Toward this end, I conducted three interviews with each participant over the course of six months; however, a longitudinal study that extended past the women's term, as well as a year after their term would be beneficial in the future. Future research would benefit from a study that followed

up with the women at multiple points after their term, as they would be able to truly reflect on the totality of the experience as student body president and how the experience affected their career experience. This longitudinal research could also examine actual leadership attainment, rather than just leadership aspirations.

Next, for this study, I recruited a diverse group of 20 women from a variety of institution types across the country to participate. I focused on the how women described their experiences and leadership aspirations through concepts from the theoretical framework of SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) and gender. Yet, a limitation in this study is that I did not delve deeply into race and ethnicity to see if there were similarities and differences based on this aspect of a woman's background. A direction for future research would be to conduct a study with a similarly diverse sample, but also explore issues of race and ethnicity more closely.

Third, I interviewed women who served in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president for this study. However, a future study would benefit from incorporating the experiences of other women who hold other collegiate elite leadership positions on campus, such as newspaper editor-in-chief, sorority president, or other high-ranking officers in student government. These other perspectives are important and can lead to additional knowledge about the experiences of female student leaders, including the supports and barriers they face in their leadership roles, which may be similar or dissimilar to the experiences of women student body presidents. Additional research should focus on including a variety of women who serve in varying collegiate elite leadership positions on campus.

Finally, this study was about the experiences of women, so only undergraduate college women were recruited and participated. Because no college men participated, there were no means to compare women and men's experiences as collegiate elite leaders, nor compare their

future leadership aspirations for elite leadership positions. Thus, future research could examine and compare the experiences of both men and women serving in the student body president position, as well as their experiences in other collegiate elite leadership positions.

Conclusion

Given that women are achieving elite leadership positions at disproportionately lower rates than men across a variety of sectors (Catalyst, 2017a; Catalyst, 2017c; Catalyst, 2017d; White House Project, 2009), including the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president (American Student Government Association, 2012; Johnson, 2011; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Mink Salas, 2010; New, 2014), research is needed to explore women's experiences in, and leadership aspirations for, these elite leadership positions. The purpose of this basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was to explore the experiences and future leadership aspirations of undergraduate women who serve as student body presidents. To meet that purpose, 20 women student body presidents were recruited from across the United States to participate in this study. Participant voices emerged through three in-depth interviews over six months regarding their experiences serving as collegiate elite leaders and their aspirations for elite leadership positions in their future career. Results of the study suggest the following seven key findings:

1. Women student body presidents feel tremendous responsibility executing the duties of the presidency. Carrying this responsibility forces them to make sacrifices in their personal lives, as they find it important to perform these duties at a high level.
2. Women student body presidents are other-oriented in their leadership. They prioritize people and care about enacting change for the good of the people around them.
3. Women student body presidents navigate internal and external hurdles in their president role related to their gender and the national climate.

4. Women student body presidents develop strengthened confidence in their leadership abilities over time served in the president role.
5. Women student body presidents benefit and learn from watching others, especially female role models, practice leadership.
6. Women student body presidents describe increased leadership aspirations for elite leadership positions during the course of their tenure as president.
7. Women student body presidents develop an increased desire over time to serve in elite leadership positions to be able to provide additional encouragement and support to other women in pursuing leadership opportunities.

These key findings are valuable in that they help us to build a better understanding of the experiences of college women serving in collegiate elite leadership positions, as well as understand how these experiences may shape women's leadership aspirations for future elite leadership roles. The study's findings also provide further support for using SCCT (Lent et al., 1994; 2002) in understanding the development of women's leadership aspirations.

Considering women are severely underrepresented in elite leadership roles (Catalyst, 2017a; Catalyst, 2017c; Catalyst, 2017d; White House Project, 2009), findings ways to get more women in leadership is critical. One way is by figuring out how to further activate the leadership aspirations of college women. This study provides important information about how women solidify their leadership aspirations over the time they serve in a leadership position, which informs several implications that can be helpful in understanding how we can create additional paths to leadership for other women. First, institutions of higher education must find ways to increase the number of women in collegiate elite leadership roles by expanding and formalizing the encouragement provided to college women, as well as increasing the number of collegiate

elite leadership roles available to women. College and universities must also find ways to expose college women to more female role models and provide gender-based leadership programming. These strategies can contribute to increased numbers of women experiencing leadership roles in college, which in turn, contribute to increased leader efficacy and positive leadership outcome expectations, as well as increased leadership aspirations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter to Solicit Participants

Dear [Student],

How are you?! My name is Alicia Keating Polson and I am currently a doctoral student in the Higher Education program at NC State. I am conducting my dissertation research this year studying the experiences and leadership aspirations of college women who serve as student government presidents. The president is a tremendous role on college campuses and I am very interested in women's experiences in the position. Since you serve as student government president [or appropriate title at that university] at [name of university], I would like to invite you to participate in this study! As a participant in this research project, you will be asked to participate in three interviews with me over the course of your student government presidency. These three interviews would be set up at times that would be most convenient for your busy schedule.

If you are interested in participating in this research project, please complete this online form [insert Qualtrics link] by [date]. I will be interviewing 15-20 student government president participants from across the country, so soon after I receive your questionnaire, I will contact you to let you know if you have been selected and we can work on scheduling our first interview.

Just so you know a little bit more about me and why I am interested in women's leadership, here is the statement I include in my research which explains my passion for working with student leadership!

As a student affairs professional focusing my career on student leadership, I have always had a passion for developing college students as leaders. My study of leadership began as an undergraduate business student when I pursued a minor in leadership to augment my business management courses and co-curricular activities. This leadership minor inspired me to dedicate my career to the leadership development of college students. Through the last 12 years as a student affairs administrator, I have served as a student leadership educator. Through this role, I have taught many leadership courses, facilitated workshops and retreats, and mentored numerous student leaders. My research focuses on student leadership in the hopes that I may provide leadership educators with the information and the tools for them to provide an environment rich with leadership opportunities for their students. I am particularly passionate about the experiences and opportunities provided to college women leaders as I believe that increasing the number of women in high-level leadership positions, both on college campuses and in greater society, is necessary for true gender equality, as well as a better world.

I look forward to hearing from you!!

Alicia

[Signature line with contact information]

Appendix B: Participant Questionnaire

This questionnaire was available online via Qualtrics.

1. Name:
2. University:
3. Email:
4. Phone:
5. Hometown (city/state):
6. Age:
7. Ethnicity: Checkboxes options include: American Indian/Alaska Native; Asian; Black/African American; Hispanic/Latino; White/Caucasian; Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; Other (open response). Participants can check multiple boxes.
8. Gender Identity:
9. Year in School:
10. Expected Graduation Date:
11. Academic Major:
12. Academic Minor:
13. Employed? Yes/No
14. How many years have you been involved in student government at your institution?
15. Name of any student organizations you are involved in (including positions held, if any):
16. How much leadership training do you think you have participated in? Multiple choice options include: (a) a great deal; (b) a lot; (c) a moderate amount; (d) a little; (e) none at all

Appendix C: Consent for Participation in Interview Research

Title of Study: An exploration of the experiences and leadership aspirations of college women serving in the collegiate elite leadership position of student body president

Researcher: Alicia Keating Polson, NC State University

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Audrey J. Jaeger, NC State University

I volunteer to participate in a dissertation research study conducted by Alicia Keating Polson from NC State University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about college women's experiences serving in the role of student body president, as well as women's aspirations for future leadership positions. I will be one of 15-20 college women being interviewed for this research.

I understand I am not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this Informed Consent Form, I will find specific details about the research in which I am being asked to participate. If I do not understand something in this form, I understand it is my right to ask the researcher, Alicia Keating Polson, for clarification or more information. If at any time I have questions about my participation, I know that I can contact the researcher, Alicia Keating Polson (contact information is at the bottom of this page).

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.
2. Participation involves being interviewed by the researcher. Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes and there will be three interviews total over the course of my student government presidency. Each interview will be audio taped and notes will be written during each interview. After all interviews have been completed and the researcher writes up the final summary, I will also have an opportunity to review the final summary and provide feedback to the researcher.
3. I understand that I will receive a \$10 gift card at the conclusion of each interview as compensation for participating in the interview.
4. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during any of the interview sessions, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
5. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will be protected. Additionally, I will be able to choose my own pseudonym for use in the study. I understand that the interviews will ask me about my experiences as student body president during the interviews, and while precautions are taken to protect my identity, it may

be possible for people familiar with me to recognize me in publications about the research. I also understand that all audio recordings of the interviews will be destroyed after transcription.

6. Faculty and administrators from my campus will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.
7. I have been given a copy of this consent form.
8. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at dapaxton@ncsu.edu or by phone at 1-919-515-4514.

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

My Signature

Date

My Printed Name

Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:
Alicia Keating Polson
amkeatin@ncsu.edu
561.319.6433

Appendix D: Participant Interview Questions (1st Interview)

Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Questions for participants (1st Interview)

1. Tell me about yourself and your path to serving in the student government role.
2. Think back to the time when you made the decision to run for student body president. Please tell me about that decision and what motivated your decision to run for office.
3. Tell me about the experience of running for student body president.
4. How confident do you feel in your ability to be a successful student body president?
5. Tell me about a moment when you felt empowered as a leader.
6. Tell me about some of your expectations for this upcoming year serving in the student body president role (opportunities, challenges, supports, barriers).
7. What are some the personal areas that you expect to grow as a result of being student body president in the upcoming year?
8. Describe some leadership skills you believe you need to develop in the future.
9. Do you believe your gender has an impact on your leadership ability? If so, how?
10. Do you believe your gender has an impact on your role as student body president? If so, how?
11. What are your career aspirations? What do you hope to do professionally in your life?
12. Is it important to you to serve in leadership roles in your future career? Do you imagine you will seek out leadership roles as a professional? Manager? Department Head? CEO?

Appendix E: Participant Interview Questions (2nd Interview)

Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Questions for participants (2nd Interview)

1. You have now been serving in the student body president role for 4 months. Can you tell me about a moment during this time that stands out to you as the most memorable?
2. Are there other memorable moments that stand out from the past few months?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about the culture of your student government administration? What is it like to work for you?
4. Can explain where you spend the majority of your time as president? What are your major responsibilities?
5. How much time do you think you dedicate to student government on a daily or weekly basis?
6. How have you been able to do in balancing your role as president, along with academic work, family, friends, and all the other things you have going on in your life?
7. How do you feel your experiences of being student body president are aligning with the expectations you had coming into the position? [follow up with probing questions about the specific expectations shared by participants in their first interview]
8. Tell me about a time serving in the student body president role when you experienced a challenging situation.
9. Are there other challenging situations you have encountered?
10. At this point in your tenure, do you feel like you have the capabilities to be a successful student body president? Where do you think you are really strong, and where do you hope you can improve?
11. What experiences make you feel more confident in your capability to be student body president?
12. Have there been any experiences in the past few months that made you question your capabilities of being student body president?

13. Have you had an experience as student body president where you felt your gender was a factor, in a positive or negative way? If so, in what ways?
14. What have you observed about men and women leading on your campus? What are some of the similarities and differences?
15. Tell me about your future aspirations for holding high-level leadership positions in your future career.

Appendix F: Participant Interview Questions (3rd Interview)

Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Questions for participants (3rd Interview)

1. You are now close to concluding your role as student body president. Please tell me about your overall experience serving as student body president.
2. Can you talk about a couple of your main successes in the role of student body president so far?
3. What, if anything, frustrates you about the position of student body president?
4. Have you noticed an improvement in your leadership skills since beginning in your role as student body president? If so, in what ways?
5. What specific skills do you feel you have you gained over the course of the last year?
6. Tell me about a time that you felt the student body president role felt empowering?
7. Tell me about an experience that improved your belief in your own capacity to lead in your student body president role.
8. Can you think about a time during your presidency where you felt like your gender played a role? If so, how?
9. Are there other stories of your experience in the student body president role that you would like to share?
10. Do you feel that your participation in the student body president role changed your leadership aspirations for the future? If so, how?
11. Do you think your experience has influenced your likelihood to pursue future leadership roles? If so, how?
12. Do you have more or less interest in holding a high-level leadership role in the future? In what ways?
13. What do you expect will happen as a result of holding high-level leadership positions later in

your career? What are some of the highlights and the challenges you foresee?