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**Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership**

*Nannette W. Glenn, Ph.D.*

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Examining the Barriers Women Face in Achieving Senior-Level Leadership Roles at Council for  
Christian Colleges and Universities

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Andrew Paul Stewart

April 2022

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### **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to Josh Wandell. He gave me a chance. He taught me how to love kids regardless of their circumstances. He taught me so many lessons in such a short space of time. He taught me to never give up because he did not know how to. He taught me a different type of faith and I am forever in his debt. Heaven is rejoicing and may God bless your family.

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

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## Abstract

Data outlines the significant underrepresentation of women in senior-level leadership positions compared to males, specifically within the Council for Christian Colleges and University (CCCU) institutional environment. Due to the scarce amount of research of women who currently reside in senior-level leadership positions at Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, this qualitative research study examined the barriers women faced and strategies they employed to overcome the barriers to achieving senior-level leadership roles within CCCU member institutions. The study was guided by one central, overarching research question: How do senior-level women leaders navigate leadership advancement within CCCU institutions? The study utilized the theoretical frameworks of the sex-role stereotype theory and role congruity model to provide foundational theoretical knowledge with the study phenomenon explored in further detail through three additional research questions. A sample of 15 current senior-level women leaders from multiple CCCU institutions spanning across the United States was interviewed through a semistructured approach to explore their lived leadership experiences and perspectives. As a result of the research, 11 common themes were established: (a) Christian upbringing, (b) leadership development, (c) leadership opportunities, (d) woman catalysts, (e) stereotypes, (f) traditional institutional barriers, (g) hierarchal disconnect, (h) women's representation, (i) a lack of support or mentorship, (j) employee first/ relational leadership, and (k) critical leadership characteristics.

*Keywords:* Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), evangelical traditions, family-work conflict (double-bind), women's underrepresentation, gender inequality, historical gender roles, organizational leadership, self-efficacy



## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	i
Abstract.....	v
List of Tables .....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Background of the Study .....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	9
Purpose Statement.....	14
Research Questions.....	14
Significance .....	15
Definition of Key Terms.....	16
Summary and Organization of the Study.....	18
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	20
Literature Search Methods.....	21
Historical Gender Bias.....	22
Prescriptive Workplace Gender Stereotypes .....	25
Women’s Leadership Capabilities and Higher Education .....	29
Emotional Intelligence and Self-Efficacy.....	32
Women’s Leadership Culture .....	34
Women’s Mentorship and Development Initiatives .....	36
Family and Work Balance - The Double Bind .....	38
Religion and Gender .....	41
Religion and Christian Higher Education Institutions.....	42
Women and CCCU Institutions .....	45
Women’s Leadership Value and Higher Education .....	47
Theoretical Framework.....	49
Sex-Role Stereotypes .....	50
Role Congruity Model .....	52
Summary and Chapter 3 Preview .....	53
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	56
Research Design and Methodology .....	56
Research Methodology: Phenomenological .....	58
Purpose Statement and Research Questions .....	59
Research Design .....	59
Population .....	60
Sample .....	61
Qualitative Data Collection Methods .....	63
Materials and Instruments.....	64
Semistructured Interviews.....	64

Guided Protocols.....	66
Qualitative Interview Questions.....	66
Audio Recordings .....	67
Data Analysis/ Explication of Data .....	68
Audio Transcription .....	68
Data Coding .....	68
Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness .....	68
Pilot Interview.....	70
Researcher’s Role .....	71
Ethical Considerations .....	72
Assumptions.....	73
Limitations .....	74
Delimitations.....	75
Summary and Chapter 4 Preview .....	76
Chapter 4: Results .....	77
Research Questions.....	78
Participants.....	78
Data Collection .....	80
Data Analysis .....	81
Key Findings.....	83
Research Question 1 .....	83
Christian Upbringing.....	84
Leadership Development .....	85
Opportunities.....	87
Research Question 2 .....	91
Stereotypes .....	91
Christian Higher Education and Institutional Traditions .....	95
Progressive CCCU Institutions .....	100
Old Boys Network (OBN) .....	101
Women’s Representation .....	106
Lack of Support and Mentorship .....	110
Research Question 3 .....	112
Leadership Style.....	112
Chapter Summary and Preview of Chapter 5 .....	116
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	118
Research Questions.....	119
Summary of the Study .....	119
Methodology.....	120
Limitations .....	121
Interpretation of the Findings .....	122
Led by Faith/ Christian Upbringing.....	123
Implications .....	125
Leadership Development .....	125

Leadership Opportunities.....	126
Woman Catalysts .....	127
Stereotypes.....	129
Traditional Institutional Barriers .....	132
Hierarchal Disconnect.....	136
Women’s Representation .....	139
Lack of Mentorship.....	141
Leadership Styles .....	142
Study Recommendations .....	145
Mentor and Leadership Development Program.....	146
Senior-Level Leadership Training .....	147
Hiring Practices.....	149
Trajectory Plan.....	150
Future Research .....	151
Personal Resonance .....	152
References.....	154
Appendix A: Invitation Letter.....	187
Appendix B: IRB Approval .....	189
Appendix C: Informed Consent for Study Participation.....	190
Appendix D: Guided Interview Protocol .....	193
Appendix E: Research Participation Follow-Up and Confirmation .....	197
Appendix F: Member Check Letter and Participation Acknowledgment .....	199
Appendix G: Coding Matrix .....	200

**List of Tables**

Table 1. Number of Participant(s) in Senior-Level Leadership Roles.....	79
Table 2. Occurrence of Codes in Each Theme by Participant .....	82

## Chapter 1: Introduction

“Because I am a woman, I must make unusual efforts to succeed. If I fail, no one will say, she doesn’t have what it takes. They will say, ‘Women don’t have what it takes’” (Young, 2011, p. 74). Less than 40 years ago, Clare Boothe Luce, a renowned woman, author, politician, and U.S. Ambassador, made the astounding admonition regarding the challenges the most established and revered women faced. Mahoney (2020) suggested Luce, a leader herself promoted, women leaders were not required to display leadership characteristics that coincided with effective leadership; rather it was more beneficial to simply not be a woman in a place of leadership.

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has marked a considerable increase in research focused on gender and leadership in professional sectors. Findings continue to confirm women are still yet to be perceived as relevant within the structure of power and leadership (Hentschel et al., 2019; Manzi & Heilman, 2021; Zikmund, 2010). A fair assumption and expectation for leaders, both men and women, are one where they are challenged in their profession and pushed to succeed as both an individual and a leader. However, the overarching equal expectation of men and women in leadership appeared to be marred by continued systematic flaws where women leaders are penalized for demonstrating agentic, typically masculine personality traits (Wille et al., 2018). Despite countless hardworking and charismatic women who have successfully led and effectively met their employees’ needs (Devicienti et al., 2019), many efforts to increase gender equality, gender discrimination, and stereotypical attitudes have negatively affected women’s leadership opportunities (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018; Radović-Marković et al., 2013).

The proliferation of generalized research related to gender inequality and women’s leadership is available, yet little research or light has been shone on specific women in leadership environments in more traditional settings (Aiston & Fo, 2021; Brabazon & Schulz, 2020;

Moodly & Toni, 2017). Few questions have been asked or understood in conservative Christian higher education circles, specifically institutions affiliated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU), as to why women's leadership representation appeared sparse (Longman et al., 2019; O'Connor, 2018). The environment specific to this study were higher education institutions affiliated with the CCCCU of the CCCCU setting (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Nguyen, 2013).

This study aimed to shed light on women and their journey to the acquisition of senior-level leadership positions within a particular environment and the experiences that were drawn from the journey and navigation of a woman in a senior-level leadership role. This chapter provides an overview of the potential barriers women in leadership faced within CCCCU working environments and begins by outlining the problem current women leaders currently experience at CCCCU institutions and the barriers associated with the phenomenon. This chapter also prepared readers for subsequent chapters by addressing the background of the study, the problem that initiated the study, the purpose of the research, research questions, definition of key terms, and a summary of the chapter. Furthermore, the chapter also prepared readers for subsequent chapters through a literature review, methodology, findings, and discussion of implications for future practice.

### **Background of the Study**

To gain perspective of the disparity of senior-level women leaders today, the historical context associated with gender leadership underrepresentation was critical to understand (Chen & Houser, 2019; Parker, 2015; Samuelson et al., 2019). From the 1700s, the historical establishment of higher education institutions has played a significant role in contributing to the opportunities for women to participate in higher education and senior leadership (Long, 2012;

Smith, 2017; Smith-Hollins et al., 2015; Thelin, 2011). Long (2012) suggested the primary factor contributing to the lack of women senior leaders stemmed from historical law advances which supported women's rights yet continued to limit women to basic, entry-level positions rather than positions of leadership.

Law mandates curbed a balanced representation of women in senior-level leadership positions and only provided rhetoric concerning women's leadership representation rather than solutions (Fuller et al., 2015; Tarbutton, 2019). The enactment of the U.S. Constitution Amendment XIX, where women in America were granted the right to vote, should be considered as progress for women's opportunities and abilities to lead (Thomas, 2019). Yet, Madsen and Longman (2020) suggested the 19th Amendment only contributed to the lack of depth of women's representation in higher-level leadership positions. Thus, laws that advanced women's rights as working professionals had forced professional organizations to acknowledge women but did not necessarily require the implementation of equal gender representation in leadership positions (Park, 2020).

Continued societal and historical gender roles parallel restrictions women faced in acquiring leadership roles as senior roles have long been considered masculinized, typically dominated by White males (Browne, 2017; Rodriguez, 2019). Principles of equal dignity and respect for both men and women are now accepted as a minimum standard of moral culture throughout the Western world (de Silva de Alwis et al., 2020). Yet, many corporate companies have not shaken that males have continued to monopolize leadership positions in corporate America (Browne, 2017; Chang & Milkman, 2020). Considering the implicit definition of gender equality, one of equal share rarely is gender equality understood as both sexes are free to act pursuant to their own preferences (McCulloch, 2018; Smith & Johnson, 2020). Browne

(2017) advocated concepts of gender equality have become more understood within organizations, but gender equality remains elusive. The World Economic Forum projected that the United States is still 208 years away from gender equality (Werber, 2019).

Gender inequality remains deeply ingrained within the structure of American society and organizational leadership (Badura et al., 2018; Cañas et al., 2019; Dahlvig, 2013; Georgeac & Rattan, 2019). Leadership positions have been historically dominated by White males due to many women tasked with countering stereotypical roles at work and at home (Buse et al., 2014; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Deaconu & Rasca, 2015). Stereotypical women roles at home and at work coincided with the pronounced underrepresentation of women in high-ranking corporate positions, with women assigned to 16.9% of the board of directors' seats at Fortune 500 companies (Hideg & Ferris, 2016). Despite women representing 47% of the workforce, many women remain statistically underrepresented in senior-level leadership positions (Power et al., 2019).

Furthermore, women graduate at a greater percentage at all degree levels compared to men, but only represent 6% of all CEO positions in Forbes 500 companies (Spencer et al., 2019), with the likelihood of women advancing into a 'C suite' position (CEO, CFO, COO) 15% below that of men (Power et al., 2019). Despite statistics indicating women acquired the necessary education to become leaders, women experienced underrepresentation at every level of the corporate pipeline with the disparity greatest in senior-level leadership (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Power et al., 2019).

Though gender equality advances have occurred within the workforce (Power et al., 2019), gender leadership underrepresentation still exists (Georgeac & Rattan, 2019). Chan (2019) and Knecht and Ecklund (2014) advocated the remnants of historical stereotypical women



roles continued to damage women's ability to advance, specifically in higher education leadership roles. Dahlvig (2013) outlined unlike males, women must balance career advancement with family life, as women are tasked with more family-work conflict compared to males where women are required to perform at work and at home (Gupta et al., 2018). Baker (2016) reiterated the resulting grind that the labor-intensive struggle women faced countering stereotypical roles to simply acquire a leadership position. Baker stated women confronted stereotypical gender barriers before even contemplating successful leadership tenure, which contributed to significant gender underrepresentation.

Efforts to increase gender diversity in leadership were affected by gender discrimination and stereotypical attitudes, which continue to negatively impact women's leadership career opportunities (Kossek & Buzzanell 2018; Radović-Marković et al., 2013). One in four women contemplated what many would have considered unthinkable just six months ago: downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce completely (Coury et al., 2020). Moreover, corporate America was at a crisis point where companies risk losing women in leadership, future women leaders, and unwinding years of painstaking progress toward gender diversity (Coury et al., 2020).

Traditionally, the purpose of higher education was to educate elite White males and "replicate the existing elite and fulfill elite roles" (Lombardi, 2013, p. 21). The opportunity and access for women to gain a college education became a reality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, well after males. However, women have continued to acquire more advanced degrees compared to males, such as the 2014-2015 school year, women accounted for 1,082,265 undergraduate degrees in comparison to males who acquired 812,669 (Scott, 2018).

Despite statistics outlining women acquiring more advanced degrees than males, the numbers have not corresponded to an equal representation of women in higher education leadership roles (Longman & Anderson, 2016; Longman et al., 2018). Scott (2018) indicated women represented 30.2% of the membership for the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB), yet males held 82.6 % of board chair positions at public institutions. In 2010, 48% of the CCCU Board of Trustees were composed of only 20% women. By 2015, women's representation on the Board of Trustees at CCCU institutions increased to 55% (Curry & Willeman, 2018).

Despite a marked improvement in women's representation at the CCCU board level, solving the dearth of women represented in senior-level leadership positions remains an issue as women continue to face barriers in the workplace, hindering career advancement and experience inequality in employment, hierarchy, and compensation (Vokić et al., 2017). Furthermore, women held less than 30% of positional leadership roles in any category at CCCU institutions and barely more than 20% of all senior-level positions. Women accounted for 7.6% of college presidents and 29% of chief academic officers (Curry & Willeman, 2018). The apparent barriers aspiring women leaders continued to face amounted to highly qualified women educators probing the current educational landscape. Zikmund (2010) outlined women asked difficult questions and attempted to forge new paths, with traditionalists digging in their heels to stop them. Zikmund continued by implicating the controversies over sexuality, over definitions and names for God, over relations with other religions, where issues developed out of women's experience of marginalization and their consequent abilities to see themselves as fellow travelers with other marginalized groups.

The staggering underrepresentation of women in leadership roles is most apparent in higher education settings, specifically within certain populations such as CCCU member institutions (Longman et al., 2011; Moreton & Newsom, 2004; Smith & Suby-Long, 2019). In 2010, 60% of students attending CCCU institutions were women, yet 5% of CCCU institutions had a woman as president (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). By contrast, in 2010, women accounted for 26% of leadership positions at all U.S. colleges and universities (Curry & Willeman, 2018). Additionally, in 2010, Curry and Willeman found results were similarly disheartening at CCCU institutions, with 19% of women serving as chief academic officers, whereas 40% of all U.S. colleges and universities had a woman in a provost position.

The consequential underrepresentation of women leaders has negatively affected the influence of active women's voice within CCCU member institutions (McKenzie & Halstead, 2014). CCCU organization structures (Longman & Lafreniere, 2012; Smith & Mamiseishvili, 2016) have promoted a continued labyrinth of gender bias against women leaders' resulting in continued leadership marginalization (Kaiser & Wallace, 2016).

In education, unlike males, women must balance career advancement with family life (Dahlvig, 2013). Furthermore, women were tasked with more family-work conflict than men, where they are required to perform at work and home (Gupta et al., 2018). The nature of higher education leadership roles lent itself to a significant amount of work spent with an organization and a schedule that lacks flexibility (Longman & Anderson, 2016). Longman and Anderson advocated busy and inflexible schedules limit women leaders' ability to effectively balance leadership work with family life. The consequent lack of support for women leaders has been intensified due to the sparse access women leaders have to mentorship programs (Nakitende, 2019; Tangenberg, 2013). The need for mentorship to limit the pervasive cultural connection

between legitimate leadership and masculinity is clear (Hart, 2016), which has led to a disproportionate number of the critical mass of women in leadership roles (Read & Kehm, 2016).

Women's underrepresentation at senior-level leadership positions can be attributed to various barriers women faced on their journey to acquiring and maintaining a senior-level leadership role (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Scott, 2018). Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) identified 27 gender-based leadership barriers, including a lack of mentorship, gender stereotypes, harassment, bias, and hierarchal culture. Many of the barriers found were determined to be hidden and often a greater level associated with unconscious barriers in religious organizations (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Dzubinski, 2016). Consistently, women leaders exhibited feelings of inadequacy that negatively coincided with leadership ability attributed to continued gender inequality in senior-level leadership (Dahlvig, 2013).

Mason et al. (2016) outlined Christian men navigated invisible barriers through their nature to lead, to not be affected by self-esteem or efficacy, and the opportunity for males to acquire positions of power due to patriarchal religious culture rather than their qualifications or experience. The consequential gender bias associated with male and women leadership opportunities has been clear within the walls of religiously affiliated higher education institutions such as CCCU institutions (Luna De La Rosa & Jun, 2019; Smith & Suby-Long, 2019). Gender biases within CCCU leadership constructs disturb an equitable leadership cycle where gender equality should reign in leadership positions (Ibarra et al., 2013; Wallace & Wallin, 2015).

The lack of senior-level women leaders can be pinpointed within specific organization populations, specifically at CCCU institutions (Parker, 2015; Redmond et al., 2017; Shepherd, 2017). Gender underrepresentation in senior-level leadership positions is particularly noticeable

at Christian higher education institutions (Longman et al., 2019). Despite increased representation of women leaders within higher education (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Johnson et al., 2020; Madsen, 2012) leadership gender inequality is still rampant within CCCU organizational leadership structures where women are underrepresented in senior-level leadership positions (Hernandez Bark et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2019; Yang & Aldrich, 2014).

The consequent underrepresentation of women leaders negatively affected the influence of active women voices within CCCU member institutions (McKenzie & Halstead, 2014). CCCU organization structures have unintentionally (Longman & Lafreniere, 2012; Smith & Mamiseishvili, 2016) promoted a continued labyrinth of gender bias which women leaders experienced (Kaiser & Wallace, 2016), resulting in continued women leadership marginalization. Though there is much research regarding barriers to women leadership, scant data exists related to the barriers and experiences women leaders faced in specific environments (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Nguyen, 2013).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Women account for over half of high-status professional degrees (Gerzema & D'Antonio, 2013; Longman & Anderson, 2011; Nakitende, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2020); yet gender underrepresentation in senior-level leadership positions within Christian higher education has become a significant issue. As of 2017, women occupied 27% of full-time professor positions (Taylor et al., 2017) and 27% of all higher education institutions' presidencies (Johnson, 2016; Moreton & Newsom, 2004). Though full-time women faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions has increased to approximately 50 percent in 2020 (NCES, 2019). Kellerman and Rhode (2017) demonstrated continued representation issues in leadership and tenure track positions as women tenured professors

decreased from 40% to 35%. The underrepresentation of women in higher education professional ranks, specifically tenured or senior-level positions, has become more evident within Christian higher education institutions as women “often fair significantly worse in measures of gender equity” (Reynolds & Curry, 2014, p. 14).

CCCU member institutions were one of the worst contributors to the problem of women's leadership underrepresentation, as women represent 7.6% of presidential positions of CCCU institutions in the United States (Curry & Willeman, 2018; Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Longman & Anderson, 2016). CCCU membership criteria offered an outlook on the evangelical culture and beliefs that exist. The evangelical and theological beliefs associated with CCCU institutions have significantly influenced the leadership aspirations and experiences of women leaders (Longman et al., 2018). Dahlvig and Beers (2018) and Longman et al. (2011) articulated the environment and traditional constructs of many CCCU member institutions have negatively impacted the amount of senior-level women leaders at CCCU institutions.

Longman and Anderson (2011) and Johnson (2016) maintained there had been ample opportunity to move toward more gender-equitable leadership, but many CCCU member institutions have not been willing. CCCU institutions justified their lack of gender diversity in leadership positions by maintaining the traditional cultures on which the institutions were founded (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Because of such traditions, many CCCU institutions held onto evangelical traditions to monopolize a lack of diverse power in leadership positions in today's workplace (Smith & Mamiseishvili, 2016). Evangelical power garnered at many CCCU institutions significantly limited the opportunity and potential for women's representation in leadership positions and presented a significant barrier to progressing to more gender-equitable leadership (Schlumpf, 2018).

Nussbaum and Chang (2013) emphasized the dilemma CCCU institutions face as holding onto historical evangelical practices may prevent CCCU institutions from interpreting the Bible and religious traditions in a way that coincides with current societal needs. The authors maintained from 1998 to 2010, only six of the 110 CCCU U.S. affiliated institutions had a woman as president, with the number of men serving in vice presidential roles or higher five times more than the ratio of women. Although Nussbaum and Chang noted more progressive Christian higher education institutions had made major strides to create vibrant, diverse campuses, specifically integrating theological patterns tied to institutional history while incorporating increased diversity efforts through the institutional mission, identity, theological foundations, policies, and board governance.

The increased emphasis on finding ways to help women in higher education is not unique to Christian higher education but is exacerbated. Dzubinski (2018) reported women found the higher education environment ‘chilly,’ which reflected a trend of evangelicalism with women’s leadership lagging comparable to secular nonprofit organizations. Barton (2019) reiterated institutional roots and connections, specifically those tied to the Church of Christ with a historically complementarian theological position related to women in leadership presented significant challenges for succession planning. Though CCCU institutions have recognized the need to confront the underrepresentation of women in Christian higher education, Christian higher education institutions have begun to engage in a holistic approach that allowed individual institutions to embrace their Christian identity as the foundation of their success while engaging new models of learning to execute actions that make Christian colleges and universities more accessible and relevant to meet diverse needs of women (Schreiner, 2016). However, the recent employment of succession planning and more diverse approaches to institutional theology still

have not changed the fact as of spring 2021, across the 180 plus CCCU affiliated institutions, 18 are currently led by women presidents, thus, approximately 90% of CCCU institutions are still led by males (cccu.org, 2021).

Allen et al. (2016) emphasized the need for CCCU institutions to be a catalyst for change by normalizing women in their career paths and counter unconstructive implicit expectations where the institutions facilitate women's career advancement. There was a discrepancy in the proportion of representation of women in higher education leadership. Women who made it to a place of leadership were more likely to have partners who made career accommodations in support of the woman's career and were less likely to relocate for career advancement. The findings reinforced the concern and importance of mentorship and sponsorship to support women in positions of leadership (Behr & Schneider, 2015).

Implicit gender equity concerns within CCCU institutions further contributed to the barriers associated with the limited number of senior-level women leaders within Christian higher education (Dahlvig & Beers, 2018). Dahlvig (2013) outlined a hierarchal structure that matched a patriarchal structure at most CCCU schools, as women leaders experienced discrimination and a lack of access to senior-level leadership positions (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Gupta et al., 2018; Longman & Anderson, 2016). Dahlvig and Longman (2014) affirmed the number of enrolled women students at CCCU institutions compared to the number of senior-level women leaders did not positively correlate. Thus, women were forced to navigate different organizational terrain from their male counterparts to achieve leadership roles (Longman et al., 2018). O'Connor (2018) supported there were serious implicit gender equity concerns within CCCU institutions which required further investigation into CCCU member institutions' current approach to gender equity and leadership.



Despite the barriers women faced from gender role ideologies specifically related to theological views (Mason et al., 2016) and family life (Ekine, 2018), those in leadership positions continued to perform at the highest level (Porterfield, 2013). Leadership gender diversity had innumerable benefits, including greater social responsibility, improved culture and climate, and increased profitability (Badal & Harter, 2014; Catalyst, 2015; Kay & Shipman, 2014). Yet, Dahlvig and Beers (2018) and Dahlvig and Longman (2014) suggested the vast majority of CCCU institutions continued to have males dominated top senior-level positions.

Women continued to struggle in gaining opportunities to attain leadership positions if CCCU institutions held on to their evangelical traditions (Morley, 2013; Schlumpf, 2018; Zikmund, 2010). Therefore, it has been crucial to further understand the barriers women face in acquiring and maintaining senior-level leadership at CCCU institutions (Barton, 2019; Longman & Anderson, 2016). Promoting an understanding to produce outstanding women leaders and gender equity in senior-level leadership positions, specifically within a higher education setting is, has been critical for the advancement of higher education leadership (Smith & Suby-Long, 2019).

Though there has been much research regarding the barriers women face in acquiring and performing in positions of leadership, there is little data to support the women who break through unconscious barriers, the glass ceiling, to positions of leadership (Flippin, 2017; Taylor & Stein, 2014). Data are even scarcer with women in leadership, particularly within CCCU institutions where traditional rules accelerate the gender gap and the potential for equal gender opportunity in leadership roles (Longman et al., 2018).

Further study is warranted to understand the current patterns of masculine ethics leading to the scarcity of women in senior-level leadership roles (Alemán, 2014; Longman & Anderson,

2011). Furthermore, continued masculine discourse (Zhao & Jones, 2017) and the apparent failure of CCCU institutions to offer women the same opportunity to teach and administer as men require further investigation (Joeckel & Chesnes, 2012; Nussbaum & Chang, 2013). This research outlines the meager amount of senior-level women leaders at CCCU institutions to understand their experiences within their leadership role, examine their journey to the current place of leadership, and inform current and aspiring women leaders to achieve in leadership and become more efficient in educating aspiring women leaders.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the study was to examine the barriers women faced and strategies they employed to overcome the barriers to achieving senior-level leadership roles within CCCU member institutions. This qualitative study utilized semistructured interviews and open-ended questions with current senior-level women leaders at CCCU member institutions.

### **Research Questions**

The central question that guided the research study was: How do senior-level women leaders navigate leadership advancement within CCCU institutions? In addition to the central question, the following accompanying research questions were used to explore the phenomenon:

**RQ1.** How have senior-level women leaders traversed their Christian identity, gender, and leadership within CCCU settings?

**RQ2.** What barriers have senior-level women leaders experienced at a CCCU institution?

**RQ3.** What leadership style have senior-level leaders employed within a traditional higher education religious community?

## Significance

The study afforded the collection of valuable research related to women leaders in CCCU leadership settings to explain potential barriers aspiring women leaders may face and potentially close the gap of senior-level women leadership representation at CCCU member institutions (Dahlvig, 2013; Longman & Anderson, 2016; Longman et al., 2018). The study provided an understanding of the experiences of women leading in conservative Christian environments (CCCU) through the lens of the role congruity model (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and sex-role stereotype theory (Hollander & Yoder, 1980).

Joeckel and Chesnes (2012) and Redmond et al. (2017) promoted the importance of outlining the experiences of senior-level women leaders. Yet, outlining senior-level women leadership experiences in specific populations such as conservative Christian environments allowed for the understanding of women leaders who consistently described treatment within higher education as one of hostility with subtle messages of invisibility against women (Dzubinski, 2018). Barriers associated with women's leadership were exacerbated in conservative environments, including CCCU institutions (Longman et al., 2018). The authors alluded to the need for Christian higher education institutions to take the first step to recognize that women encountered barriers at all levels of leadership.

Higher education institutions established on Christian traditions typically maintained historically complementarian theological positions, which presented significant challenges for succession planning for women in leadership. The uncomfortable reality for higher education is that it is a sector largely unprepared for the impact of a limited leadership pipeline. Women and people of color are severely underrepresented in academic and nonacademic leadership roles (Barton, 2018). Systemic barriers prevented women from obtaining senior-level positions despite

women acquiring 57% of Bachelor's, 60% of Master's, and 54% of Doctor's degrees in the 2017-18 academic year (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, IPEDS, 2018). Recognizing the need for leaders with different competencies and perspectives from diverse backgrounds must be at the forefront of Christian higher education to address the systemic challenge preventing a successful future through an inadequate leadership pipeline (Barton, 2018).

Research related to women's leadership experiences within traditional Christian higher education constructs is limited at best with a lack of leadership involvement and visibility for women leaders (Longman et al., 2019). The study provided an outlet, an active voice, a place for women leaders to be visible and share their leadership journey, wisdom, and experiences to expand knowledge for CCCU communities.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**'C Suite' positions.** The 'C suite' position can be classified as positions such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Financial Officer (CFO). The positions typically consist of individuals who are in senior-level leadership positions (Power et al., 2019).

**Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU).** The CCCU is a higher education association consisting of more than 180 institutions globally. CCCU institutions are accredited colleges and universities with Christ-centered missions rooted in the historic Christian faith (cccu.org, 2021; Confer & Mamiseishvili, 2012).

**Evangelical traditions.** The historical-theological traditions and Christian mission the institution was founded on. Evangelical traditions can be used to promote equality and theological tradition (Smith & Mamiseishvili, 2016). The shared and internalized vision for

evangelical higher education institutions to fulfill their mission despite obvious external threats (Mullen, 2020).

**Family-work conflict.** Family-work balance refers to consistent gender role stereotypes where women are perceived to have family work conflict than men, which may lead to lower performance and less promotability (Gupta et al., 2018).

**Gender inequality.** The persistent lack of representation of women in top leadership and acknowledging the fragmented nature of social progress across domains of inequality (Georgeac & Rattan, 2019).

**Historical gender roles.** Women compared to males represent a lower percentage of college professors and administrators, a representation that has existed since the early 1800s (Parker, 2015).

**Organizational leadership.** The type of leadership is found in many constructs, specifically within higher education institutions. Organizational leadership is where gender should be acknowledged as a basic organizing feature of organizations (Longman et al., 2018).

**Self-efficacy.** Where an individual makes cognizant decisions directing behaviors toward desired behaviors. Such behaviors can include goal setting, effort, and persistence. Self-efficacy can be related to performance, and an increase in self-efficacy can coincide with leadership success. (Huszczko & Endres, 2017).

**Senior-level leaders.** The term refers to the corporate level and higher education senior administrative positions that specifically include central academic affairs roles (Associate Provosts or Deans) and central senior academic affairs officers (e.g., deans, CEO, CFO, vice president, and president; Longman & Anderson, 2011).

**Women's underrepresentation.** The idea women are misrepresented in leadership settings where women's professional paths are represented as a 'jungle gym.' The lack of women's representation in the higher echelons of leadership, including corporate boards and senior-level leadership positions (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).

### **Summary and Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 included the introduction, problem statement, study purpose, research questions, study significance, and summary. This chapter provided insight into previous research related to the topic of barriers to women in leadership, but additional research is required to truly understand the research concept. Chapter 2 continues to address the previous research conducted on this topic through a literature review. The review introduces theoretical frameworks, including the role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and Hollander and Yoder's (1980) sex-role stereotype research. Eagly and Karau (2002) role congruity model propose a gender group will be positively viewed and evaluated when the group exhibits characteristic associated with typical gender roles. Similarly, Hollander and Yoder (1980) sex-role stereotype theory introduces potential issues in comparing male and women leaders due to generalizations related to historical stereotypes and failure to view women as a function in their current context.

Furthermore, Chapter 2 presents literature related to the barriers to women's leadership, outlining topics, including historical gender factors, family and work balance, access to mentors, evangelical traditions, and self-efficacy concepts while continually considering the CCCU environment and the experiences of women leaders within traditional Christian higher education communities (Northouse, 2015). Chapter 3 outlines the study methodology, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, and assumptions. Chapter 4 outlines the study findings from semistructured interviews, and Chapter 5 provides a summary of the

research questions, interviews, finding interpretations, emerging data themes and policy implications, and application to future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the barriers women faced and strategies they employed to overcome the barriers to achieving senior-level leadership roles within CCCU member institutions. The study expounded knowledge of current women leaders' journeys and experiences from a personal and professional level to provide perspective on women's senior-level leadership representation in higher education while outlining experiences of senior-level women leaders within conservative Christian communities, particularly CCCU environments.

The promotion of gender equality in organizational leadership is key on a national level to advance organizational leadership (Kelan & Wratil, 2018; Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). On a smaller, more tangible level, exploring gender representation within senior-level leadership positions at CCCU institutions is crucial to the advancement of current and future women leaders, future mentorship programs, and the overall success of CCCU institutions (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Longman & Anderson, 2016; Longman et al., 2018). Many women receive equal working opportunities at entry-level positions yet do not have the same opportunity to pursue or maintain a senior-level leadership role (David, 2017; Morley, 2013). However, there has been little research conducted on senior-level leadership within specific higher education environments, specifically CCCU institutions.

This study was designed to address the gender gap in senior-level leadership positions within CCCU settings through a qualitative lens studying current women in senior-level leadership roles. The study afforded an insight into the experiences of current women CCCU senior-level leaders while paving the way for aspiring CCCU women leaders. Data collection through semistructured interviews guided through theoretical frameworks including the role



congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and Hollander and Yoder's (1980) sex-role stereotype research provided insight into the lived experiences of current senior-level women leaders. The proposed literature in this chapter provided a foundational perspective of women in leadership to offer an understanding of topics and themes women leaders had previously and currently experienced in specific traditional Christian higher education settings.

### **Literature Search Methods**

The literature review was focused on the following areas: historical gender bias, prescriptive gender stereotypes, women's leadership capabilities, self-efficacy, family and work balance, evangelical traditions, and women's mentorship. Understanding the existing research related to the outlined key research topics required a substantial research process with the use of a variety of sources to garner essential literature. I utilized the Brown Library at Abilene Christian University (ACU) utilizing online databases to establish pinpoint literature research and analysis specifically within the past 10 years.

In addition to utilizing the online database, I used research books adopted from the classes taken throughout the Doctoral process and online databases including Digital Dissertations and Thesis Global, Ebook collection (EBSCO), Eric (Gov't), and Sage Research Methods Online to provide further research specifically related to the education field. To include the most updated statistics related to higher education topics, such as the proportion of full-time professors and academic degrees awarded by higher institutions, I utilized the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) database.

To confine my research, I utilized specific phrases and themes to gather existing literature related to the research topic. Relevant phrases included but were not limited to *barriers to women in leadership*, *gender bias in leadership*, *women's leadership capabilities*, *prescriptive*

*gender stereotypes, gender workplace bias, leadership barriers at CCCU institutions, women's leadership at CCCU institutions, Christian traditions, and women in leadership and women's leadership misrepresentation.* Precise keywords allowed for more refined research with literature specifically related to the topic while providing detailed insight into the relationship between leadership barriers and women's misrepresentation within specific higher education populations, including the CCCU.

### **Historical Gender Bias**

Intertwined within the role congruity theory, women have begun to gain increased access to supervisory and middle management positions without ever establishing themselves in the upper echelons of senior-level leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Longman & Anderson, 2016; Redmond et al., 2017). Access to senior-level leadership roles coincides with hindrances stemming from historical gender bias barriers associated with leadership roles. Such leadership roles have typically been termed a masculinized position dominated by white males, with gender inequality evident in workforce leadership (Georgeac & Rattan, 2019; Power et al., 2019; Rodriguez, 2019).

The participation of women at an entry-level position in higher education has been one of slow progression dating from the colonial era (Long, 2012). Historically, males have consistently been provided more opportunities to further their education, with women left to serve in traditional roles, including housework and child-rearing (Smith, 2017; Smith-Hollins et al., 2015; Thelin, 2011). Chen and Houser (2019) supported gender stereotypes, specifically stereotype-based expectations of inferiority contributed to the absence of gender diversity and underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Furthermore, women who currently serve in higher education suffered from structural inequities and lasting realities of the direct legacy of

America's historical antagonism toward women's higher learning (Nideffer & Bashaw, 2001; Tzu-Jiun Yeh, 2018).

Tarbutton (2019) suggested the first opportunities for women to further their education and gain a chance in the leadership realm were due to law-making changes and the result of the United States at war. In 1868, the institution of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment promoted equal protection of the law for all citizens. By 1920, the establishment of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment allowed women to vote, and the beginning of World War II in 1939 forced women to enter the workforce even on a temporary basis (Parker, 2015; Tarbutton, 2019). Women's leadership progression began to occur as a direct result of the World War. Long (2012) advocated significant work advances developed from the promotion of specific laws such as the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment that have supported women entering the workforce at entry-level positions. Despite law advancements that created potential opportunities for women leaders, Fuller et al. (2015) and Tarbutton (2019) noted progressive gender equity laws ranging from constitutional amendments to Title IX did not encourage a balanced representation of women in senior-level leadership positions. Tarbutton argued the laws only seemed to provide rhetoric concerning women's leadership representation rather than solutions.

O'Neil et al. (2008) supported Fuller et al. (2015) and Tarbutton's (2019) research suggesting the ranks of women in leadership within organizations had grown exponentially. However, at their core, organizations were still fundamentally male-dominated. O'Neil et al. (2008) promoted the preponderance of anecdotal leadership opportunities for women and clarified the most effective approach for successful organizations to implement women's leadership programs was to develop the talents and encourage the contributions of women employees within their organization. O'Neil et al. detailed women's career development may not

differ fundamentally compared to males, yet women becoming leaders was a lot more complex due to barriers imposed by gendered social bias.

Gloor et al. (2020) advocated women leaders continued to face workplace gender bias, as women's performances presented an ethical dilemma for organizations. The authors suggested the need for utilizing the role congruity model as a tool to utilize in fairly evaluating women leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Furthermore, Gloor et al. (2020) outlined positive improvements associated with women's leadership representation due to decades of women exemplifying progression through their achievement, including the increased number of women who acquired higher education degrees versus males.

However, increased women's leadership representation did not slow the consistent historical gender bias hindering women's representation in leadership roles. Historical gender bias continued to play into the struggle women in leadership face today (Dzubinski, 2018). Many of the historical gender biases are not readily visible to outsiders, with subtle discrimination which manifests in isolation. Consequently, women's underrepresentation resulted in an unreceptive campus environment and fewer mentoring opportunities (Freeman et al., 2019). History precedes the continued struggle for women to garner leadership opportunities. Shakeshaft (1989) outlined from the early 1800s, teaching became feminized as it was a logical extension of domestic teaching roles at home as a mother. As education progressed and the establishment of educational administration became a reality, males were best suited with leadership positions (Adkinson, 1985).

The split between educational administration and teaching exacerbated the gender gap as women continue to hold most educational employee positions but few leadership positions (Gangone & Lennon, 2014). Ties to previous stereotypical roles that women used to hold,

continue to discourage gender equality in leadership positions today. Historical gender biases in education have formed a pattern of gender underrepresentation in higher education. Regardless of women's education or leadership skills, there must be a recognition of the realities of systemic barriers women face (Brower et al., 2019; Gangone, 2016; Madsen & Longman, 2020).

### **Prescriptive Workplace Gender Stereotypes**

Chen and Houser (2019) suggested the combination of widespread gender stereotypes and leader prototypes feed the notion that women suffered from leadership gender bias. Though society has changed, workplace gender stereotypes have remained firm (Rice & Barth, 2016). The authors outlined a great deal of concern related to explicit and implicit biases against women in higher education hiring but considered women in college as more career-oriented while holding onto minimal gender-stereotypical beliefs. However, Smith et al. (2019) argued women often encountered gender stereotypes and biases that reinforced the existing hierarchy. The author continued suggesting many industries and professions have attempted to retain talented women. They simply do not belong, do not fit, and are often penalized for their adoption of an authentic leadership style.

Farh et al. (2020) found prescriptive gender workplace stereotypes may be related to the enactment of the women's voice. The author stated the importance of providing women a voice as a construct provided a link between the elements of an individual voice and the benefits of team performance. Abraham (2020) reiterated Fahr et al.'s (2020) research called for the reconceptualization of organizational approaches where many male-dominated organizations were not providing women with a voice or chance for employment referral. Abraham (2020) restated the need to take the costless step first step of making gender preferences clear to minimize biases.

Gender stereotypes and prejudice against women leaders provided an alternative explanation for the underrepresentation of women in leadership (Hoffmann & Musch, 2019). The authors promoted women who experienced prejudice as leaders leading to social desirability bias. Hoffmann and Musch suggested women practitioners concealed gender-stereotypical attitudes and acts of discrimination to avoid bias from those they lead. Though there have been recognized changes in participation and acceptance of women, there has been a significant increase in women's gender stereotyping (Haines et al., 2016). Haines et al. echoed prescriptive gender stereotypes that were so deeply embedded in society that those in positions to evaluate men and women must be constantly vigilant to possible influences of stereotypes regarding judgments, choices, and actions.

Eagly et al. (2020) maintained that it was only in competence that gender stereotypes and equality had come to dominate people's views of males and women. The authors explore claims gender stereotypes associate a group's lower status as an implied competence stereotype. However, Eagly et al. found the increase of women in employment has forced people to believe gender differences should be viewed through competence rather than personality, thus countering gender stereotypes.

Valuing professionals on leadership competence was valid specifically if leaders, regardless of gender, were provided a fair chance in a leadership position to present their ability. Gloor et al. (2020) claimed women face consistent, sizeable, and persistent effects indicating significant biases in the workplace compared with males. Furthermore, Gloor et al. discussed biases might be overcome at a team-level environment with a balanced gender-composed team that equalizes potential biases between genders. Though Gloor et al.'s balanced team gender approach provides a potential solution to gender prescribed biases, Ariza et al. (2020) suggested

the distance between men and women's leadership representation is related to the influence of an agentic and androcentric society with a greater quantity of gender stereotypes for males.

The consequences of an androcentric society and a higher quantity of male gender stereotypes resulted in continued women leadership inequity leading to continued underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in higher education (Leal Filho et al., 2020). Madden (2011) agreed with the notion of continued gender inequity toward women leaders. The author contended gender stereotypes were pervasive and impacted all aspects of women's and men's behavior. Reverting to historical and cultural influences related to gender stereotypes, Leal Filho et al. (2020) and Madden (2011) claimed leaders were perceived as effective when they adopted roles congruent with expectations, thus outlining the need to articulate the benefits of leadership reflecting feminist values.

Salin (2020) argued the subtle barriers women face negatively contributed to the attainment of leadership positions. The author outlined termed the metaphorical barriers like the glass ceiling where women suffered from multiple barriers in their journey to attain a leadership position. Salin alluded to many organizations that implemented gendered leadership expectations where male assumptions significantly affected leadership hiring. Furthermore, Salin articulated women faced gender bias even when they acquired a leadership position due to the exhibition of gender-incongruent behavior even when male and women leaders perform the same.

Katila and Eriksson (2013) reiterated women leaders suffered from gendered positioning due to the more expressive and communal nature of women compared to males. Women leaders were perceived to possess interpersonal sensitivity and exemplified a selfless attitude, whereas male leaders were identified as more agentic and competent in their leadership position. Katila and Eriksson further outlined the aggressive and forceful nature of male leaders were considered

as positive attributes that women may not possess. The authors supported women were held to a different standard of bias where their care was perceived as a hindrance to their leadership, yet males were emotionally stable despite showing less care for their subordinates.

The consequential stereotypes women leaders were associated with included being too caring, indicating women suffered from stereotypical assumptions regarding their roles (Katila & Eriksson, 2013). Koenig et al. (2011) argued stereotypes related to women's roles and abilities were a barrier to women's advancement to the highest levels of leadership. Women experienced continued gender bias through cultural stereotypes associating them with being the kinder, more positive sex. Women leaders were stereotyped as the 'nicer gender,' resulting in workplace discrimination where they suffered from the cultural stereotype of masculinity that was robustly associated with leadership contexts.

Gender bias research related to women in leadership revealed the small number of women who succeeded in acquiring top-level leadership positions experienced a significant pay gap in comparison to male leaders (Kulich et al., 2011). Thus, research consistently indicated as women continued to climb the corporate ladder, the discrepancy in compensation between males and females became larger. Heilman and Okimoto (2007) echoed the consistent theme of sex bias in the workplace, suggesting women were perceived as not as competent as men and experienced distorted performance evaluations. Heilman and Okimoto reiterated the unequivocal evidence that women leaders who performed male gender-typed work suffered from career-hindering problems in work settings.

Heilman and Okimoto (2007) further suggested women leaders experience gender bias on a regular basis, where women experience negative reactions when successful in male leadership domains (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). Consequently, gender bias resulted in perceptions women



violated stereotype-based 'oughts' of how women should behave in male leadership settings. Heilman and Okimoto outlined stereotypical women's gender bias tended to support the idea women who were successful in male domains violated 'gender stereotypic prescriptions,' resulting in undeserved negative reactions (p. 91). Thus, understanding the 'oughts' (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007) impact of prescriptive gender stereotypes combined with women's leadership capabilities was critical to empowering aspiring women leaders (Madden, 2011).

### **Women's Leadership Capabilities and Higher Education**

McDermott (2014) suggested an increasing trend of women acquiring leadership positions; however, in 2014, only 16% of women held director positions at Fortune 500 companies. Furthermore, McDermott outlined many women leaders were capable of leading but suffered from the "good girl syndrome," where they were often overly modest and did not want to stand out. The author continued by suggesting women were truly valuable in leadership positions but had to consciously make a transition from the 'good girl' mentality. Jones (2014) echoed McDermott's (2014) research noting male leaders continued to make most high-level decisions regarding advancement in higher education. Despite Jones promoting women's place in higher education leadership, the underlying mindset still suggested women were more nurturing. Consequently, women were perceived as less powerful than male leaders even when the research clearly implied women's ability to lead effectively with true democratic intention (Barnett, 2020).

Gallant (2014) termed the underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership as a persistent global phenomenon. Gallant's views contradicted surrounding women's leadership constructs where women suffered from gendered notions which blocked the development of leadership capabilities. Gallant outlined the lack of women-oriented leadership programs

promoted a lack of women's advancement and continuity in their social institutions. Gallant argued women in mid-career academics were fully capable of attaining and succeeding in higher educational leadership but required an increased capacity to understand larger and more complex groups of others where males had more accessibility to further their leadership capabilities.

Black and Islam (2014) reiterated the difficulty for women to gain a leadership role while imploring women to take responsibility for their own careers by building self-confidence and being prepared to speak up as a valued contributor to one's organization. Black and Islam offered workplaces that were still male oriented at the top, yet, argued women had to promote fellow women and their leadership capabilities, one aligned with a mentorship advocacy structure. The author's research viewed effective women leaders as an asset to an organization that exhibited positive influence on both men and women employees. Although Black and Islam detailed women's self-promotion and self-confidence as helpful, they recognized the systemic and structural bias in policies and procedures favored males regardless of women's leadership capabilities.

Hunt et al. (2014) contributed to the polarizing effect women leaders could have when acquiring a position of leadership. Their research focused on Australia's first woman Prime Minister who outlined the leadership characteristics of exuding confidence as critical for future aspiring women leaders to succeed and acquire leadership positions as long they experienced the impact of a woman role model. However, Hunt et al. outlined clear evidence that suggested women leaders consistently attempted to avoid backlash by conforming to feminine norms rather than delving into male dominated leadership capabilities. Furthermore, women had the attributes to lead, yet the outside criticism of appearing ambitious collided with women's fear of experiencing backlash.

The fear of women experiencing backlash coincided with research dedicated to women leaders facing unique challenges at multiple development stages of their leadership journey (Mattar et al., 2018). Due to leaders in many organizational capacities, a one size fits all model doesn't necessarily apply. Both men and women must partake in leadership development interventions to allow one as a leader to tailor goals, aspirations, and capabilities to fit their leadership context. Mattar et al. (2018) stated the best leaders were able to choose from a wide variety of available interventions and resources to suit their leadership culture. However, given the unique challenges and opportunities of aspiring women leaders, many women faced barriers, including a lack of cooperation from male colleagues and boundaries imposed by society leading to persistent inequality regardless of leadership capabilities.

Women appeared to continually face a steeper path towards professional growth than males (Mattar et al., 2018). Khan and Shahed (2018) echoed women required more access to leadership development programs to improve capabilities. The authors even found many leadership traits were common in both male and women leaders, including honesty, optimism, taking the initiative, and a sense of achievement. In addition to comparable leadership traits found in men and women, Khan and Shahed (2018) claimed women leaders had supplementary leadership traits, including confidence and the ability to formulate an organizational vision while implementing such vision into a reality.

Both men and women shared similar expertise and capabilities in leadership positions. Yet, the implementation of formalized leadership development programs that targeted women was essential to provide enabling structures for women to be trained effectively to garner the capabilities of male leaders (Redmond et al., 2017). Consequently, the provision of programs to

enhance the leadership development of women correlated with the capacity and capabilities of women to succeed in leadership roles.

Though Mattar et al. (2018) and Khan and Shahed (2018) described the many capabilities of women leaders in comparison to men on an individual level, McKenzie (2018) outlined a discouraging underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (27%) and attributed such discourse to the lack of both confidence and belief in women's leadership capabilities. McKenzie implored higher education institutions to assist women in understanding the leadership challenges they may face to motivate them to seek leadership roles in the workplace, leading to increased women's leadership capabilities. The underrepresentation of women leaders appeared to not be associated with the capability of the leader, yet it is also crucial to understand the unique emotional intelligence women exhibited versus men to understand the literature related to women's underrepresentation in leadership roles (Gouws, 2008; Mayer et al., 2017).

### **Emotional Intelligence and Self-Efficacy**

Gouws (2008) encouraged further understanding of women's emotional intelligence is crucial to recognize the underrepresentation of women leaders. Gouws (2008) promoted women leaders were perceived as too emotional to handle high-level leadership positions and reiterated stereotypical ideas that informed perceptions about women's abilities to perform well in leadership positions. Mayer et al. (2017) researched women's emotional intelligence traits, and their findings indicated women mainly referred to intrapersonal emotional intelligence followed by interpersonal emotional intelligence and adaptability. Women scored low in assertiveness and impulse control but were very aware of self-regard, specifically related to interpersonal relationships and empathy. However, strengths in areas such as intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional intelligence opposed stereotypical male leadership strengths. Mayer et al. (2017)

outlined the strengths of women's emotional intelligence were related to the balance of working well, staying healthy, and supporting work colleagues on an optimal level.

Bausch et al. (2014) indicated women underestimate their abilities to a larger degree than men as women expected their performance to be lower than men's. Furthermore, even with more established women leaders, they were still more likely to underestimate their ability as a leader. Bausch et al. advocated self-efficacy as having a significant influence on one's future goals and aspirations. The higher the individuals' efficacy, the higher one's challenge, and the belief in self as a leader to complete tasks.

Guillén et al. (2018) maintained women who even appeared to be self-confident did not necessarily gain influence in contrast to males. High-performing women leaders only gained influence when their self-confidence was coupled with pro-social orientation. Guillén et al. promoted women who succeeded in male-dominated domains did not ensure positive consequences for women leaders. The authors suggested men benefited from high performance independently, whereas women had to attain a high performance while also taking others' interests and motivations to heart.

Correll and Simard (2016) expressed women leaders' lack of self-efficacy was directly related to the systematic scarcity of specific feedback tied to outcomes. On the other hand, men were offered a clearer picture of their strengths and were provided with detailed guidance on how to reach the next level of their careers. Guillén et al. (2018) confirmed a similar ideal of vague feedback where successful women performed in male-dominated domains did not necessarily correlate with positive consequences for women. Women leaders who exemplified high levels of self-efficacy did not necessarily reap the same rewards as males who performed similarly or even worse. The apparent bias between men and women leaders surpassed simple

gender bias and applied even within psychological constructs such as emotional intelligence and self-efficacy (Bausch et al., 2014; Guillén et al., 2018; Mayer et al., 2017).

### **Women's Leadership Culture**

Research related to women's leader emotional intelligence coincided with current research associated with women's leadership culture (Mayer et al., 2017). Read and Kehm (2016) delineated countless leadership programs focused on developing and enhancing characteristics, including assertiveness and confidence. Yet, leadership characteristics were arguably harder for women to feel comfortable performing due to their cultural ascription. The shift toward a postmodernist leadership construct removed the fixed leadership model and provided opportunities for women to succeed in leadership positions.

Read and Kehm (2016) further outlined leadership as often gendered where characteristics such as assertiveness were viewed positively when coming from male colleagues rather than female colleagues. Culturally perceived feminized behaviors and practices that may be very normal for women, such as the way they dress, can lead to negative judgments for women in a leadership role. Consequently, the authors supported women often struggled in creating a leadership identity due to the discourse shown toward women leaders.

Faulkner (2009) examined the lack of women in academic leadership, stating institutional structures often excluded women and created unnecessary boundaries. Furthermore, the author urged institutions to create environments that encourage and support women attempting to balance family life and personal goals with career aspirations and leadership. Faulkner encouraged higher education institutions to take women's leadership more seriously and lean into women's careers on a deeper level. Furthermore, the author argued higher education

institutions' insurmountable culture did not allow for growth, thus, resulting in a lack of women mentors and programs available for women to seek advancement.

The advancement of women's leadership required the establishment of a unique women's leadership culture while adapting to the entrenched masculine culture of leadership (Cãnas et al., 2019). Acker (2012) alluded that many higher education organizations had structures and cultures pervaded by gender. Acker positioned even in environments where women led. A masculinized culture could still exist, thus, women were not only underrepresented but challenged with navigating changing workplace cultures. Moreover, Burkinshaw (2015) explained masculinist cultures were a deeply rooted issue. The authors posited women leaders were challenged to find the balance between meeting male-dominated cultures while not looking out of place to coincide with feminist ideals.

Morley (2013) expressed women leaders had to find balance when constructing their leadership identity, specifically within masculinized organizational cultures. Women leaders had to traverse the incongruence of minimizing gender differences to promote a leadership culture equal to that of a male. Furthermore, Pyke (2013) reiterated the lack of culture supporting equal gender leadership opportunities and suggested women leaders experienced a lack of support and, at times, bouts of bullying.

Women leaders were challenged with hierarchal cultures already set in stone, specifically at traditional Christian higher education institutions (Burkinshaw & White, 2017). The authors advocate exclusionary leadership structures remain at higher education institutions with a significant presence of organizational masculinity. Boysen et al. (2018) recapped the continued perception that the 'good old boy' mentality kept women leaders at a disadvantage despite their exemplified productivity and executive presence when provided the opportunity. Chisholm-

Burns et al. (2017) acknowledged women had fewer opportunities to engage in work interaction or network to gain an effective woman mentor, unlike their male counterparts.

Hostile, male-oriented organizational leadership working cultures significantly excluded women leaders and put individual constraints on women creating a leadership culture that men did not have to experience. Pyke (2013) stated women created leadership cultures associated with negative perceptions. Consequently, Iverson et al. (2019) argued women leaders were required to exhibit dynamic, resilient traits simply to create a positive leadership culture. Advancing a successful women's leadership culture required needed attributes more than a prescribed list of characteristics typically linked to male-dominated leadership constructs (Iverson et al., 2019). Iverson et al. echoed the call for leadership development initiatives to promote critical and creative thinking, which encouraged adaptive leadership suited to today's societal needs.

### **Women's Mentorship and Development Initiatives**

A critical area of women's leadership representation in higher education was a direct result of the availability of mentorship programs and developmental initiatives for women (Zimmerman et al., 2020). Ekine (2018) indicated women leadership increased reliance on women who were persistent and persuasive in advocating to serve as role models while increasing women's participation in leadership.

Cãnas et al. (2019) and Ekine (2018) advocated purposeful interventions of current women leaders enhanced aspiring women leaders' confidence and self-esteem while encouraging women to be competitive and assertive in pursuing leadership. By expressing women's fellowship programs as a cornerstone for women to climb the academic ladder, women leaders were perceived as more authentic by their peers when they partook in mentoring activities (Cãnas et



al., 2019). Women participants voiced support for mentor programs and encouraged the provision of space for women leaders to develop identities as professionals and normalize concerns related to the workforce (Cãnas et al., 2019; Ekine, 2018).

Turner-Moffatt (2019) expressed to normalize gender diversity in leadership was to advance the use of mentorship programs. However, increased future women's representation in leadership was challenging due to the current lack of women leaders and role models. Turner-Moffatt noted despite achieving an executive career being a difficult task in itself, current stereotypical perceptions often negatively affected the goals of women seeking such positions. Few women in leadership sustain the persona that leadership attainment is more difficult for women (Bowling, 2018).

Current mentoring research suggested aspiring women leaders had to have women in the workplace as role models (Zimmerman et al., 2020). Bowling (2018) mentioned women mentors were a critical part of both professional and personal development while aiding in creating a leadership pipeline within an organization. Insala (2018) advocated the elimination of stereotypes and double standards towards women could be achieved through mentoring programs. Moreover, Insala noted the ability to provide all employees the same access to mentoring opportunities while utilizing mental training to address the challenges of a diverse workforce provide positive solutions for organizations.

Mackey (2018) affirmed leveraging allies and mentors within workplaces was crucial for women to advance in leadership positions. Mackey confirmed women are required to be empowered to be a part of the leadership within an organization and should not be expected to singlehandedly change the cultures and values of their behavior without sufficient mentoring programs in place. Mackey implored the use of strategies that increase influence and capitalize

on the opportunities; women must acquire allies and mentors within their organizations, encouraging women to face the unique challenges within the workplace.

Gibson's (2006) research recognized the political climate and culture of academic institutions matched with the need for women's access to mentoring. Gibson suggested a mentor had the potential to transform the academic institution with increased diversity within the faculty population. Høigaard and Mathisen (2009) restated the importance of mentoring programs outlining those who were mentored often reported higher salaries, greater organizational awareness, and a higher rating of employment compared to those who were not mentored.

An establishment of women role models within the higher education field could inspire women in male-typical domains and managerial settings. More specifically, aspiring women leaders could be molded when women in leadership could serve as role models to mentor other women on how they should behave in challenging situations (Latu et al., 2019). Latu et al. (2019) and Mackey (2018) outlined the accessibility of women mentors, and developmental initiatives provided aspiring women with the confidence to pursue leadership positions. However, the lack of access to women's mentorship programs coincided with the inhibiting subtle barriers women faced due to remnants of established historical stereotypes (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Gibson, 2006; Longman & Anderson, 2016).

### **Family and Work Balance - The Double Bind**

Historically, women have often acquired traditional roles, including child-rearing resulting in a hindrance to aspiring women leaders' ability to attain leadership positions (Smith, 2017; Smith-Hollins et al., 2015; Thelin, 2011). Brue (2018) posited the expansion of work-life balanced dialogue presented the barrier of women attempting to progress into senior leadership positions while managing nonwork obligations. Additionally, Brue (2018) and Cheung and

Halpern (2010) delineated the integration of work and family roles provided both mutual opportunities and overlapping role demands resulted in work-life imbalance. The consequent push for an increased representation of women in leadership was matched by assumed stereotypical responsibilities around the home, a double bind.

Braun and Peus (2018) reiterated the growing pressure for women to acquire more leadership positions presented organizations with the responsibility of encouraging work-life employees. However, Carlson et al. (2009) promoted one had to understand work-life balance to take leadership gender into account. The push for organizations to help workers balance their work and family lives has become increasingly viewed as a business and social imperative. It is an essential component to corporate success (Braun & Peus, 2018; Carlson et al., 2009). Crain et al. (2014) acknowledged the interconnectedness between work and family but voiced concern with companies who failed to consider other life domains that women stereotypically were responsible for, including community involvement, leisure, and time with extended family.

Debebe (2011) opposed stereotypical roles of women within family constructs, arguing that males can and do fulfill roles at home. However, Debebe outlined women's advancement into leadership roles while balancing family duties contradicted that of males. Women were still pressured with tasks of raising a family while performing as a leader, while males were not subject to the same pressure. Thus, women who assumed leadership roles and had a family were pressured to find a balance between stereotypical women's behaviors while moving away from such behaviors in the workplace to be perceived as a strong senior-level leaders.

The consequent blurred lines between work and family caused concern between work and home boundaries. Concerns included spillover where work was taken home and negatively affected home life (Desrochers et al., 2005). Similarly, DiRenzo et al. (2011) further outlined the

pressures of women in leadership, stating those in high leadership positions brought considerably more work home, which negatively impacted the balance between family and work.

The common goal of many leaders was to maintain the balance between work and family responsibilities; however, many women leaders found balance difficult to acquire where spousal support was key in supporting one another's roles (Ferguson et al., 2016). Gregory and Milner (2009) indicated work-life balance was at the forefront of policy discourse within many organizations. The authors argued that women's choices were constrained by organizational culture and stereotypical roles within the household. Consequently, the importance of spousal support or support, in general, was key in increasing active coping mechanisms in promoting work-life balance (Halbesleben, 2010).

The promotion of work-life balance was highly dependent on the leave arrangements, and direct provision of services women in leadership have period examples including childcare or a supportive family system improved women's representation in management (Kalysh et al., 2016). Although women were expected to be nice and selfless, they suffered from the double bind of being conventionally feminine and also strong leaders. The double bind was 'exacerbated with women who started a family and were expected to treat birth as an appendectomy before resuming work after a brief time of recuperation' (Orbach, 2017, p. 221). The apparent pressures of women choosing between a career and a family were amplified as many women leaders treat the work-life balance as a personal management task rather than a commitment of the organization (Toffoletti & Starr, 2016). The pressured decisions women must make to support their family and career were reiterated in a CCCU institutional setting (Longman & Anderson, 2016).

## **Religion and Gender**

Collins (2009) portrayed women as never meant to compete with men, to act independently of men, to earn their own bread, or to have adventures on their own. Collins continued by articulating women in the 1960s were not to engage in any business without their husbands' permission or get credit without male co-signers. Then, suddenly, everything changed. The cherished convictions about women and what they could do were smashed in the lifetime of many women living today.

Though there has been recognition and serious advances for women professionally since the 1960s, most women worked outside the home, women were viewed differently professionally and received better compensation, some things still have not changed. Women were still trying to figure out how to balance passion and domesticity and are still trying to find their professional place specifically within the theological leadership realm (Zikmund, 2010). Religion remains a historical field where women are influential but are denied authoritarian positions due to Christian communities who hold on fervidly to gender roles (Porterfield, 2013).

Roberts et al. (2020) outlined most U.S. churches have been led by white men, often due to many Christian churches not allowing women to enter positions of leadership rationalized through Biblical justification. The Bible states that God does “not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet,” Timothy 2:12. The dominant U.S. depiction of God includes a predicted perception that white males are particularly fit to lead (Roberts et al., 2020). The impression that males can only lead in Christian contexts was supported at an early age where many girls form a set of rules that limit communal participation based on gender stereotypes. Such rules were based on conservative traditions that predicted women’s gender roles (Bang et al., 2005).

Conservative Christian communities seem to echo gender traditions based on theological practices where young women verbalized their desire to be a male so they could lead (Johnson & Penya, 2012). Ferguson (2018) referenced roles specifically within the clergy that were congruent with stereotypical women's roles such as service, care, and counsel, where many women were at odds between their stereotypical role and their leadership role. When women within religious leadership settings have promoted communal or congregational activities, they are perceived as agentic and stereotypically unfeminine. Women who applied an agentic leadership style to congregational matters experienced a severe penalty for how their congregants viewed them (Ferguson, 2018). Male leaders were freer to operate within the agentic and nonagentic modes, whereas women were perceived as countersign stereotypical gendered norms and did not fit within the congregation.

### **Religion and Christian Higher Education Institutions**

Longman et al. (2018) suggested the examination of how a culture influences leadership aspirations and development contributed to the understanding of the relationship between higher education institutions and women's opportunities for advancement. The authors explored the importance of organizational fit and job satisfaction. Their research suggested women who closely aligned with the organizational mission had increased job satisfaction with the gender climate and opportunities for advancement. Longman et al. further outlined the converse was true were women who felt a disconnect with the institution often had greater potential for a forced or voluntary departure.

Seltzer and Yanus (2017) outlined many scholars failed to consider the impact of religion, specifically denominational influences, on gender biases. The authors contended traditionalist views on women's roles in society and their influence on rhetoric could lead to

gender bias regarding women in leadership. Thus, the systematic control of religiosity where women did not play second fiddle regarding leadership opportunities due to traditional religious views was key when viewing women's leadership underrepresentation.

The interplay of religion and women in leadership can be viewed from the standpoint of a Christian school versus a secular school to promote similarities and differences between women's leadership opportunities (Knecht & Ecklund, 2014). The authors suggested that the trend lines between students at secular colleges and Christian colleges looked similar and warned Christian colleges could be failing in their mission to provide students with curricular and extra-curricular experiences they would not get at a secular college. Consequently, the absence of divergence between Christian and secular colleges may be due to simply the students' colleges are admitting rather than the experiences they provide.

The experiences and traditions provided in Christian higher education are critical to distinguish as most Christian higher education institutions were built on tradition. Avishai (2016) argued religion tied to an institution becomes a "legitimate site of empirical and conceptual significance for building and sharpening our analytical lenses" (p. 273). The author claimed attention must be paid to religion as it is here to stay where social life takes place, specifically within a Christian higher education setting. Furthermore, Avishai (2016) indicated that religious traditions and gender studies were rife with contradictions and tensions about how gender regimes are produced, reproduced, and challenged daily. With the obvious observation that most Christian higher education institutions were built on traditional religious doctrines and ideologies hundreds of years ago, today's societal needs matched with traditional doctrine create messiness and challenge evangelical power structures.

Evangelical traditions tied to Christian higher education were built according to normal practices, with specific gender-role stereotypes in place (Dzubinski, 2016). Due to gender role stereotypes, women entering leadership feel scrutinized according to religious stereotypes. Dzubinski (2016) outlined the need for women to negotiate the highly contested leadership space. The author suggested even in evangelical positions of leadership when occupied by women, the leadership position may not be particularly powerful at all.

The apparent strength of gender-role stereotypes within Christian higher education institutions presented challenges women had to navigate (Dzubinski, 2016). Challenges seemed to be more apparent for women who attempted to lead in Christian higher education as the tacit acceptance of unexamined gender-role stereotypes continued to control women's place and behaviors. As a result, unspoken assumptions related to women's leadership skills and contributions continued, stereotypes tied to women's leadership diffused women from fully contributing to Christian higher education (Dzubinski, 2016).

Chan (2019) reiterated the concept of evangelical traditions as a house deeply divided between women's place evangelically and within the family. The author argued the need to go beyond simply accepting women in leadership where men and women were not pre-assigned to traditional roles. The author suggested a move away from traditional roles opened numerous possibilities for men and women yet required a major paradigm shift in the understanding of the church and evangelical traditions. When considering the broader perspective of evangelical traditions, Johns and Watson (2006) argued women lacked opportunities to engage in the cycle of learning and conceptualization of leadership. Thus, many women expressed reservations regarding evangelical preparation and confidence to fulfill their role in an evangelical setting.



## **Women and CCCU Institutions**

Dahlvig and Longman (2014) claimed the challenging relationship between women and evangelical traditions was exacerbated in a CCCU institutional setting. Lancaster et al. (2019) supported institutions tied to the CCCU carried inherent evangelical traditions and implications due to their historical Christian institutional background. Lancaster et al. promoted within Christian higher education settings alternative perspectives were closed off, and many women were particularly sensitive to feeling rejected or ostracized on nonreligious campuses. Furthermore, many CCCU institutions tended to report politically conservative mantras and rejected ideas and influences that weakened their institutional faith.

From the establishment of CCCU institutions to the present day, women's representation in leadership has been scarce. The underrepresentation of women within CCCU institutions has long been associated with evangelical traditions (Joeckel & Chesnes, 2012; Longman et al., 2011). Longman et al. specifically outlined a time when an experienced woman leader at a CCCU institution was convinced by family and theological influences to leave her job to take care of her daughter. Vaccaro (2010) indicated the consequential pressures of evangelical traditions led to women feeling ostracized and isolated on higher education campuses. Vaccaro continued by suggesting women experienced unwelcoming climates with limited campus programs directed at women's organizations.

Despite women who continued to work as hard as males within CCCU institutions and adding to the known labyrinth of women in leadership (Eagly et al., 2007), women were unable to advance their careers due to traditional evangelical limitations (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014) and struggled at denominational schools that denied women's ability to serve the church or in any leadership capacity (Joeckel & Chesnes, 2012). Joeckel and Chesnes asserted women

suffered from the glass ceiling effect at CCCU institutions where males ruled, and often the school's theological stance set the tone for the entire university. Moreover, the CCCU manifestation of gender polarization through theological and political homogeneity silenced the profession of unconventional viewpoints resulting in women leaders remaining an elusive ideal.

The elusive ideal carried by many CCCU institutions continued to be structured around traditional family constructs where males delegated family responsibilities to spouses (O'Neil et al., 2008). Inequality between men and women has been pervasive and rooted in religious tradition within CCCU environments which discouraged women in leadership roles. Many CCCU communities were defined by masculine norms, the endorsement of essential gender differences, and separate roles for men and women regarding leadership (Dahlvig, 2013).

Women leadership disparities predominantly related to the evangelical culture of the CCCU membership limited women's leadership possibilities due to the stained-glass ceiling rooted in deeply held beliefs about authority structures and gender roles (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). The theological and political homogeneity militated against women's agency caused member institutions of the CCCU to be significantly behind in societal norms in offering women the same opportunities to teach and lead as males (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Dahlvig (2013) argued Christian higher education institutions existed to offer a rich tradition and theological foundation of advocacy for the oppressed and affirmation for all people. Yet, the theological principle advocating for the affirmation of all people, specifically women, were challenged through the lack of women in leadership roles at CCCU institutions, despite heavy institutional ties to Christian traditions (Dahlvig, 2013).

## **Women's Leadership Value and Higher Education**

Longman et al. (2019) outlined women entering leadership found their actions scrutinized according to CCCU traditions and stereotypes. Thus, there was a critical need for women to be aware of potential stereotypes and consciously negotiate them to help women in a leadership function. The authors debated women leaders had to understand what it meant to be a woman in leadership and the need for women to be conscious of their beliefs, awareness, and how they were perceived. Longman et al. suggested the contributions of previous women leaders affirmed the need for a proactive pursuit of women in Christian higher education leadership.

Glanzer et al. (2013) confirmed the need to proactively pursue more women leaders within CCCU settings. Furthermore, several policies and practices at church-related colleges (CCCU) served to maintain and support denominational identity. Despite the authors pointing out significant changes in CCCU, including student enrollment, it was premature to confirm CCCU institutions were losing their denominational identity or becoming more generically Christian.

Glanzer et al.'s (2013) research pointed to the rigidity of CCCU institutions which potentially limited the advancement of women leaders within CCCU ranks. Park (2020) suggested gender disparities still existed in academics, and the implementation of gender quotas allowed for changes in the composition of higher education academics. Park claimed that gender disparity in academia was not due to supply, rather demand, which was related to subtle gender bias against women. Instead of focusing on the disparity, the continued implementation of gender quotas increased women's representation at all levels of higher education. Park continued to promote the simple increase in women faculty endorsed a symbolic effect of breaking male dominance while changing attitudes and behaviors of an institution toward gender diversity.

The ability to be proactive in encouraging more women to enter higher education leaders was significantly related to the women who managed to acquire leadership positions (Ekine, 2018). Women leaders had to be future role models but were required to put on persistent and persuasive efforts to advocate as women role models and increase women's participation in leadership. Ekine stated the need for purposeful interventions for the pursuit of future women leaders, and such interventions enhanced women's confidence, self-esteem, empowerment, and competitiveness. The ability to promote women leaders in the gender mainstream within higher education provided the pathway for the pursuit of future women leaders while removing systemic barriers.

The breakdown of systemic gender leadership barriers within the CCCU required leadership programs tailored to women where they are called to act (Gallant, 2014). Women often experienced continued discourse attributed to the lack of interaction and management practice. Gallant promoted unconscious gendered views blocked women's abilities to develop agency, and it was imperative for women to experience leadership programs that advanced continuity between the individual and social institution—women who experienced leadership programs created a proactive mindset for aspiring women leaders and deconstructed gendered leadership notions. Thus, the opportunity for women who aspired for a career in leadership to connect with current leaders provided a greater level of consciousness regarding symbolic workplace interactions (Gallant, 2014).

Carvalho and Diogo (2018) reiterated the need for women's presence in leadership positions to deconstruct male dominance. However, the authors clarified the presence of women leaders was not enough to change gendered organizations. Women leaders had to acquire gender awareness and the ability to change the organizational culture for women to fit in a more

comfortable capacity. Though changing organizational culture was not simple for anyone regardless of gender (Carvalho & Diogo, 2018), the overarching promotion of aspiring women leaders was due to the number of women in top leadership (McKenzie & Halstead, 2014).

McKenzie and Halstead (2014) outlined the necessity of an active woman voice providing perspectives across all facets of university life. The increase of women leaders with an active voice allowed for increased comfort in opinion expression while sharing experiences and lived experiences. Active voice and the acknowledgment of women in leadership in simple terms were associated with the actual number, the equal representation of women in leadership roles (McKenzie & Halstead, 2014).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This qualitative study examined the experiences of senior-level women leaders at CCCU institutions through two significant theoretical frameworks. Hollander and Yoder's (1980) sex-role stereotype theory and Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory informed this study and helped guide research questions while evaluating responses from senior-level women leaders through the lens of the two theories.

Prior to introducing the two main theories, it was important to gain an in-depth perspective of the barriers women faced to acquiring and maintaining the leadership position in Christian higher education through Longman and Anderson's (2011, 2016) research. The authors' groundbreaking research focused on the future of Christian higher education from the perspective of gender imbalance in senior-level leadership roles. The authors asserted that the future of Christian Higher Education depended on the promotion of gender balance in senior-level leadership by outlining 20 years of data supporting women's leadership underrepresentation within CCCU institutions. Longman and Anderson (2011) offered potential

solutions through the imagination of Christian Higher Education and recognized women faced various barriers regarding the CCCU organizational climate and the acquisition of leadership positions. However, Longman and Anderson's (2011, 2016) research related back to Hollander and Yoder's (1980) gender generalization research, where gender underrepresentation and barriers in leadership were first brought to the forefront.

### ***Sex-Role Stereotypes***

Hollander and Yoder (1980) proposed countless issues when comparing men and women in leadership. The complexities of comparing gender leaders with women leaders are specifically associated with unfair stereotypes related to historical generalizations. Hollander and Yoder warned against the use of sex-role stereotypes as actual behaviors, generalization from dyads to larger groups, and the failure to view women's behavior as a function of the context rather than gender characteristics. The authors continued in alerting future researchers of the need for sensitivity and rigor when analyzing men and women in leadership as not to get caught in historical myths that negatively impact the advancement of women in leadership positions.

Stemming from Hollander and Yoder's (1980) sex-role stereotype model, Begum et al. (2018) outlined the participation of women in leadership challenges a male-dominated organizational culture and leadership styles. Begum et al. articulated that a simple approach to leadership based on gender behaviors and traits was insufficient for understanding all attributes leaders possess. Consequently, Begum et al. suggested that considering the sex-role stereotype model was crucial to understanding all the attributes a leader possesses and the strategies they must adopt to thrive as a leader.

Powell (1982) followed the establishment of the sex-role stereotype theory by outlining the mantra, 'masculine is best in management' (p. 68). Powell detailed the crucial prescription

that sex-role differences had a significant impact on effective management rather than gender differences. Eagly (2020) reiterated the familiarity of males occupying leadership positions due to sex roles with culture simply defining women as less qualified than males with no specific evidence to support such assumption. Eagly advocated women were associated with communal, supportive, and warm characteristics, whereas males were assumed to be assertive and dominant. Sex-roles stereotypes defined women leaders before they even assumed leadership positions, with many believing agentic qualities were essential for leadership success. The cultural incongruity between women and leadership forced women to be viewed through sex-role stereotypes, with a continued stereotype of women in leadership's inability to assert authority (Eagly, 2020).

Hollander and Yoder's (1980) sex-role stereotype model established the importance of exploring the framework of women's leadership underrepresentation and unfair sex-role stereotypes. Ibarra et al. (2013) added further research alluding to second-generation gender bias as the primary cause of women's persistent underrepresentation in leadership roles. Ibarra et al. offered the notion that women often suffered from invisible barriers that arose from cultural assumptions, organizational structures, and practices. The findings suggested the starting point for women's leadership underrepresentation was to view research through the lens of historical gender bias and the association of Biblical traditions related to CCCU institutions (Longman & Anderson, 2016). Furthermore, Hollander and Yoder (1980) established a critical theoretical steppingstone where the too-ready use of sex-role stereotypes as if they were actual behaviors amplifies the disparity between women and leadership.

### ***Role Congruity Model***

The role congruity model coined by Eagly and Karau (2002) proposed that a group will be positively evaluated when characteristics associated with the group align with typical social roles. In the case of a research problem investigating the representation of women leaders, the role congruity model would support males assuming a higher likelihood to acquire a leadership position specifically within male-dominated organizational settings such as the CCCU.

Wang et al. (2019) adopted the role congruity model to outline compensation gaps between men and women. The authors described a large gap in pay between men and women in the top leadership positions. Adopting the role congruity model (Eagly & Karau, 2002), Wang et al. (2019) reiterated the enduring perception of role incongruity women in the leadership experience. Women leaders were viewed as less incongruent with behaviors displaying agentic traits where communal traits are valued.

Regardless of the professional research suggested, women experienced role congruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Ferguson (2018) supported women in clergy roles struggled to enter religious leadership, and the women who assumed clergy positions were more likely to have lower-paying and lower-status jobs upon becoming a clergyperson. Furthermore, Ferguson outlined male leaders were more likely to experience role congruity due to descriptive and prescriptive gender norms. Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity model proposed the potential barriers women leaders faced through outlining historical leadership as a male prerogative. Despite women gaining more access to entry and middle-level leadership, women remain rare in acquiring roles as elite leaders and top executives.

Scott (2014) noted that the role congruity theory could negatively affect both men and women at different levels of leadership. Scott offered males struggled to acquire middle



management positions as they suited stereotypes tied to women's leadership style. Additionally, the simple fact that a woman was a leader in any capacity served as a negative characteristic attributed to the role congruity model. Women in leadership positions were perceived as an exception to the rule because of their leadership status. Scott detailed women in leadership positions created a dynamic, a dichotomy between women in general and women leaders.

The establishment of a conceptual framework through the sex-role stereotype model (Hollander & Yoder, 1980) and role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) reiterated the misrepresentation of women in leadership (Longman & Anderson, 2016). The sex-role stereotype model (Hollander & Yoder, 1980) and role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) provided foundational theoretical knowledge to further explain women's leadership underrepresentation within CCCU constructs. The consideration of gender stereotypes where leaders adopted roles congruent with expectations (Madden, 2011) was critical and contributed to the issue of women's underrepresentation in senior-level leadership roles at CCCU member institutions.

### **Summary and Chapter 3 Preview**

On a broader scale, women leaders appear to be significantly underrepresented on a broader scale with women only representing 5.8 percent of CEO positions within the top 500 U.S. corporations and only 21.2 percent of board seats (Catalyst, 2020). Fortune 500 companies provided a broader perspective of gender leadership representation, though, in specialized professional environments such as Christian higher education, women's leadership underrepresentation seems to be even more evident (Scott, 2018). Scott suggested there were continued low numbers of women representatives in leadership roles, while Dahlvig (2013) supported a clear misrepresentation of women in senior-level positions in the educational realm.

Dahlvig and Longman (2014) outlined women presidents led only five percent of CCCU institutions, despite an increase of women in presidential roles in higher education from 21.1% in 2001 to 26.4% in 2011. Consequently, the literature review provided a critical reflection of research to promote understanding of CCCU ideals, beliefs, and traditions that have typically restricted women's ability to be in a leadership capacity (Reynolds & Curry, 2014).

Chapter 2 provided a perspective and understanding related to the problem of women's underrepresentation in CCCU institution leadership roles. The literature presented began with the historical perspective of women's roles about leadership roles utilizing Hollander and Yoder's (1980) sex-role stereotype theory combined with Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity model. Utilizing the two conceptual frameworks, the literature review outlined the history of gender bias in educational leadership, self-efficacy, women's leadership capabilities, women's leadership culture, family balance, women's mentorship programs, evangelical traditions, and the proactive pursuit of the future women in leadership.

The review specifically viewed women's leadership through the lens of the CCCU environment and examined the potential opportunities and effects of evangelical traditions tied specifically to CCCU institutional traditions. Furthermore, the review reiterated the theme of women's leadership underrepresentation, comparing broader contexts to a specific population (CCCU). Consequently, the literature review shed light on the ratio of women who acquired similar education and experience to males in hopes of providing perspectives of gender leadership representation while promoting similarities and differences.

Subsequently, Chapter 3 outlines the methodological process to attain the lived experiences of current CCCU women in senior-level leadership roles. The chapter introduces a qualitative study led through a phenomenological design to capture the lived experiences of

women leaders who have walked the walk. The implementation of a qualitative study to understand the nature of social phenomena is guided through a central research question designed to provide the perspective of women within CCCU institutions who have already achieved a position of leadership (Kalman, 2019). The chapter provides an in-depth overview of how one plans to implement and gain research data from participants who have experienced the leadership journey, specifically in a CCCU environment.

### **Chapter 3: Research Method**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the barriers women faced and strategies they employed to overcome the barriers to achieving senior-level leadership roles within CCCU member institutions. The following chapter discusses the methodology used for the current qualitative study. To provide clarity, the chapter includes a restatement of the research problem in addition to recapping research study questions previously outlined in Chapter 1. Furthermore, the chapter will primarily outline the phenomenological approach to this study and an in-depth discussion of the materials used to collect and analyze research data.

Methodological details included the procedures for conducting the research study and the chronological order of the research steps. The chapter outlined the ordered methodology details, including the research design and method, population, sampling, qualitative instruments, and data collection and analysis. Following the detailed descriptions of the study methodology, the chapter discusses study trustworthiness, the role of the researcher, assumptions, and delimitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary of the method design and the justification of the relationship between the research design and data collection goals.

#### **Research Design and Methodology**

To aptly address the research questions, a qualitative phenomenological approach was most applicable to acquire the lived experiences outlining women's leadership in higher education. The utilization of qualitative research does not allow for a rigid plan related to research design and data collection (Pickard, 2017), yet, promotes an understanding of the nature of social phenomena through an iterative process of knowledge production (Kalman, 2019). The qualitative research design and methods provided in-depth insight into the impact of CCCU environments and women's leadership representation with hopes of affording aspiring women

leaders a robust understanding of how to navigate potential barriers on their journey toward leadership attainment within CCCU constructs.

Many studies regarding women in leadership constructs at CCCU institutions have been conducted via qualitative research allowing the creation of a narrative orchestrated through participant lived experiences (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014; Longman & Anderson, 2011; Smith & Suby-Long, 2019). The intent of qualitative methodology was to gain knowledge and a deep understanding of the leadership experiences of current senior-level women leaders where I was forced to engage in openness and inquiry (Creswell, 2014; Vagle, 2018).

This study employed a qualitative interview approach with semistructured interviews as the primary source of information. Qualitative research can consist of multiple data collection methods, yet, the qualitative approach allowed for the implementation of a rigorous exploration of gained experiences from women who are already in senior-level leadership positions at CCCU member institutions (Daniel, 2019). Consequently, to gain valuable data from women in leadership positions, adopting a qualitative research design allowed participants to express their learned experiences and describe concepts as they were (Austin & Sutton, 2014) while gaining different perspectives in a multi-voiced research design (Leavy, 2014).

The utilization of semistructured interviews through a phenomenological research approach explored participant reflections and opinions to provide insights regarding their pursuit and attainment of a CCCU leadership position. The implementation of a qualitative study allowed participants to share their experiences and perspectives of how they perceived women in senior-level leadership roles. Furthermore, a phenomenological approach promoted participants to share their lived experiences and share their stories (Saldana & Omasta, 2018). The approach of a qualitative study afforded participants to feel comfortable in narrating their own story and

provided an understanding of their personal experiences through leadership roles, personal motivations, and workplace experiences. The focus of this phenomenological study was to reach the essence of the experiences about the phenomenon (Fidan & Koç, 2020).

### **Research Methodology: Phenomenological**

Phenomenology is appropriate in uncovering the structural barriers that women face as leaders in CCCU institutions as one can preserve the richness of human experience and is critical to gain the necessary organic nature of women leaders' experiences within CCCU environments (Churchill, 2018; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Valentine et al., 2018; Watson, 2018). The consequent goal of the research study was to further understand the deep structural barriers women face based on the experiences shared by women participants currently in a leadership role at CCCU institutions.

The phenomenological approach was applied with the specific intention of outlining the specific barriers senior-level women leaders face in CCCU leadership environments. This approach allows the researcher to potentially address deep issues within a specific institutional construct to allow women leaders to be heard. The phenomenon of experienced barriers afforded me to gain the experiences and perceptions of senior-level women leaders that could potentially challenge structural norms (Lester, 1999). The phenomenon of barriers to women in leadership could be presented in both a conscious and unconscious manner within CCCU leadership specifically tied to gender. The phenomenon could be utilized to inform and challenge policy or leadership norms that have been set in stone since the establishment of CCCU institutions. Garnering participants lived experiences within a specific environment (CCCU) supported using a phenomenological approach to fully understand the barriers women leaders experience within a CCCU environment.

To effectively address the research questions, the study garnered authentic experiences that reflected the journey of senior-level women leaders in CCCU settings. The consequent application of a phenomenological approach where the research study attempted to uncover the essence of participants' lived experiences was most applicable (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). To gain the relevant research, the most accurate phenomenological qualitative data for the outlined research study was achieved by capturing the experiences of senior-level women leaders who had first-hand experience of the leadership journey within CCCU institutions.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the barriers women faced and strategies they employed to overcome the barriers to achieving senior-level leadership roles within CCCU member institutions. The qualitative research approach guiding the study was designed to answer one central question: The central question guiding the research study was: How do senior-level women leaders navigate leadership advancement within CCCU institutions? In addition to the central question, the following accompanying research questions will be used to explore the phenomenon:

**RQ1.** How have senior-level women leaders traversed their Christian identity, gender, and leadership within CCCU settings?

**RQ2.** What barriers have senior-level women leaders experienced at a CCCU institution?

**RQ3.** What leadership style have senior-level leaders employed within a traditional higher education religious community?

### **Research Design**

To effectively collect data targeting senior-level leaders at CCCU institutions, the implementation of semistructured interviews from a qualitative research approach was

recommended (Creswell, 2014; Mahat-Shamir et al., 2021). The research questions provided a broad guide to the understanding of the phenomenon and lived experiences of senior-level leaders at CCCU institutions to understand their current role and the complex factors that affect the acquisition and maintenance of a woman in a higher education senior-level role. The qualitative study allowed for research questions directed at a specific population sample's unique experiences and observations from a phenomenological perspective (Creswell, 2014; Leavy, 2014).

### **Population**

The study population was representative of former and current women in senior-level leaders serving at CCCU institutions. To acquire the necessary data for the outlined study, the research population consisted of senior-level women leaders currently employed at a CCCU institution. For this study, a senior-level woman leader was defined as an individual in a central academic affairs role (e.g., associate provosts or deans) and central senior academic affairs officers (e.g., deans, CEO, CFO, vice president, and president; Longman & Anderson, 2011).

The focus on senior-level women leaders in the specified population was tied to the lack of data regarding women's leadership representation at CCCU institutions (Dahlvig & Anderson, 2011; Longman et al., 2011; Smith, 2019). Smith and Suby-Long (2019) posited there was a lack of representation of women in senior-level leadership roles where women leaders' path described as a labyrinth with multiple confusing options. Many women could acquire entry and middle-level jobs like their male counterparts. However, the ability to acquire a senior-level leadership role specifically in a CCCU environment was limited (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014).



## Sample

Participant selection consisted of 15 women serving in a senior-level leadership role at a CCCU institution. Naderifar et al. (2017) outlined snowball sampling as an effective sampling method to allow researchers to reach smaller populations. Due to the scarcity of women in senior-level leadership roles at CCCU member institutions (Joeckel & Chesnes, 2012), snowball and purposive sampling was used for the selection of the 15 women participants as it was most likely to provide insight into the phenomenon investigated due to their professional role (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

The selected senior-level women leaders were required to meet preselected criteria to qualify as a research participant, which was outlined in the guided interview protocol preselection survey and an invitation to participate in the research study. The selected senior-level women leaders were employed at CCCU institutions which were imperative to the success of the research study. The study specifically outlined the barriers women faced in achieving senior-level leadership roles within CCCU institutions.

The objective of purposive sampling was for one to produce a sample logically assumed to be representative of the population (Lavrakas, 2008). The sample of 15 senior-level women leaders within CCCU institutions afforded the implementation of a purposive sampling methodology. Furthermore, snowball sampling involves information seeking from “a chain of recommended informants” (Suri, 2011, p. 69), allowing for participants to potentially recommend fellow senior-level women leaders to participate in the study.

The sample of 15 senior-level women allowed for various lived experiences and perceptions to be uncovered while allowing for research saturation and avoiding repetitiveness (Chenail, 2011). The participants provided data that reflected specific barriers while exhausting

the knowledge that could be attained from women senior-level leaders within the CCCU population with data saturation, the goal which allowed data collection to end (Fofana et al., 2020).

The pool of potential sample participants was established by compiling all senior-level women CCCU leaders' email addresses acquired via the CCCU website. All email addresses were accumulated into a confidential database document. Fifteen (15) interviewees who had served for a minimum of 2 years in a senior-level leadership role were selected from CCCU institutions in combination with the indication selected interviewees were willing to participate in a virtual interview (Zoom).

All participants were required to meet certain preestablished criteria (e.g., the position of senior-level leadership, 2 years of work experience [see Appendix A], and sign a consent form [see Appendix C]). All potential participants were contacted through a documented email communication to avoid interviewer bias (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The email included preestablished criteria (see Appendix A) in qualifying for the study and an invitation letter with outlined next steps for participants who agreed to participate and meet the preestablished criteria (see Appendix E). The email invitation included the purpose of the study and a request to conduct an online video conference (Zoom) with outlined confidentiality measures included to inform participants of the interview process (see Appendix A).

Willing participants were followed up via electronic communication (see Appendix E) to confirm study participation after responding to the documented email. Following preestablished criteria, email response, and signed consent (see Appendix C), participants partook in a semistructured interview focused on the lived experiences of senior-level women leaders in different CCCU member institution environments (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). Each

semistructured interview included the same series of questions for consistency and reliability purposes to elicit important professional and personal moments while promoting commonalities through storytelling (Seaton, 2021).

### **Qualitative Data Collection Methods**

Data collection from a qualitative perspective requires the researcher to make sense of the words the participant is trying to communicate (Churchill, 2018). The investigation of the research problem could be achieved through various methodologies, yet a qualitative research design combined with a phenomenological approach allowed for a slightly less rigid approach. Such an approach promoted the collection of organic data from participant experiences pertaining to the research problem (Englander, 2020) while allowing for participant descriptions of experiences to grasp meaning to further comprehend the research problem (Churchill, 2018).

Qualitative interviews allowed me to garner opinions that would not be captured through standardized data collection, such as surveys and questionnaires (Creswell, 2014). The utilization of semistructured interviews led through guided interview protocols (see Appendix D) served as the main data collection source. Qualitative interviews may be conducted in multiple formats, from face-to-face to virtual interviews. To fulfill the purpose of this study, interviews were conducted via the virtual video conferencing software (Zoom), and all participants received a participation invite (see Appendix A and D) and completed the informed consent document to partake in the study (see Appendix C).

Utilizing online video conferencing software (Zoom) allowed for succinct audio and video recording amounting to accurate interview transcription and effective reliability measures as the study progresses (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Participants were interviewed using the same guided interview protocol, and all three research questions were

asked. However, the order and flow of questioning were not consistent depending on the interview and the semistructured nature of the study to fulfill the purpose of eliciting lived experience and authentic opinions from participants (Creswell, 2014).

### ***Materials and Instruments***

The study was conducted primarily through an approved guided interview protocol (see Appendix D) based on qualitative, semistructured interview practices. The qualitative questions were guided by a central study question and three additional research questions. The research questions sought to gain perspective and lived experiences of senior-level women leaders while setup in a semistructured fashion to allow participants to share freely regarding the barriers they may have faced while serving as a senior-level leader.

### ***Semistructured Interviews***

Churchill (2018) supported the shift of research focus from the researcher's intuitions to the world of the participants expressed in their own words. Thus, it was critical to have succinct data instruments in place to make sense of the responses and experiences presented through participants. The process of qualitative semistructured interviews coincided with the emergent nature and explanatory aims of qualitative research (Yee, 2019).

The phenomenological researcher may use the interview as the sole method to uncover the essence of the phenomenon of inquiry (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The study was led through online semistructured interviews conducted through Zoom to provide most of the research data. The rationale and utilization of semistructured interviews within the study allowed for the art of storytelling through interviews. The ubiquity of storytelling embodied through an interview structure allowed participant narratives to come to the forefront of the research, and the stories became a readily accessible form of data (Yee, 2019).

The aim of semistructured interviews was to explore the in-depth experiences of research participants and the meanings attributed to their experiences (Adams, 2010). Thus, attempting to establish the experiences and journeys of current women CCCU leaders could be best reflected through a semistructured interview model (Kallio et al., 2016). Kallio et al. further outlined the rigorous semistructured interview process can enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative research and contribute to the credibility of the study.

Semistructured interviews provided the research with a degree of structure while allowing significant latitude to adjust the course of an interview through constant in-interview analysis and implementing semistructured interviews as a data collection tool allowed one to tend to participant answers, body language, and reactions. Thus, such interviews are the most valuable resource in collecting lived experience data from participants (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

When targeting a specific audience such as senior-level women leaders, personal interviews are recommended with thorough documentation throughout (Creswell, 2014). In addition to online semistructured interviews (Zoom), field notes and audio recordings were utilized to supplement the semistructured interview. Prior to the interview, thorough background research was conducted on each senior-level participant to provide relevant background information. Semistructured interviews were open-ended as participants' experiences were different, which afforded the collection of rich, thick, experiential data (Bearman, 2019). The semistructured interviews were based on the phenomenological interview questioning, which promotes a reflective process to make sense of women leaders' lived experiences (Alirezai & Roudsari, 2020).

### ***Guided Protocols***

The development of effective interview questions was crucial to accomplish study goals (Turner, 2010). Thus, a semistructured interview required nonassumptive but open-ended questions that allowed for comprehensive responses. The questions were based on the measures sought for the study, including specific barriers to women leadership, the nature of the CCCU environment, the journey of women leaders, and mentoring advice for future women leaders. Guided interview protocols (see Appendix D) were constructed to answer the appropriate interview questions, and each individual participant will receive the same guided interview protocol previously approved through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before any interviews are conducted.

### ***Qualitative Interview Questions***

To provide participants with an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the interview topic and research, the three questions were sent to the participants. Follow-up questions were asked when necessary to fully comprehend the phenomenon. A guided interview protocol (see Appendix D) principled the interview process and provided participants and me a repertoire of possibilities to address specific topics related to the phenomenon of the study (Galletta, 2012).

The 15 participants were contacted via their email address attached to their specific CCCU institution employer. Interviews consisted of barriers and lived experiences women leaders encountered while in their current leadership position. The methodological approach promoted data collection reflective of a body of participants (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Watson, 2018) and guided participants through carefully crafted questions related to the intended research topic (Klenke, 2015). The employment of a small number of intentional research questions articulated the research topic related to the participant and utilized an interpretive

phenomenological approach which resulted in effective participant experience analysis (Leavy, 2014).

All interviews followed a general interview guide (see Appendix D), with each participant provided with an initial interview letter (see Appendix A) outlining the interview session. All interviews lasted a maximum of 60 minutes and were recorded through video and audio recording (Zoom) before professional transcribed (GoTranscript) for accuracy and to limit bias. Though all interviews were conducted via video conference, all participants were requested to conduct their interview in their respective office or in a location that was not distracting and was comfortable for the participant at their prospective CCCU campuses to maintain consistency. Furthermore, I digitally recorded observational field notes to identify relevant cues and nonverbal communication.

### ***Audio Recordings***

To supplement semistructured interviews, all interviews were recorded directly on Zoom video conferencing software via laptop while the interview was taking place. To ensure accurate interview recordings, each interview was recorded on a separate handheld digital recording device with field notes and observations used during each individual interview to provide further qualitative strength and to aid in triangulating data (Patton, 2015).

Each semistructured interview video and audio recording were both reviewed and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist for accuracy and to limit bias. Participants were required to complete the informed consent (see Appendix C), which allowed for video and audio recording.

## **Data Analysis/ Explication of Data**

### ***Audio Transcription***

To meet IRB regulations and protect the identity of the participant and confidentiality of the information gained from the interview, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. All video and audio recordings and transcriptions were collected and stored on a password-protected external hard drive. Due to the time and amount of data acquired from a 60-minute interview, all interview data were transcribed through the company Go Transcript. The Go Transcript company requires all transcribers to sign a confidentiality agreement and nondisclosure agreement to protect interview data and participant confidentiality.

### ***Data Coding***

Data were coded through qualitative data analysis, specifically thematic analysis software (QDA), to understand themes that emerged from the interview in an open-response environment. Due to qualitative data consisting of countless words and phrases, thematic analysis is critical in assessing the data (Clark & Vealé, 2018). The data were analyzed and interpreted through transcribed video conference recordings, handheld audio recordings, re-watching the video interview, and creating units of meaning through thematic analysis to obtain the themes of each senior-level leader and the barriers they faced to attain and maintain their position. The values coding method was utilized to extract common themes shared by participants and identify common and contradictory themes, and discover participant values, attitudes, and beliefs (Saldaña, 2016).

### **Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness**

To provide additional measures of validity, imperative to a qualitative study, consistent data collection procedures were implemented. Creswell (2014) emphasized that a researcher



must provide consistency in their approach for all members of the population sample to increase reliability. Thus, each participant received an invitation to participate in the research study via email (see Appendix A), a confirmation email outlining their acceptance to partake in the study (see Appendix E), and an informed consent letter outlining the study (see Appendix C). Each participant completed a request form to allow for the conduction of an online video conference (Zoom) with outlined confidentiality measures, including informing participants of the interview process and the use of a semistructured interview guided protocol to obtain information.

To provide additional measures of validity, which was imperative when conducting a qualitative study, significant data collection procedures were applied. Each video interview was recorded through Zoom conference recording, field notes, and an additional voice recorder was used to ensure consistency between the video recording and voice recording. Furthermore, the conduction of a pilot interview allowed for feedback regarding interview procedures and questions to improve interview quality with the research participants (Chenail, 2011; Majid et al., 2017).

The application of rigor and trustworthiness within the qualitative study was implemented with participants provided the opportunity to review the transcripts produced from the video conference interview and the study findings (see Appendix F). Participants were provided with every opportunity to provide feedback on key research findings and experiences to provide clarity. Johnson et al. (2020) advocated the comfortability of research results was influenced by reducing researcher influence and meeting standards of rigor through peer review. In addition to transcript review, I reviewed field notes, body language, and interview delivery to ensure research design, method, and conclusions were explicit, public, replicable, and free of bias (Johnson et al., 2020).

To ensure accuracy in the transcription of each interview, all interviews were video recorded. The video recording was transcribed verbatim to promote consistency and allow for robust descriptive language that provided contextual information and allowed the reader to determine the credibility of the interview (Johnson et al., 2020). To demonstrate the credibility of research “rooted in honest and transparent reporting of biases” (Johnson et al., 2020, p. 142), participants engaged in member checking to increase study credibility and confirmability. All participants were asked to verify the interview transcription, verify the accuracy, and ensure the interview transcript truthfully reflected the meaning and intent of the subject’s contribution (Johnson et al., 2020).

### ***Pilot Interview***

The conduction of a pilot interview allows for feedback regarding interview procedures and questions to improve interview quality with the research participants prior to the study taking place (Chenail, 2011; Majid et al., 2017). A pilot interview is a typical procedure allowing me to test the quality of the interview protocol and identify potential researcher bias (Chenail, 2011). The interview allowed for the testing of interview question procedures and protocols planned for the sample of 15 women participants. With a small sample size, a pilot interview was imperative in improving the interview guide, particularly the interview delivery and question validity (Majid et al., 2017). The interview was conducted with a woman senior-level educational leader who provided a close comparison to the target research population and was interviewed with the same proposed format and guided interview protocol as the research population (video conference).

Piloting interviews are crucial to test the questions and gain some practice in interviewing (Majid et al., 2017). I reviewed the interview recording for question validity, interview protocol clarity, and effectiveness of providing vital research related to the research topic. Feedback was

gained from the interview pilot participant to understand questions and protocol effectiveness. Revisions were made from the feedback established via video conference recording and the participant to ensure interview efficiency moving forward. The pilot interview also provided a time frame for the interview and the anticipated length of individual interview questions.

### **Researcher's Role**

Maxwell (2005) outlined the need for a researcher to understand how their values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of a research study. I am a school administrator in a private Christian high school setting who is familiar with the CCCU environment by acquiring a bachelor's degree from a CCCU institution and professional networking. I have no professional or personal ties to any population sample but have always been interested in the difference between men and women in leadership, specifically within Christian higher education.

Clark and Vealé (2018) supported qualitative researchers should engage in reflective and interpretive thinking. Thus the research design was based on the desire to understand the nature of senior-level leadership within CCCU environments. I have career aspirations to advance into senior-level administration in higher education. The pursuance of the study in part is to gain personally and professionally from the findings to understand the journey of current leaders and the potential differences between men's and women's leadership aspirations.

Through the implementation of semistructured interviews, I hoped to gain valuable insight into the experiences of women who hold senior-level positions to learn about potential barriers while hoping to provide perspective for aspiring men and women who sought leadership roles in Christian higher education. The perspective of those who occupy leadership positions

allows for potential smoother navigation for future aspiring leaders and the hope of negating potential barriers in the future.

Due to the motivation and interest of the research to understand gender differences in Christian higher education leadership, strict interview protocols, consent forms, interview confidentiality, and data security measures were applied to the study. To avoid potential bias during the interview process, I abided by the interview protocol to limit personal views and opinions during the interview. Furthermore, to minimize threats to validity and reliability measures member checking and the use of multiple coding techniques, including qualitative data analysis (QDA) and the constant comparative method (CCM) to ensure interviews are consistently coded the same way over time and reflect the voice of the research participants (Elliott, 2018).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the methodology of this study and the participation of the 15 senior-level women participants at CCCU institutions. To ensure participant confidentiality and the welfare of study participants, several proactive ethical steps were taken. Due to the possibility of deductive disclosure concerns (Kaiser & Wallace, 2016), participants and their institutions will remain anonymous and were provided pseudonyms (see Appendix C). The location of the participants in the study is not pertinent to the research, and locations of participants and CCCU institutions remain anonymous.

The study included limited risk to participants or their associated CCCU institution by outlining overarching themes and barriers; few ethical considerations were required. The most significant ethical consideration confronting the study was the consent and anonymity of participants. Participation in the study was completely voluntary, with each participant provided

with informed consent forms and guided interview questions prior to the study. Participants signed a consent form prior to their interview, agreeing to the interview conditions and the data collection procedures outlined with the option to discontinue the study without any consequences.

All interview questions were approved by the IRB, and all participants received guided interview questions prior to the interview. Data were collected and stored in two locations for confidentiality, including my personal device and an external hard drive stored in a confidential location only known to me. No site permissions were required due to the interview via online conference (Zoom). Each participant was provided with a personal online conference link and protected password to enter the online interview conference with only the participant and me provided access. A debriefing took place after each interview to reiterate data collection confidentiality procedures, participant level of comfort, and next steps for each individual participant.

Individual interview transcripts were made available to each individual participant by request, with participants receiving a Google Drive link to their interview protected through a time-sensitive password. Following the conclusion of the study, a debriefing form will be used to provide an explanation of the study and to provide contact information should the participants have any questions or concerns later (see Appendix F). No data collection occurred until the IRB of ACU fully approved the study.

### **Assumptions**

As discussed throughout the literature review, it was assumed senior-level women leaders at CCCU institutions were likely to have experienced barriers in acquiring their current leadership role. Consequently, it was assumed the participants have risen through the ranks in a

similar fashion to acquire their current leadership position. It was also assumed that the research participants had a similar level of educator licensure and experience due to holding a minimum of a senior-level leadership position. It is also assumed the senior-level women leaders were familiar with the construct of a CCCU institution and the traditions associated with the institution where they are currently employed.

Due to assumptions regarding potential barriers, leadership journeys, and current leadership positions, a detailed purposeful outline of the research was provided to all participants addressing the critical topics included in the interview process. Additionally, the assumption of participants willing to share the experiences openly even in their current role was assumed. To counteract the assumption, each participant was provided an in-depth guide interview protocol outlining the questions and consent forms assuring participants' confidentiality while abiding by IRB measures.

### **Limitations**

Qualitative studies lend themselves to certain limitations, specifically when data collections stem from interviews. There was potential for interview bias as the interview was heavily dependent on my individual skills as an interviewer and could be influenced by my personal biases and idiosyncrasies (Anderson, 2010). Furthermore, through qualitative interviewing techniques, rigor is difficult to maintain (Anderson, 2010) and demonstrated due to potential interview gender bias due to a male researcher interviewing women participants. Downey (2015) described interview bias as the potential phenomenon of the “looking glass self” (p. 535). where one’s method of interviewing is inseparable from general conversation norms and judgments associated with themselves.

## **Delimitations**

A limited population of 15 participants reduced to a specified population (CCCU) may lack external validity for study generalization. The challenge of qualitative phenomenology was a phenomenon or lived experience that cannot necessarily be attributed to all populations. Englander (2020) aptly outlined a lived experience provides a narrative sense of self, but it is a challenge to transcend the meaning of such phenomenon to any individual person or population. Thus, it was reasonable to assume when comparing CCCU institutions to public institutions research findings may differ due to the small population size and differences between Christian and public higher education. However, the goal of the research design was to specifically promote a deeper understanding and provide insight into addressing a theoretical problem or phenomenon (Yin, 2013).

Terrell (2016) supported established boundaries, and delineations of a study allow the researcher to control factors and aid with future study replication. The study was designed to provide a specific understanding of the barriers senior-level women leaders face within a CCCU setting. Consequently, specific limitations were placed on the research participants as they were required to be employed at CCCU institution, hold a current senior-level position, and research criteria stated the leader had to have 2 years of senior-level leadership experience.

Population limitations and interview leadership criteria included in the study allowed for a deeper understanding of the true lived experiences of senior-level women leaders within a CCCU setting (Alase, 2017). A vast amount of research was completed on barriers to women's leadership, yet few studies have focused on a specific higher education population such as the CCCU. The limitation on sample size and the population was purposeful in hopes of future research allowing for public and private higher education comparisons. The study provided an

in-depth look at a specific women's leadership population, hopefully utilized in the future as a stepping stone for women's leadership research.

### **Summary and Chapter 4 Preview**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to further examine the barriers women faced in achieving senior-level leadership roles within CCCU institutions. The qualitative phenomenological design examined the specific journey, barriers, and perspectives of current women senior-level CCCU leaders who faithfully capture their lived experiences (Lang & Bochman, 2016). Previous research outlined the journey and differences between men and women regarding leadership representation within a broader population setting. Yet, this research design captured the voices of those who represent the true experience of senior-level women leaders within a specific higher education environment (CCCU).

Data collection from senior-level women CCCU leaders added significant insight into the journey and barriers women leaders face in acquiring leadership positions within Christian higher education. The study aimed to collect data that reflected the voices of women leaders who had walked through differing journeys to get to the same point of senior-level leadership. In Chapter 4, the author outlines the results of the semistructured interview questions from each participant. Through qualitative data analysis (QDA), constant comparative method (CCM), and multiple coding cycles, a range of codes were established to align overarching themes that captured the lived experiences of the senior-level women participants (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016; Watson, 2018).



## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the study was to examine the barriers women faced and strategies they employed to overcome the barriers to achieving senior-level leadership roles within CCCU member institutions. This qualitative study utilized semistructured interviews and open-ended questions with current senior-level women leaders at CCCU member institutions. The semistructured nature of the interviews afforded perspectives from CCCU senior-level women leaders related to their leadership journey, identity, leadership style, barriers, and strategies to support aspiring women leaders pursuing roles within the CCCU community. The experiences of the participants will assist the CCCU organization and its individual members in fostering supportive environments for both women currently associated with the organization and aspiring women outside of the organization looking for leadership roles.

This chapter presents the findings established through 15 semistructured interviews with current women senior-level leaders within the CCCU. The chapter findings are organized by major research findings and emerging themes that were identified from participant interviews through the data analysis processes previously outlined. The senior-level women leaders provided perspective and shared their leadership experiences through their personal narratives created via a semistructured interview medium. Participant narratives were formed from their own words through their personal experience as they reflected on their leadership journey and current leadership role.

Each participant interview provided a unique insight coinciding with their personal and professional experiences, including religious upbringing, personality, leadership style, professional journey, and challenges. Despite the unique leadership journeys and upbringing,

similar patterns emerged between all of the study participant responses. In Chapter 5, the links between the study literature, findings, theories, and application will be discussed in depth.

### **Research Questions**

The central question for this study was the following: How do senior-level women leaders navigate leadership advancement within CCCU institutions? Subsequently, three research questions were employed to explore the phenomenon.

**RQ1.** How have senior-level women leaders traversed their Christian identity, gender, and leadership within CCCU settings?

**RQ2.** What barriers have senior-level women leaders experienced at a CCCU institution?

**RQ3.** What leadership style have senior-level leaders employed within a traditional higher education religious community?

### **Participants**

Purposive sampling was used to acquire a sample of 15 study participants. The sample population included 15 women who currently worked in a senior-level leadership capacity at a CCCU for a minimum of 2 years. Potential participants whose contact information was publicly available via their individual institution website or through the CCCU website were invited via electronic mail to participate in the study, pending they met the study's preestablished criteria (see Appendix A). Despite receiving an overwhelming response from many women senior-level leaders willing to participate in the study, 15 senior-level women leaders who responded with a willingness to participate in the study were randomly selected. The 15 selected participants were followed up with an additional electronic communication outlining instructions related to interview sign-ups and were required to complete the informed consent form (see Appendix C).

The 15 senior-level women participants served in varying senior-level leadership roles (see Table 1) with experience ranging from 2 to 25 years with previous professional backgrounds varying from the law, ministry, corporate fundraising, and education ranging from elementary to higher education. All participants were extremely familiar with Christian higher education either through family, religious upbringing, or attendance at a Christian higher education institution as students and now working as a leader at a CCCU institution.

All the participants were very familiar with the Christian faith and identified as Christians, yet differed significantly in their upbringing from a cultural, denominational, and diversity standpoint. The participant sample was representative of multiple ethnicities, including Asian, Caucasian, and Asian-Indian, with participants representing higher education institutions from 11 different states across the United States. Of the 15 participants, four had acquired a minimum of a master's degree, while the remaining 11 participants had gained a terminal degree ranging from degree areas of law, ministry, and education.

**Table 1**

*Number of Participant(s) in Senior-Level Leadership Roles*

Number of participants in role	Senior-level leadership role(s)
3	Provost and/or Senior Vice President
3	Vice-President for Academic Affairs/ Graduate Learning
2	Vice President for Operations/ Institutional Planning
1	Vice President for Student Affairs
1	Chief Diversity Officer
1	President
2	Chief of Staff/ Dean of Faculty
2	Vice President for Advancement and Admissions

## Data Collection

Participants who voluntarily agreed to partake in the research study received a follow-up electronic communication (see Appendix E), which included instructions to complete informed consent (see Appendix C) in addition to interviewing confirmation and sign-up instructions (see Appendix E). Informed consent was obtained from each participant before providing a confirmation email outlining access to their scheduled online interview (Zoom) and the guided interview protocol (see Appendix D). As outlined in the methodology and IRB protocol (see Appendix B), all interviews, coding, and any additional communication were conducted in password-protected settings, with all interview recordings, transcripts, and coding remaining confidential throughout the data collection process. Participant information and interview responses were protected throughout the data collection process through password-protected interview sign-ups and electronic communication. All interview recordings and transcriptions were stored in a fingerprint-protected device and password-protected external hard drive.

Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes while following the guided interview protocol (see Appendix D) with semistructured questions. Interview participants were afforded the autonomy to answer in accordance with the participant's leadership experience and perspectives. I conducted all data collection individually, including participant's communication prior to the interview, conducting the interview, and recording the interview for all study participants. Interviews followed a similar pattern as outlined in the guided interview protocol (see Appendix D), yet, allowed space for participants to share freely if there were a topic they were specifically passionate about or could provide an in-depth perspective. Follow-up questions were used depending on each participant's answers to provide a unique perspective while limiting ambiguity. Interviews were recorded via Zoom on my personal device and transcribed

using the transcription company, Go Transcript. All employees of Go Transcript signed a nondisclosure agreement to ensure interviews were kept confidential while abiding by informed consent and IRB protocols.

### **Data Analysis**

The primary source of data collection was through semistructured interviews of 15 senior-level women leaders who were employed at CCCU affiliated institutions. Through acquired informed consent, participants agreed to answer questions based on three research questions which contributed to the research phenomenon. Each interview was conducted and recorded via online video software (Zoom) on my laptop device. Additionally, an external digital audio recording device and field notes were used in each interview for quality assurance purposes. Individual video recordings were transcribed verbatim through an interview transcription company (GoTranscript). Video recordings, transcripts, and field notes were also repeatedly reviewed to understand participant responses, body language, and tone.

After countless reviews of the transcripts, video recordings, and field notes, interview responses were isolated to create units of meaning through thematic analysis (Clark & Vealé, 2018). Once themes were established from the data, themes were integrated into a codebook allowing for qualitative data analysis (QDA) using thematic analysis software (Dedoose). The codebook created from data collection was implemented into the Dedoose software program allowing for data to be coded via thematic analysis. Analysis through the Dedoose software program included an in-depth discovery of each interview transcript through thematic coding to ascertain the occurrence of each theme and to allow the generation of transcript excerpts within the text tied to themes outlined in the codebook.



The code occurrence table allowed data patterns to be established and applied to a coding matrix (see Appendix G). Excerpts from the interview transcripts were pulled verbatim to coincide with the thematic patterns outlined through code occurrence (see Table 1). Consistent words and phrases participants shared throughout their interviews were then installed into the coding matrix (see Appendix G) for clarity and to guide the study results. Detailed and repeated reviews of each transcript combined with field notes and video recordings ensured study validity and findings. Findings were reported by major themes per research question, with participants identified only through pseudonyms (Participant A-M) to maintain confidentiality.

### **Key Findings**

Key research findings are arranged by themes corresponding to research questions. The themes found in the research questions were reflective of all participants and provided the perspective of the participants' past, present, and future professional endeavors to provide an overarching review of their leadership experience. Question one examined the journey of senior-level women leaders within the CCCU setting while touching on their personal upbringing. Question two specifically addressed the barriers senior-level women leaders experienced within their current position and how they navigated challenges and successes within the CCCU environment. Question three analyzed the varying leadership styles senior-level women leaders employed while pointing to future aspirations about their current role.

### **Research Question 1**

Question one addressed how senior-level women leaders traversed their Christian identity, gender, and leadership within CCCU settings. Participants alluded to four major themes in response to question one: (a) Christian upbringing, (b) leadership development, (c) opportunities, and (d) woman catalysts.

### *Christian Upbringing*

All the participants spoke of varying Christian upbringing and how growing up shaped their connection to working in Christian higher education or having a Christian connection in a specific capacity. Most participants spoke of their upbringing as ‘Cultural Christianity’ where they grew up in a Christian home and attended religious events regularly, whether led through family or personal choice. Participant N spoke of their Christian upbringing as a generational process where Christian heritage was uniquely tied to their upbringing. Participant N explained, “My parents attended a Christian Church there, they still go to the same church as part of where my grandparents went to church, so it's definitely been part of my heritage.” Growing up, the church appeared to be the backbone, a foundation for many participants, which galvanized their journey to become a Christian and serve in Christian higher education.

There was an unconscious recognition for a Christian background where participants were immersed in the Christian faith. The value of a Christian upbringing and a commitment to Christ was abundantly clear across all participant responses. Participant F outlined, “By God’s grace, I grew up in a Christian home, Christian family.” Though responses varied regarding the role of study participant families in their faith walk, all participants had been acclimated to the Christian faith in some capacity and recognized the importance of such. The importance of being immersed in the Christian faith provided the steppingstones for participant leadership journeys while markedly contributing to their decision-making process.

All participants spoke of their commitment to Christianity through studying scripture, prayer, and attending or leading Bible studies as cornerstones of how they navigate their personal and professional life. All participants promoted significant reliance on prayer and God’s discernment when making decisions to achieve a position of senior-level leadership while



piloting the professional landscape in a senior-level leadership position. Participant G alluded to the reliance on God when making decisions, specifically complex leadership decisions. She provided an example of a prayer that she used when deciding by stating, "God, in this moment today, I need wisdom and discernment. And I need to know which things I need to be courageous and just take bold, assertive, decisive action promptly, and not let it sit and percolate." Part of participants navigating their leadership positions required decision making, with most participants referencing their reliance on God's calling and a willingness to honor God in their current roles.

Participant F specifically referred to God's calling as she explained, "I grew up with the idea that God actually calls people to do different things all the time, so we have several different callings." While Participant I, an 11-year CCCU leader, referred to the notion that God had to be honored consistently within a position of leadership as it was God's will. She outlined, "I firmly believe that God works in around and through us, right? To achieve his end goal." Thus, participants suggested the acquisition of a senior-level leadership role and decisions within the role were directly related to their faith and calling. All participants were driven by their faith in Christ while coinciding with their leadership journey, calling, and current leadership practices.

### ***Leadership Development***

It was by no coincidence that the senior-level women leaders who participated in the study had been successful in their professional careers to attain their current leadership roles. God-given leadership and professional growth coincided with participants exemplifying a leadership skillset where they could apply varying skills depending on the leadership situation. Participant E referenced a former leader who helped her early in her leadership development journey. She explained:

Have you ever thought about becoming a university professor? And I said, no, never thought of that. They kept saying, you should really think about that. You're a good communicator. You have a really good grasp of things with people, you understand education. So, they ended up recruiting me to become the director of their teacher education program.

Participant H, who had served in multiple leadership roles within the CCCU for the past 5 years, spoke of doors opening for her to step into larger leadership roles yet stated, “doors open when one is effective at their job” and continued, “my skillset was recognized, and doors seemed to open.”

Multiple participant responses presented a significant and obvious connection between an effective leadership skillset and the opportunities to lead. Though leadership ability was consistent among all participants, many inferred their upbringing in athletic settings provided leadership pathways through experiences and lessons they learned through the process.

Participant C was extremely intentional in outlining the effect athletics had on her leadership development as she detailed:

You know, I think it was interesting in my small town, the women's athletics were historically stronger than the men's and I've always wondered if that doesn't have something to do with it because that's kind of unique to the-the generation that I was able to grow up in as opposed to, you know, before Title IX. I really do think that that provided an opportunity. So, we had our softball team which was very famous. Our- track was really good. Volleyball was really good, and it was funny because the men's sports at the time I went through weren't near as- weren't near as strong. And so, I think it just, um,

I do think that had something to do with the confidence, of the young women that I've seen come out of even that high school.

Similarly, Participant O, a senior-level leader for the past 11 years confirmed that many of her leadership opportunities stemmed from her athletic experiences. Participant O added:

Athletics was a big part of my life and so many of my leadership opportunities emerged through athletics or confidence building, I think as well. I would point back to those experiences, they were really big for me in terms of, again, being a leader and teamwork.

The experiences of participants from athletics experiences, specifically when growing up, provided foundational leadership tools that allowed women to succeed in senior-level leadership roles. Many participants pointed to their athletic experiences as a catalyst to their confidence while positively contributing to their leadership journey.

### ***Opportunities***

Most participants within the study spoke of the importance of early leadership opportunities as providing a foundation for their future leadership endeavors. Participant L, a leader at a CCCU institution for the past 5 years recalled,

I had opportunities to do things that most young people as a whole in the states don't have, much less women in evangelical households if you will. I have parents who are very supportive and never said you can't do this because you're a girl.

In addition to multiple participants becoming accustomed to leadership at an early age, participants advocated for a risk-taking mentality when opportunities arose.

All the participants were tapped in some capacity, ushered to take on a leadership role. Participant F acknowledged:

I was teaching in a high school, I was an administrator in a public high school, I was an administrator in a Christian high school. For all of those, I was continuously tapped on to be a leader, so there was just this constant sense of leadership opportunity.

Many of the participants' leadership journeys coincided with the theme of taking a risk, a door opening, or being tapped by someone already in the higher education field or all three of the areas. Participants reflected on the need to take opportunities when doors opened as Participant I expressed:

I think for me, when I came into this position, um, and again, there were little doors that opened a long in the way, when I came here and started-and started serving, I was the director of clinical and field-based experiences. I was in the teacher education department, and I was just preparing future teachers. So, I was the person in charge of student teaching, developing partnerships with the community, and because I had just come out of the P-12 world, they saw a really strong opportunity for me to be able to speak some relevancy into how our worlds would connect.

Consequently, all the study participants acknowledged their skills and the need to take risks when they presented themselves, yet many suggested a simple willingness to take the smallest opportunities presented the difference of getting a foot in the leadership door.

Participant K, a 13-year veteran within CCCU leadership, affirmed:

Look for opportunities to make a difference. Then that's just speaking from personal experience. Many of the projects that I took on, I've always joked that in my second life, I would be a lawyer because I find gaps and loopholes and things like that.

Though all participants displayed elements of opportunistic behavior, multiple participants did express the start of their leadership journey or their current leadership position resulting from their alma mater connections.

Many participants who now occupy a senior-level leadership position had a significant contact at their current institutional place of employment. Most study participants completed an undergraduate, master's, and/or terminal degree from their current place of employment. The alma mater connection played a crucial role in women acquiring a senior-level leadership role, whether conscious or unconscious. Participant N, a leader for the past 12 years within the CCCU, detailed:

The connection and history with the university. My dad graduated from here, so I can remember coming down here as a child and we would come down for homecoming and reunions and various things. I can remember it being a fun destination to be a part of this community, even as a kid.

The connection to the institution was a key finding regarding participants' ability to navigate their leadership journey. Though the finding did not suggest that it was easier for women senior-level leaders who worked at their alma mater, the theme suggested the ability to traverse the CCCU landscape can potentially be eased with a familiarity to a CCCU institution.

**Woman Catalysts.** Most participants referred to the importance of knowing a woman in a leadership position to help traverse the CCCU leadership environment. Participants confirmed women of influence, whether through mentorship or professional collaboration, were key to navigating the CCCU leadership landscape. Participant G spoke of the influence of a woman leader she was familiar with by stating:

A very strong, powerful, godly woman leader, really paved the way for that. And also for me, she continues to be a mentor to me in her retirement. And I can see in hindsight how she has really, really paved the way for me to continue to advance.

Participant G added to the importance of women mentors, outlining “I probably have a few more women mentors than male mentors at this stage in my career. Both are very valuable.”

Not only did participants recognize the importance of knowing a woman with a significant sphere of influence within Christian higher education, but participants also indicated the critical need for supportive women catalysts to help guide Christian leadership within the CCCU. Participant M, a leader for the past 4 years within CCCU leadership, passionately declared:

The number one thing that changes the culture to shift women is when they see women in leadership, it's even not even mentoring. Because often, mentoring comes from women that aren't in leadership. They just listen to women, tell other younger women how to manage it. What young women actually need to see are leaders in the academy, vice presidents of academic affairs, deans, department chairs that are women. Then they need to also see faculty members who are women in male-dominated fields. Then we need to add of color so that they can see the representation. In fact, there's research after research study that shows it's the representation of what they see first that tells them I can do that too.

The passion reflected in Participant M's comments affirmed the overarching theme supported by all participants related to the need for women catalysts and visibility within the CCCU leadership ranks. Traversing a Christian leadership environment as a woman in a male-dominated field was outlined as challenging, according to many participants. Yet, all advocated

for the need for future women's representation where aspiring women leaders could see women currently in positions of leadership.

## **Research Question 2**

Research question one established the environment, Christian upbringing, and professional journey of study participants specifically when navigating the CCCU setting. In question two, participants addressed the barriers they faced as a senior-level woman leader at a CCCU institution. Participant responses indicated a time when they had experienced a barrier in their leadership journey or their current role within senior-level leadership. Though many barriers were mentioned, the most emergent themes that surfaced from research question two were stereotypes, institutional traditions, hierarchal disconnect, lack of women's representation, and a lack of mentorship.

### ***Stereotypes***

The most obvious stereotypical barriers that participants spoke of were conscious, visible barriers that all could see and witness. However, when speaking of the barriers associated with ascertaining and maintaining a senior-level role within the CCCU, all but one participant spoke of the dangerous mix between conscious and unconscious stereotypes specifically related to gender. With the expectation for males and women to perform stereotypically in ways that align with gender norms, almost all participants spoke of the barriers that arose when one relied on gender stereotypes limiting women's leadership capacity.

All but one of the participants spoke of the negative gender norms that they had experienced in their role as a senior-level leader. Interviewees spoke of multiple occasions where assumptions were made regarding family life and stereotypical women roles. Participant M spoke candidly when approaching the topic of negative social norms. She stated:

I'll give you an example. We let women lead at our institution. It's like saying, we let women preach. Who's letting? Do you hear the language? We allow. That alone speaks to the system. We actually stroke ourselves with pride, how good we're doing. Until we recognize these things, it won't change. We need to start cultivating our women in students, our women students have to become these women of tomorrow so to speak.

Participants spoke of the language used when stereotyping women leaders where it was seen as a rite of passage, not a norm that women could lead at a CCCU institution. Evidence from the participant interviews suggested stereotypical gender norms did not allow women leaders to be treated the same as males, in turn presenting a significant leadership barrier. Participants outlined the limitations of systemic CCCU institutional hierarchy, which relied on unconscious gender norms as a major barrier for current women leaders who were concerned such a barrier could cause women leaders to turn on one another.

The idea that women could turn on other women due to lacking social norms may have seemed farfetched, yet Participant C reiterated the potential for women to turn on each other due to negative gender norms making it extremely difficult for women to break into CCCU leadership positions. She affirmed, “women are often the biggest impediment to women leadership. And I don't know if you found that in the research, but I do believe there's some truth to that.” Stereotypical barriers alone led through social norms appeared to be enough to rock the boat within women leadership constructs in a CCCU environment. Participants alluded to women scratching and clawing to attain leadership roles, and the senior-level women leaders interviewed were of the few who had overcome gender norm barriers to gain a leadership position.



Within the barrier of stereotypical behaviors, an obvious barrier was the unconscious perception between males and women within CCCU constructs. Multiple participants spoke of actual conversations they had experienced with males where they unconsciously created gender barriers by making assumptions and associating conversations as only being male oriented.

Participant J shared:

So about four or five of us would come and we would have our meetings. But before the meeting, the actual meat of the meetings occurs, you know, you do the small talk, right? And, those typically were football, you know, the games- football, baseball, anything that-- and the funny thing is, they'll say, I'm sorry we're talking about this. As if I don't know anything about football. As if I don't know anything about baseball, well, I don't care as much as they do, so that's right. You know, I'm not going to go Sunday night football, you know? I only follow one team. I don't care for the rest. There was this definitely an underlining, this is the boys conversation and you're the only girl kind of tone and they don't mean it that way. So, I know where their heart is at. So, but that as the culture.

Participant J, a leader of 5 years within CCCU leadership, drew attention to a culture of male versus female, male-oriented conversation built on stereotypes, discounting the woman leader without any prior knowledge.

Another participant shared similar concerns regarding the unconscious barrier where males and females were treated separately differently due to one male making a subjective call regarding a woman leader. Participant A who had 15 years' experience in CCCU leadership, was referring to an evaluation that one of her women leaders had just walked through. She explained,

I know this is probably a personality thing, but sometimes you come across as too assertive. And, she said, oh, does it only seem like I'm too assertive because I'm a woman? You know, if a man is assertive, it's called a strength.

Women leaders suffered barriers for portraying the same characteristics as male leaders.

However, most participants expounded that the same characteristics portrayed by a male and female leader could be perceived very differently. Male versus female perceptive barriers were reiterated as Participant C spoke of her experiences in a leadership role when attending events.

She described,

I'll go to like meetings and with my husband, for example, he's you know a striking presence. And it's just hilarious because I'll go to CCCU events and others and everybody, like, the eyes go to him, they believe he's the president. Like, you know what I mean? And so, he has to so often, Oh yeah, this is my wife, the president. So, there's some of that where you just know like, Oh wow. There-- It's not even on their radar that-- that I could be the president instead of him.

Multiple participants pointed to the importance of not assuming a male would be in a position of leadership only, nor women could not contribute to conversations that have been normalized for male consumption only. Such unconscious thoughts and norms significantly contributed to daily barriers women leaders faced, specifically within the CCCU.

When digging deeper into the stereotypical barriers women experienced, many clarified the lack of awareness within leadership conversations that only promoted stereotypical behavior. Participants echoed stereotypes they had experienced by other interviewees, with one speaking of the complete lack of conversational awareness from males when a woman was in a senior-level leadership role. Participants shared fellow leaders rarely experienced a woman within a

senior-level leadership setting, and their conversational awareness reflected such behavior.

Participant B, a leader for 17 years within the CCCU, stated,

When I first started the role, I learned pretty quickly that the only way was going to be respected as if I really knew what I was doing. And I was walking into rooms often where I knew nothing. And so, I learned to ask really good questions. And, over the years, I didn't walk into a room where they assumed I was there to take minutes for the meeting. When all the men were sitting, like I would sit in on early on meetings and people assumed I was the minute taker, not the person who was actually making the final decision and paying the bills.

When establishing oneself in their leadership role, participants spoke of early conversations and assumptions made primarily by males regarding one's roles served as a significant barrier to their leadership role. Moreover, women spoke of simple off-hand comments that impacted their ability to lead through pure assumption or humor. Participant A recapped when a group of leaders spoke of a situation at the institution, and an individual commented, "Can a woman handle a crisis?" Participants repeatedly shared that pervasive language was the norm within their leadership realm, and there were significant stereotypical barriers between males and females and how they interacted.

### ***Christian Higher Education and Institutional Traditions***

When discussing Christian higher education, embedded traditions fostered within CCCU institutions suggested women must navigate a complex environment. Whether at an entry-level position or in senior-level leadership, Watters et al. (2021) advocated the gendered expectations women confront within the workplace align with extant literature positing women are subject to mutual influence within the public and private sphere. With such pressures from gendered

expectations, the environment senior-level women work in can help or hinder their leadership ability.

Within the CCCU setting, participants repeatedly spoke of institutional decisions specifically related to theological traditions presented a clear barrier for women leaders.

Participant A shared,

I guess, to get back to theology, there's not quite the freedom. And then there are sometimes in the president's office and with the trustees, I don't quite feel the freedom because things are still all pretty stagnant. You know, it's still kind of stuck in the past a little bit. There are some board of trustee members who are wonderful, and they want to move ahead. I had a few trustees who wanted me to apply for the president's position.

Multiple participants spoke of institutions relying on set traditions to make current-day decisions.

Even as Participant A explained, many powerful institutional leaders were open for a more progressive stance on women roles, yet, traditions took precedence, the mantra of taking the easy way out. Participant L reiterated the biggest barrier to women's leadership might be denominationally tied. She stated, "I think it's fear of conflict with the denominations," specifically referring to the fear of many institutions to change practices or traditions that they have held onto so dearly over many years.

Many participants alluded to changes to welcoming women within the senior-level leadership realm as a CCCU changing their doctrine or Biblical tradition, rather than simply changing individual, institutional beliefs that were not doctrinally or biblically tied. Participant A summarized the thoughts of most participants regarding CCCU's traditional institutional beliefs by stating, "In Christian organizations you feel like if you make any changes, it's like you're changing a belief or a doctrine, or is this still biblical? Or, you know, everything goes back to-

that and tradition and it's comfortable.” The concept of comfort for institutions was not necessarily stated but implied through multiple participant responses. The concept of this is what an institution has always done, so why change? Such a mindset severely limited women’s ability to acquire and maintain senior-level leadership roles within the CCCU.

The overarching barrier countless participants drove home when speaking of institutional traditions was directly related to the denomination the specific institution was affiliated with. Any CCCU institution tied to a denomination that traditionally believed women should not be in leadership provided the most significant barrier for women’s leadership representation within the CCCU. Obviously, all participants who partook in the research study were part of CCCU institutions that advocated for women senior-level leaders in some capacity. However, Participant I clarified, “I think it depends on the school's denominational ties and their church ties would, in my opinion, that's probably the number one driver.” Thus, the individual institution and their theological ties could significantly limit the ability to attain a job in senior-level leadership.

Participant O reiterated the importance of institutional traditions supporting women leadership as she expressed,

My perception just from what I know of the individuals that have done that, I would say it is because of or it is related to specific beliefs and values, how they've been raised, or the values that they hold.

All participants made it abundantly clear that an institution’s theological stance on women leadership was a key support or barrier to the success of senior-level women leaders within the CCCU. Participant I spoke of other institutions she was aware of that were not as supportive of women in leadership. She explained, “there are pockets that still have a very traditional view of

women.” Thus, the traditional view of male-dominated leadership within the CCCU presented a substantial barrier for women as they navigated their leadership journey.

All study participants spoke of barriers personally experienced or barriers that they were aware of tied to an individual, institutional beliefs. However, an overarching theme tied to the CCCU institutions was the effect of embedded Christian traditions that coincided with the vast majority of CCCU institutions. Participant M spoke of embedded Christian traditions, stating:

I'll say it this way. I believe that it is embedded in Christian higher education because we are so connected to the North American Evangelical Church that is so far behind on understanding kingdom immunity. We then go by the way of how our churches go. I believe that institutionally it's fraud.

Throughout the interview process, most participants spoke of embedded Christian views on family/work balance, the roles of women, expectations for women to succeed as a mother, a wife, and a leader, with differing expectations for males. Participant L confirmed,

I think that maybe even the national conversation has started to shift away from good for women to good for families because you've got two parents working with kids and you create these systems where you have to be there from age five without thinking about, you know, those afterschool hours were incredibly challenging. There are ways you can alleviate that, but everyone's still stuck in the tradition and custom to there being somebody at home or when they were in that phase, there was somebody at home taking care of all those things. There are some institutional habits, if you will, that we've not been able to change yet.

Such expectations to manage a family and a leadership role were confirmed by most participants who experienced the embedded nature of Christian traditions where the woman was

the primary caregiver, cooked the meals, and more. Participant A reiterates the embedded traditional culture affirming,

I even had a board member asked me in an interview like, do you think you can balance this kind of work with a family and a marriage? Now, I went to the president after I got the job and said, you might want to talk to your board members about illegal questions in interviews.

Similarly, Participant L spoke of the barriers faced when navigating embedded Christian traditions where males were typically used to women adopting traditional roles at home and at work. She identified, “There is a history of conflict because of differing missions, churches versus educational institutions. That's always going to be a point of tension.” Thus, the conflict between a CCCU educational institution and its ties to the church will always be a point of contention.

Yet, participants clearly stated, the challenge remained that gendered roles tied to Christian traditions were easy to see and were experienced daily. Participant I spoke of even at the highest echelon of meetings with the university cabinet embedded traditions remained as she quotes,

For instance, you know, like I'll be in Cabinet. We were-- this was during the pandemic. And, we were having Zoom-based Cabinet meeting. And, the president said, well, does anybody need to take a break? Participant I, do you need to go take care of the oven? So, like little comments like that, you know? And-- so things like that are said, and I kind of note to myself, okay, but I really need to break this down. Out of everybody on Cabinet, you are the one that still goes home and cooks' dinner for your family. You are the only one who still has children at home, you know?

The challenge of embedded Christian traditions appeared to be directly tied to CCCU church and denomination affiliations.

However, the balance between church beliefs, Christian beliefs, and institutional beliefs is a fine one. A balance that almost all participants suggested that had not been found even when they adopted significant positions in senior-level leadership where they were making decisions on behalf of the whole institutions. There was not necessarily a power struggle, merely a lack of recognition for the unconscious, embedded Christian role and traditions that had been created over generations of running CCCU institutions a specific way.

### ***Progressive CCCU Institutions***

Despite the barrier of embedded Christian traditions, participants not only outlined the barrier but also offered a potential solution. Participants alluded to the lack of progressive theological and traditional interpretations of women's roles within leadership at CCCUs. Most participants mentioned their ability to adopt their current role was due to a more progressive approach adopted by their institutional employer. Participant K outlined:

Yes, I am in a position of leadership. I would say that that is primarily due to a newer administration. We had a change in president, we had a change in provost, we had a change in our CFO, so really, I think all our senior-level or executive-level positions have changed. With that new leadership, there's been a change in the approach to women in leadership.

Though the institutional approach to women in leadership is key, research suggested that the leadership team at a specific CCCU can help progress women's leadership or hinder it depending on their beliefs. Participants continued by mentioning that traditions could change if the leadership in place is willing to view the bigger picture and not adopt the mindset of doing



what has already been done. Participant D referred to the importance of removing gender from one's ability to lead and for leaders to simply establish who would be best suited for the job. She shared, "I'm hoping that presidents and other leaders are looking more at accomplishments in what people, you know, have potential to do." Many of the interviewees shared the critical element of working with an institution that was progressive in their analysis of women leaders.

Progressive institutional Christian theology was mentioned by Participant A even spoke of a critical part of senior-level leadership was one where the women leaders were not able to swing the thoughts of the cabinet. She referred to a time when she was encouraged by a fellow senior-level leader to pursue a position as a CCCU president. Participant A indicated:

We had no women in leadership at the senior level ever, and there was one very progressive cabinet member, he wanted me to apply for the position. He asked me to, and I said, no, thanks, I'm not putting myself through it, they won't hire me.

The example provided by Participant A was consistent with most of the interview responses.

There were elements of progression within senior-level leadership. However, the barrier remained that there was rarely a majority who supported women in senior-level leadership roles, a mantra reflective of the institutions.

### ***Old Boys Network (OBN)***

The lack of progression at CCCU institutions toward senior-level leaders was identified countless times throughout the interview process. Participants aptly named a significant barrier to their journey and adoption as a senior-level leader was due to the Old Boys Network (OBN). Barton (2019) mentioned that it is likely many Christian higher education leaders historically understood succession planning to involve tapping a 'good old boys' network for individuals who looked and thought like them.

The Old Boys Network (OBN) was labeled as a defined group by most participants, a very real network of males with strong ties to the institution, which limited women's leadership roles. Participant A provided a clear example of when she experienced the Old Boys Network (OBN) firsthand:

Well, it's just this crazy dynamic, I remember when we had our former president, he has a president's house, and he has some senior vice president and other folks who would come over and have coffee with him before meetings. And I remember I asked him, I said can I stop by, you know, at your house? I noticed you know, so and so and so, and so is coming over. I want to go over some things with you. He said, well, let's just wait. I'll just try to get to my office, you know, and we can meet with you- and I'll meet with you in my office once my secretary's there." Again, I think it's just because I was woman. I mean, I'm second in command to the president, but he still wouldn't meet with me alone.

The perspective provided by Participant A was not an anomaly; rather, 14 of the 15 interviewees spoke of experiences where they had been limited in some capacity by the OBN.

Participant F reiterated the power the OBN had in limiting women the ability to enter and succeed in senior-level leadership within the CCCU. She advocated:

It's probably because I've seen this pattern of behavior for years, there tends to sometimes be a good old boy's network. There's seems to be sometimes a talking over, but at the same time, if I am direct and blunt, then my male colleagues are offended that I have been so direct, and they want me to be less direct. So, there's this they-they will talk over me sometimes or at least try to and then when I'm straight to the point, they-- their feelings get hurt.

Participant F specifically related to experiencing the OBN, yet when she alluded to standing up to OBN bias with assertive leadership characteristics, the OBN was offended by her actions. She suggested there was a double standard that severely limited one's ability to lead effectively.

Examples of the OBN were rampant throughout the interview process, with many participants speaking to consistently battling the undercurrents of the OBN while attempting to remain amicable to keep constituents on their side to ensure they could get their job done effectively. Participant O provided an example early in her senior-level leadership reign, outlining:

When I first started interacting with the board more frequently in my role, I would go to a meeting and be sitting at the table with all of the male leadership, and board members would come in and go to every male and greet them. I would be sitting there with the other women who were administrative support typically and not receive any acknowledgment.

The obstacles women had to overcome when they had a seat at the table were acknowledged. Thus, there were not only barriers on the journey to senior-level leadership, but even when women had adopted positions within senior-level leadership.

Participant C, who had served in CCCU leadership for a relatively young 4 years, echoed the stance taken by most participants where she recognized the power of the OBN within her own community and the barriers they caused toward women leaders. She spoke of recognizing utilizing the OBN for her gain as she was speaking of a speech she gave at a community event:

So last night in my big speech, I also prepped a backup, a guy, that I have that works in the community. He's my entrepreneur in residence. It's a long story, like how I have or

why I have that, but it's- but he's also my PR guy in the town because he can get away and do some things with the good old boys club.

Not only did she prepare a male from the OBN to support her for her speech, but she also spoke of using the males within their OBN groups to establish her leadership agenda within the ranks of groups typically hard to reach. She continued, “There's a Bourbon group. There's a back room, you know. So, I actually like, and maybe that does sound manipulative, but I do use men in situations where I think men make more sense.” Despite Participant C being able to navigate the OBN, the barrier outlined by multiple participants remained. Women leaders could not lead fully in all capacities without the influence of the OBN.

Participant M's comments regarding the OBN maybe present the most powerful barrier that the OBN cause for women leaders, the ability to negatively affect women leadership in an unconscious fashion. She posited:

Very little of the lack of mobility for women is blatantly explicit. I often say that about racism too, it's not the blatant hate crimes that inhibit racial justice to be seen and known. It's the subtleties of the daily unconscious way in which we don't even realize we're in systems that oppress. It's the unconscious things. It's also the way that the systems have decided to limit the opportunities for women. This is very much built into liberation theology, when the oppressed become the oppressor, but this idea that, “We'll just get women to turn on each other.” That thing where we're like we don't even want to trust each other, because they're just so many-- That's a system that builds that for us, because there's no good old girl network. I'm using the term girls synonymous with them when we say good old boy. I think that those unconscious systemic challenges that are- This is

strong word. -so insidious and sinister. They just lay in there, and we don't even want to even believe that it could possibly be real.

Multiple participants pointed out the OBN does not only cause issues in a conscious light, but unconsciously the OBN affects the relationships and trust women have other women in similar positions. Participant M articulated the OBN is almost systematic in nature and can easily be overshadowed as the OBN may not be a dedicated, tangible group, rather a collection of males who may negate the positive role of women leaders.

**Board of Trustees / President's Cabinet Disconnect.** Like the previously mentioned consequences of the 'Old Boys Network,' most participants spoke of the disconnect between members within an institutional Board of Trustees, specifically the understanding of differences between institutional operations, finances, advancement, and academics. Participant F stated:

A president's cabinet, oftentimes, the colleagues don't understand academia. So, when you have the majority of the people who are part of the cabinet not understanding academia or what academics it's often a challenge to have to communicate, um, not only the value but the paradigm.

There appeared to be a significant lack of care for board members to take time to understand the position of a woman leader in the cabinet.

Thus, those who were not involved in academics did not take time to understand how decisions may affect academics despite being an educational institution. Participants spoke of the lack of perspective of board members to view the whole picture and truly understand the direct effect their board position could have on the overall health of the CCCU institution. The disconnected attitude of Board members explained by participants came to the forefront when

Participant F spoke of her lack of opportunity to become president due to a woman with a major board disconnect. She voiced:

The board chair called me and said, well, we would like to invite you as a finalist, and you are going to be interviewed and we'll make our final decision, but I need to tell you it was not unanimous. And I found out later that the unanimous aspect didn't happen because I'm a mother. They weren't sure. Members of the search committee weren't sure how I would handle being a president and being a mother.

The participant provided a stoic reminder of the lack of opportunity women leaders had due to their gender and a board disconnect despite being a top candidate for the job.

Other participants spoke of the critical ability to communicate in a certain way when on the cabinet to ensure the Board of Trustees remained unified in respecting the senior-level woman leader. Participant I verbalized, "I am aware that communication styles between men and women can impact my ability to be received in settings." In many regards, the simple statement of communicating effectively is key for any leader. However, participants spoke of the critical nature of communicating in a very specific way as a woman leader to allow all board members to understand their positions and what they were communicating to not create more disconnect within the group.

### ***Women's Representation***

The lack of women's representation in senior-level leadership within the CCCU was a common theme among most participants. Multiple participants indicated that there were simply not enough women in positions where information and experiences could be compared with women in similar positions. Participant I stated:

Where would someone like myself go 10 years ago when I was moving into leadership, where would I go to get mentorship from a woman if there are no women in leadership in an institution? I think that would actually be really beneficial.

When there were few women in CCCU leadership, there were limited colleagues to rely on as the women who broke the barriers of reaching senior-level leadership wanted to excel in their role and had the sparse time or opportunity to mentor those attempting to break the barriers of reaching a senior-level leadership role.

Breaking the barriers of reaching a senior-level leadership was a topic touched on by Participant K when she spoke on behalf of a woman who has broken the barriers of senior-level leadership. She indicated:

You are one of the ones breaking the barriers of you're in, and it's now trying to get the next group and the next group in. It's challenging because I feel like once you break in, you're trying to just stay flow by doing your job, not necessarily thinking about, well, how do help everybody else.

Again, participants spoke of their leadership journey and acquisition of a senior-level leadership role as a major challenge without even contemplating mentoring the next generation of leaders.

**Trajectory Plan.** Coinciding with the theme of women's representation, there was a significant conversation between participants and the need for a trajectory plan for current and aspiring women leaders specifically within the CCCU realm. Participant M plainly stated, "I really believe that they should make a trajectory plan and write it down." She reiterated the refrain for a plan simply saying, "Write your plan down and build your champions." All the participants advocated for a legitimate plan moving forward to support more women in leadership within the CCCU.

However, Participant I outlined the need for investment in women leaders within the CCCU, so they do not have to look for external help. She exclaimed:

There's probably not enough for women to be able to feel like there's investment. Like I had to pay for a coach myself, the university paid for most of it, out my professional development budget, but I had to also help a little bit, because I wanted it so badly. So, I don't think those kinds of resources for women have been expanded enough.

Though many participants spoke of the necessity of a trajectory plan now with specific target goals to achieve women's representation in leadership, participants recognized the need that they could do not do it alone. All alluded to the need for current and aspiring women leaders to be supported by males in senior-level CCCU leadership and external influential male leaders connected to CCCU institutions, whether as alumni, donors, or on the board.

The recognition that women were not equally recognized in senior-level leadership within the CCCU was correlated to the amount of support they received from powerful male leaders. Participant A stated, "the mentors that I've had, they're male." With many participants suggesting a lot of their mentors and support were male, which was reflected in simple data outlining there are more males in CCCU senior-level leadership.

Participant M reiterated the need for male leaders to recognize that senior-level women's representation was directly correlated to the male advocacy of the importance of their role within CCCU leadership. Participant M shared:

There's a movement, there's a growing number of men who are beginning to understand and they need to speak. Because often, women, and people of color are starting to say, do you want to pay the cost too? Because we always pay the cost. People often wonder, how come the shelf life, so to speak of women in leadership is three to three to five years.



Because we pay the cost. We either decide to move on, because now we've exhausted our agency, our capital has been expended, or we're just like, I need to get out to here. Toxic. Men can stay and stay and stay because they don't have to pay the cost. I would like to see men who get it, call other men who don't get it to account.

Multiple participants shared a similar sentiment that it was not only up to women to help women's representation.

Participants stated it was crucial for males connected to the CCCU to aid in the process of advocating for women to positions of senior-level leadership. Participant J outlined her experiences when males advocated for her position. She exclaimed:

I've had specifically men who would open doors for me and who would pull up, chairs around, tables that I was not necessarily always invited to. I've had experiences and moments where, um, it's not like a blatant thing---it's like a subtle thing, right? So, you're in a group and you walk in and you're the only woman in a room and you're like, okay, this is, right-- well, actually it was pretty common for me to have that experience.

Terminology such as 'opening doors, tapped, and encouraged' were phrases used by multiple participants as to what was required from males to advocate for women leaders.

Participants who were all in a senior-level role were not unwilling but struggled to find time to support aspiring women senior-level leaders, specifically at CCCU institutions. Thus, the attitude in which there should be a combined effort between male and female leaders to encourage and provide resources to help the next group of women leaders was a consistent theme throughout the research study.

### *Lack of Support and Mentorship*

Throughout the interview process, all participants spoke of the correlation between mentorship and women's senior-level leadership representation in the CCCU. Research suggested the consistency, intentionality, and advocacy of mentors had a prominent effect on a participant's ability to acquire a senior-level leadership role. Participant K spoke of the need for consistent mentoring interactions to allow women to acquire or maintain their senior-level leadership roles. She explained:

Honestly, I would say that if I would call anyone a mentor, it would have been my previous provost. He retired two years ago, but he promoted me into my first administrative position. Very conscious efforts on a regular basis, once a month or every other month, to make sure that we touch base and talk about things that are going on and how to pivot as needs arise or whatever.

The need for consistent mentor interaction was also reiterated by Participant I, who stated, "I point back to that peer modeling program, it was a critical early development step for me. And this idea that simply be in a listening ear can have profound impact on the development of relationships." The idea that one concept shared by a mentor, such as listening in this case, amounted to having a profound effect on the participants when they acquired a leadership position. The need for consistent mentorship at a minimum provided participants with a trusting professional confidant to lean on for support.

In the same vein from a logical standpoint, many participants alluded to their current or former boss being a key mentor in their leadership journey. Participant H acknowledged, "I think I have always valued mentorship, learning from others. Our former provost who had been- who's retired, she had been here for 30 years." Participant N advocated for the importance of her

predecessor providing the leadership tools she needed to succeed in her current role. She pointed out,

I would say it's multiple people speaking into me, and most of the time not being aware that I was maybe being mentored. Certainly, they were probably not aware either. I think of my predecessor in this role who held this role for a while, as well as our current president.

Furthermore, all participants spoke of the need to feel mentored and supported internally within their institution from those who had walked in their shoes formally or were in similar roles. There was a feeling across all participants that being mentored internally provided value and increased the amount of trust between the leadership team.

However, many participants spoke of the benefits of having an external mentor, one outside of education and the CCCU organization, to provide perspective while sharing overarching leadership characteristics. Participant B mentioned:

I grew up in a single-family home and he (the mentor) kind of helped me think through things about where I wanted to be. He wanted to encourage and kind of encouraged my family in different ways. I wouldn't think of him as a mentor in the same way I do now as a mentor, but if I look back, he was really a critical person in the path I took.

Responses indicated external mentors may not have even provided leadership mentorship, but mentorship from a broader life skills perspective.

The provision of experiences that the women participants were able to then utilize once in a leadership role. Participant C referred to a key external mentor that helped her tremendously on her leadership path. She explained:

My biggest professional mentor is an ex-CEO. He definitely was an advocate of women in leadership in the business sector and-and he took me under his wing, was willing to mentor me in, I mean, obviously he was a CEO of one of the biggest companies in the world.

Interview responses continually indicated that it was not necessarily the type of mentor, whether internal or external, rather the advocacy from the mentor for women leadership and the ability to speak on overarching leadership principles in addition to leadership experiences which served as most valuable for women leaders.

### **Research Question 3**

Research question three closed the loop when attempting to gain a rounded perspective of senior-level women leaders within a CCCU environment. Study participants addressed their leadership style tied to their leadership journey, current successes, and the differences in their style compared to stereotypical CCCU leaders. Responses to question three centered on study participants speaking of their overarching leadership style centered on service before diving into individual leadership characteristics that allowed participants to reach a position of senior-level leadership.

### ***Leadership Style***

When establishing leadership styles employed by senior-level women participants, there were unique leadership styles that may have served participants well to reach their current role of senior-level leader. Despite the uniqueness of leadership characteristics, participants shared overarching leadership styles, which reigned true with all participants. All senior-level women leaders interviewed indicated they attempted to empower their employees and employed a servant leader mindset. Participant D stated, “I think we need to, as women in leadership,

empower other women.” The idea of empowerment was directly tied to the relationship women participants formed with their staff. Participant K described the concept of empowering staff as getting on their level, working with them in the trenches. She remarked:

I think this goes back to my leadership style, and that is, empowering people, providing, and getting and not being afraid to get in the trenches with everyone else, get my hands dirty, or whatever, however, you want to describe that. Really engaging people with that, we're all in this together, so let's collaborate, work as a team type thing.

There was significant weight put forth toward the relational development and engagement between participants and their staff. Continual relational development was described by Participant E.

I'm also very relational, and so people feel like they can approach me about anything. So, because of that, they-- I will find out things that are going on in departments or in the institution that other leaders don't know anything about, and then I'll be able to report, hey, just so you guys know, there's a lot of people that are feeling this, or this is an issue that's coming up. And they will be like, how do you know that? I haven't heard anything about that.

**Individual Leadership Characteristics.** The themes of leadership empowerment and relational development seemed to go hand in hand. Participants suggested an extreme amount of detail went into their leadership style, the way they treated their employees, and how one could balance authority while not being perceived as being above someone on a human level. The detail that coincided with participant leadership styles was evident when participants were asked about their personal leadership characteristics. The characteristics described appeared to be in response to potential barriers that they had previously suggested.

A prime theme where participants formed characteristics to combat barriers was the need to be the most prepared when entering a high-stakes leadership environment. Many participants spoke of being the only woman in meetings or the only woman in senior-level leadership within their institution. To combat the potential isolation of such, a consistent theme was the participants' ability to over-prepare for leadership situations. Participant I maintained:

And for a woman, I think stopping and listening first and asking probing questions to seek understanding is just going to be so key to your ability then to strategically decide what to say next. Because you will encounter people that have a problem with you being a woman. But I would say the same thing to a male.

Participant D, an experienced 7-year CCCU leader, shared a similar viewpoint, "I think women need to choose their words and how they get that meaning across in a more eloquent way." She added, "I feel like women need to always be on their toes." Participant responses spoke to a different kind of preparation for women leaders. Senior-level women leaders had to have the ability to listen intently and were not able to relax or feel comfortable in a leadership environment when in the early stages of acquiring a senior-level role.

Participants were quick to outline once comfortable within a senior-level role to be transparent as a leader. The ability to be open and honest with subordinates and fellow leaders was seen to be a key detail of being an effective woman leader. Participant C emphasized:

I just have to be really transparent, or people will think I'm being like you know, all of the bad words, that come to mind with women leadership. I mean, including like manipulative and tricky and I'm like no I'll tell you exactly where I'm headed and where I'm going.

The need to be transparent coincides with the participant's reception as a leader. Characteristics including preparation and transparency lent themselves to leadership excellence, according to participants.

A consistent theme promoted by most participants was leadership respect was gained through exemplar performance. Many alluded to the need to gain respect which then opened doors to allow for acceptance and transparency within their leadership realm. Participant M spoke of respect gained through excellence outlining, "I think the leadership roles that I was given were mostly given to me because of, I would use the word competence. I think I was just highly viewed as someone who pursued excellence in all they do." The viewpoint where one pursued excellence could be achieved depending on the unique characteristics of the woman leader.

Most participants did speak to the importance of a leadership skillset, including problem-solving and a willingness to take on problems as a key leadership characteristic. Participant F, who had served 9 years within CCCU leadership, commented,

You have got to think about how everything within an organization connects to another.

So how do you problem-solve? You have to disaggregate and then analyze. And to move into any kind of leadership, you need to be able to do that.

Leadership styles were similar across all participants to allow them to navigate leadership advancement within the CCCU. Participants had to gain respect through excellence, be willing to over-prepare, take on problems, empower employees, lead through service, and exemplify transparency to ensure they were received professionally by their peer leaders and subordinates.

## Chapter Summary and Preview of Chapter 5

Three research questions were answered within Chapter 4 where senior-level women leaders responded to their Christian upbringing, the CCCU environment, barriers experienced, and leadership style. From the three research questions, 11 major themes were established, and themes were described in detail about each research question. Research question one afforded participants the opportunity to share about their Christian upbringing and the CCCU environment. Question one asked, How have senior-level women leaders traversed their Christian identity, gender, and leadership within CCCU settings? Four of the 11 major themes were established from the question, including (a) Christian upbringing, (b) leadership development, (c) leadership opportunities, and (d) woman catalysts.

The second research question asked, What barriers have senior-level women leaders experienced at a CCCU institution? From the question, five more of the 11 major themes were found, including (e) stereotypes, (f) traditional institutional barriers, (g) hierarchal disconnect, (h) women's representation, and (i) a lack of support or mentorship. Participants were then asked a third and final research question, What leadership style have senior-level leaders employed within a traditional higher education religious community? Participant responses amounted to two major themes, including (j) employee first/ relational leadership and (k) critical leadership characteristics to round up the 11 major themes.

The provision of multiple participant perspectives provided unique responses, yet consistent themes were evident with the three research questions. The experiences shared within the interview process were characterized through the 11 themes outlined. Though previous literature and my viewpoint would have suggested specific research outcomes, the responses from participants were far-reaching, varied, and provided a tremendous amount of perspective to



live a day in the life of a senior-level woman leader within the CCCU. The results presented did not provide the notion or indicate as to why women's representation is lacking in senior-level leadership within the CCCU. The notion was amplified by those interviewed who had made it into senior-level leadership roles, some who oversaw a CCCU institution yet had subconscious, subtle pressures as a leader that they believed would not be characterized by male leaders or leaders in a secular setting.

Chapter 5 further discusses senior-level women leadership experiences and how they navigated the CCCU environment. The chapter will present relationships between themes, interpretation of data, a summary of the findings related to the research questions, a comparison of findings to previous literature, and the implications of the findings as to the effect on future practices and recommendations specifically within CCCU leadership.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the barriers women faced and strategies they employed to overcome the barriers to achieving senior-level leadership roles within CCCU member institutions. Beyond demographic and justice issues related to women's senior-level leadership roles, considerable research has documented the power and benefits of women's perspectives within senior-level leadership (Longman, 2021). There is a scarce amount of research related to the representation, journey, and experience of women leaders, specifically within the CCCU sector (Longman et al., 2018). This research provides a twofold perspective, one adding to the body of research within women leadership in higher education, the second specifically relating to women leaders within a religious higher education setting.

This study revealed the lived experiences of CCCU women leaders through a phenomenological qualitative approach. Open-ended questions guided through semistructured interviews with current senior-level women leaders at CCCU member institutions afforded women leaders an opportunity to share their experiences. Participants were able to provide their unique stories, their leadership journey, and experiences while outlining the leadership qualities, personal characteristics, and Christian faith to attain and maintain a position of senior-level leadership within the CCCU.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed overview of the central study research question and sub-questions, a summary of the study including the methodological research approach, and an interpretation of the findings outlined in Chapter 4. Additionally, the chapter includes study findings in relation to literature, data themes, study implications, and recommendations for practical application and future research. The chapter concludes with personal reflections related

to the research topic and conclusive remarks which outline the key study results and significance of the results for past, present, and future research.

### **Research Questions**

The central question guiding this research study was: How do senior-level women leaders navigate leadership advancement within CCCU institutions? In addition to the central question, the following sub-questions were used to explore the phenomenon:

**RQ1.** How have senior-level women leaders traversed their Christian identity, gender, and leadership within CCCU settings?

**RQ2.** What barriers have senior-level women leaders experienced at a CCCU institution?

**RQ3.** What leadership style have senior-level leaders employed within a traditional higher education religious community?

Using a guided interview protocol, quotes were gathered from participant's lived experiences centered on the outlined research questions. Participant quotes provided unique leadership perspectives while providing the major themes of the study.

### **Summary of the Study**

Fifteen senior-level women leaders employed at a CCCU were selected via purposive sampling for the study. The participants were interviewed during the fall of 2021, driven by a guided interview protocol in a semistructured manner. Each participant had access to the interview protocol prior to the interview taking place to understand the direction of the interview while allowing each individual participant to share their unique perspective of their leadership journey and current role within the CCCU.

Though the participants were unique in terms of the role they were in, their personality characteristics, and their leadership qualities, each participant shared similar overarching

characteristics centered on a grounded Christian faith and unerring yet humble confidence to succeed in their leadership role. The findings were disclosed through 11 major themes identified from the three research questions. The themes included (a) Christian upbringing, (b) leadership development, (c) opportunities, (d) woman catalysts, (e) stereotypes, (f) traditional institutional barriers, (g) hierarchal disconnect, (h) women's representation, (i) lack of support or mentorship, (j) employee first/ relational leadership, and (k) critical leadership characteristics. From the three research questions, participants alluded to 11 themes, which defined their CCCU leadership experiences. Participants displayed independence while describing their leadership faith, personality, style, and characteristics in what one would identify as a male-dominated higher education leadership field.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study with a phenomenological approach investigated the real-life experiences of 15 senior-level women leaders within the CCCU. Qualitative research allowed for the creation of a narrative orchestrated through lived experiences coupled with an open inquiry approach (Creswell, 2014; Smith & Suby-Long, 2019; Vagle, 2018). Participant data were gathered through semistructured interviews with 15 senior-level women leaders who had served in CCCU leadership for a minimum of 2 years. Participants were selected through snowball and purposive sampling for the acquisition of a logical sample representative of the CCCU leadership population (Lavrakas, 2008). Fifteen senior-level women CCCU leaders were interviewed virtually (Zoom) with interviews recorded and transcripts created from the digital and audio recordings from the individual interviews. Transcript data were reviewed and coded to present emergent themes via thematic analysis software (Dedoose) to understand emergent themes with the values coding method utilized to extract common themes and critical quotes coinciding

emergent themes. From audio and digital reviews and thematic analysis key findings and perspectives were established and organized by themes corresponding to the three research questions. The result from the gathered data allowed for the establishment of current and future implications for senior-level women leaders in higher education, women leadership within the CCCU, and women leadership within Christian higher education institutions.

### **Limitations**

Qualitative studies lend themselves to certain limitations, specifically when data collections stem from interviews. There was potential for interview bias as the interview is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the interviewer and can be influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies (Anderson, 2010). However, the guided interview protocol and participant confidentiality-maintained research integrity. Furthermore, I was the only researcher in this study, the sole individual administering the interview process.

Consequently, being a male researcher interviewing women participants afforded the possibility for interviewer gender bias due to the unconscious application of implicit negative gender stereotypes, specifically in a semistructured interview environment. However, to reduce interviewer bias, implementing a guided interview protocol allowed for a specific structured interview process and negated potential unconscious gender stereotypes (Latu et al., 2015). Furthermore, participants appeared to be comfortable, were supportive of me, and were not only willing to participate and share openly but had the option to opt-out of the study at any point.

Constraints outside of the control of the researcher that could affect whether the results are generalizable to other populations are referred to as limitations (Terrell, 2016). A further limitation may be the sample size and whether the sample was large enough to reflect all senior-level women leaders within the CCCU community. Additionally, research questions focused on

barriers to leadership that could be uniquely tied to participant emotions which may affect the narrative concerning one's experience and must be considered when evaluating each participant (Ross, 2017). Furthermore, an ideal sample would represent every senior-level woman CCCU leader, though data saturation was achieved from the 15 participants within this study. Future research could welcome a larger sample size to represent all senior-level women leaders in higher education institutions while welcoming varied perspectives and experiences.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

This chapter includes the interpretation of the findings and recommendations for future research. This study aids in explaining the lack of women senior-level leaders within the CCCU. The study advocates for progression in women's leadership representation to change the status quo of males hired in leadership roles within the CCCU despite research outlining women's leadership ability. The chapter illustrates the need for awareness and change regarding women's representation in the higher echelons of leadership at CCCU institutions.

In concurrence with previous research, the overarching themes of the study supported previous literature suggesting barriers women faced while on the journey to and when attaining a leadership position. The study further suggested a mixture of conscious and unconscious barriers women navigated on the journey to and while in a leadership position. Offermann and Foley (2020) identified numerous positive virtues women bring to leadership tasks where women did not simply warrant leadership roles yet were necessary to surmount the power of implicit and explicit biases working against women. Thus, the study research firmly reiterated that women suffered from multiple barriers due to their gender. Additionally, leading in a religious climate further exacerbated the underrepresentation of women in positional leadership when facing the persistent challenge of constant movement within Christian higher education (Schreiner, 2016).

### **Led by Faith/ Christian Upbringing**

Though the research results were unique to each participant, the foundational element of this research and the purpose of each research participant were uniquely tied to their Christian faith. The study outlined the critical importance of the Christian faith in each of the participants' lives, journeys, and decisions as a person and a leader. However, working at a CCCU institution presented the unique challenge of aligning personal faith to theological institutional goals.

On countless occasions, each participant referenced their Christian faith as being the cornerstone of not only how they live their life but why they even pursued or adopted their current leadership position. Despite Roberts et al. (2020) suggesting the dominant U.S. depiction of God, including a predicted perception that white males are the ones fit to lead, the research included suggests otherwise. The women participants outlined their unwavering Christian faith while successfully navigating the challenging leadership waters of CCCU institutions. The personal Christian faith of each study participant served as the backbone of this research and was only reiterated through the experiences and examples provided by participants throughout the study.

Ferguson (2018) advocated for women who applied an agentic leadership style to experience negativity toward them. However, when asked about their faith, participants were open, honest, and promoted a lack of care for how they were perceived as a woman in a leadership role. The lack of care for how they were perceived was due to the women participants' attention to detail, ability to navigate people, make exceptional leadership decisions, and their reliance on their faith made them not care, in an extremely positive, perfectionist type manner. All participants outlined differing Christian upbringings and journeys, yet in their current roles relied on and shared extremely similar values when referring to their Christian faith

and leadership. Participants commonly referred to growing up in a Christian home and attending religious events regularly. Yet, many referred to their Christian faith as one of heritage, as a generational process

The idea of Christian heritage, where faith was essentially passed down from generation to generation, supported prior literature outlining institutional religious beliefs which significantly limited women's leadership roles. Zikmund (2010) outlined that many women were trying to figure out their professional place specifically within the theological leadership realm. Porterfield (2013) added that religion remained a historical field where women were denied authoritarian positions due to Christian communities fervently holding onto gender roles. Yet, all the participants suggested their Christian base, foundation, and experiences were rarely negative in nature.

Though upbringings varied dramatically, with some more conservative and others progressive, commonly across most participants, they reported they were provided opportunities to lead. Consequently, the backbone of this research is immeasurably tied to Christianity, whether at a personal or institutional level. Research responses suggested each journey was significantly varied, rarely negative, but unique to the individual until they reached their leadership position within a CCCU institution. Though certain institutional rules remained, all participants were clear and confident in their faith, their ability to succeed, and most importantly, all suggested that they felt a belonging in their role. To describe where the women participants were today in their leadership roles would be impossible in a one-size-fits-all model. However, Avishai (2016) indicated religious traditions and gender studies were rife with contradictions and tensions as to how gender regimes are produced, reproduced, and challenged daily may be the



most accurate description of the Christian backgrounds, upbringings, and current positions of this research and the participants involved.

### **Implications**

The question was answered by all participants in a consistent and honest format which coincided with the guided interview protocol. As outlined, participants began by outlining their Christian upbringings and journey as to how they navigated their Christian faith, which remained a common theme throughout the research gathering process. Though participants' Christian faith provided the foundation for the study, findings were uniquely tied between three main research questions that provided clarity about previous literature while providing a more progressive viewpoint.

### **Leadership Development**

Findings from the first research question supported previous literature regarding women's leadership opportunities, yet participants provided a fresh perspective of how women's leadership development was perceived today. Many participants alluded to their personal leadership skillset and being provided the opportunity to lead. All participants outlined the need for doors to be opened. An individual or a group to promote or advocate for the individual was required to get the individual a foot on the ladder; a pathway into leadership. The recognition of a woman leader's skill set and ability to lead was a key element that coincided with the future success of the woman. Not only recognition but an advocacy for the individual was key to achieving a leadership position. Participant H spoke of doors opening for her to step into larger leadership roles yet stated, "doors open when one is effective at their job" and continued, "my skillset was recognized, and doors seemed to open."

The recognition of potential women leaders' skillset has been touched on in past literature, Zimmerman et al. (2020) advocated the need for developmental initiatives for aspiring women leaders, while Mackey (2018) affirmed leveraging allies and mentors within workspaces as crucial for women to advance in leadership positions. Turner-Moffatt (2019) supported the requirement for women to be normalized in leadership roles which were reflected by current findings.

However, even when referring to previous literature or the current research study, the same persona remained, fewer women attained senior-level leadership positions, while leadership attainment and development were more difficult for women (Bowling, 2018). All study participants alluded to an individual or an event where someone helped them get a foot in the leadership door, yet a consistent advocacy for leadership positions was inconsistent across study findings where inhibiting subtle barriers women leaders faced due to remnants of historical stereotypes and lack of access to women development initiatives remained (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Gibson, 2006; Longman & Anderson, 2016).

### **Leadership Opportunities**

Research question one provided an outline of how current CCCU senior-level leaders traversed Christian higher education. As noted by Brue (2018), many organizations have expanded knowledge and understanding of work-life balance where women were able to advance in leadership while managing nonwork obligations. Participant responses aligned with previous literature that encouraged the work-life balance. Most participants spoke to being tapped or encouraged to adopt a leadership position while receiving support in such a position primarily from their organization. Halbesleben (2010) advocated the importance of spousal support or general support was key to increasing coping mechanisms and promoting work-life balance for

women leaders. Findings supported the need for women to receive support to balance work and family obligations. As a result, support led to women's leadership opportunities when individual leadership values were observed by those already ingrained within an institution.

Further findings outlined the need for women leaders to be opportunistic, as Participant K affirmed:

Look for opportunities to make a difference. Then that's just speaking from personal experience. Many of the projects that I took on, I've always joked that in my second life, I would be a lawyer because I find gaps and loopholes and things like that.

All participants were aware of the need to take opportunities and the need to provide value to an organization. Longman et al. (2019) posited the contributions or value of previous women leaders affirmed the need for a proactive pursuit of women in senior-level leadership within the Christian higher education. Glanzer et al. (2013) promoted the need to proactively pursue more women leaders within CCCU settings, while McKenzie and Halstead (2014) outlined the necessity for women to take opportunities to attain leadership positions to provide an active woman's voice across all facets of university life. The concept of an active voice concurred with study findings where participants consistently alluded to the need for women to step in the space offered, to take opportunities while combining an effective leadership skill set to increase women's representation and active voice within the CCCU.

### **Woman Catalysts**

McKenzie and Halstead (2014) advocated the overarching promotion of aspiring women leaders was due to the number of women in top leadership positions. Current findings coincide with previous literature where women's leadership was critically tied to women catalysts where top women leaders advocated on behalf of the new leader crop. Research findings reiterated the

need for there to be strong women of influence in leadership roles to contribute to future women's leadership representation. Participant G, a relatively inexperienced CCCU leader of 3 years, stated:

A very strong, powerful, godly woman leader really paved the way for that. And, for me, she continues to be a mentor to me in her retirement. And I can see in hindsight how she has really, really paved the way for me to continue to advance.

The findings furthered the notion and aligned with previous literature that women had the expertise and capabilities to perform in senior-level leadership (Khan & Shahed, 2018; Mattar et al., 2018). Moreover, McKenzie (2018) implored higher education institutions to assist women in understanding the leadership challenges they can face in leadership.

Participants suggested the importance of women observing other women in senior-level leadership roles. Findings conclusively outlined the need for a culture shift where women were to be observed in senior-level leadership roles, not necessarily from a mentoring perspective, rather a catalyst, an exemplar in a leadership role. Participants unified the need for young women to view leaders in varying senior-level roles ranging from presidents to deans in typically male-dominated fields. Faulkner (2009) examined the lack of women in academic leadership, stating institutional structures often excluded women. Findings proposed participants had experienced exclusion or limiting factors while traversing their leadership journey. Cănas et al. (2019) stated the advancement of women leadership required the establishment of a unique women leadership culture while adapting to the entrenched masculine culture of leadership. The study findings passionately advocated the essential need for women's catalysts and visibility. One study participant synopsisized the representation and visibility of women leaders are what aspiring

women leaders first observe and encouraged aspiring women leaders that they can achieve similar professional heights.

### **Stereotypes**

Findings from this study outlined all participants had experienced stereotypes on their leadership journey, with stereotypes becoming more apparent for most study participants, specifically within the CCCU environment. Participants spoke of a dangerous mix between conscious and unconscious stereotypes specifically related to gender. Gender stereotypes were experienced by all but one participant where it simply was not the norm for women to lead in a CCCU setting. One participant candidly outlined the mantra where institutions stated that they let women lead. The terminology that women were allowed to lead rather than women viewed as a norm in leadership roles was made abundantly clear. Current findings suggested stereotypical gender norms did not allow women leaders to be treated the same as males. Thus, there were systemic limitations within CCCU institutional hierarchies.

Participants agreed that women leaders became isolated and at times would turn on each other due to the difficulty of even ascertaining a leadership position within the CCCU. Chen and Houser (2019) promoted the combination of widespread gender stereotypes and leader prototypes to feed the notion of women who suffered from leadership gender bias. Smith et al. (2019) supported women often encountered gender stereotypes and biases that reinforced existing hierarchy. Such literature reaffirmed current study findings where participants spoke of actual conversations they had experienced where they unconsciously faced gender barriers through preconceived assumptions and the creation of male-oriented conversations. Haines et al. (2016) echoed the prescriptive gender stereotype sentiment by asserting gender stereotypes were

so deeply embedded in society that those in positions to evaluate men and women had to be constantly vigilant to possible stereotypical influences regarding judgments and choices.

Findings indicated women leaders had to walk an extremely fine leadership line to be perceived correctly by their work colleagues. One participant explained,

I know this is probably a personality thing, but sometimes you come across as too assertive. And, she said, oh, does it only seem like I'm too assertive because I'm a woman? You know, if a man is assertive, it's called a strength.

Women leaders were typically associated with stereotypes comprising of being too caring or sensitive, which amounted to women suffering from stereotypical assumptions regarding their roles (Katila & Eriksson, 2013). Koenig et al. (2011) argued stereotypes related to women's roles were a barrier to advancement in the highest levels of leadership, where women suffered from the cultural stereotype of masculinity that was robustly associated with leadership contexts. Study findings found the importance of not assuming a male would be in a position of leadership only or that women could not contribute to conversations that had been normalized for male consumption only. These unconscious thoughts and norms significantly contributed to the daily barriers women participants faced, specifically within the CCCU environment.

Further findings clarified that much of the issue within leadership conversations was the lack of awareness shown by those in CCU settings that only promoted stereotypical behavior. Fellow leaders rarely saw other women within a CCCU senior-level leadership setting, and their conversational awareness reflected such behavior. Another participant stated,

When I first started the role, I learned pretty quickly that the only way I was going to be respected was if I really knew what I was doing. When all the men were sitting like I

would sit in on early meetings and people assumed I was the minute taker, not the person who is actually making the final decision and paying the bills.

Salin (2020) argued the subtle barriers women faced negatively contributed to the attainment of leadership positions. Women faced gender bias in a leadership position due to the exhibition of gender-incongruent behavior even if male and women leaders performed the same. Participants noted a lack of awareness throughout their time as a leader, specifically from their male work colleague who promoted the patriarchal nature of CCCU institutions which contributed to one of many stereotypical barriers participants experienced within their leadership context.

Research implied senior-level women leaders attempted to become established in a new leadership role, but early assumptions made primarily by males presented a significant barrier to the success. Moreover, the findings spoke of countless offhand comments that impacted participants' leadership ability. One participant explained a time when there were multiple male leaders in the room, and a work colleague stated, "Can a woman even handle a crisis?" Participants repeatedly shared pervasive language was the norm within their leadership realm and experienced significant stereotypical barriers primarily between male and female interactions.

Theoretically, the sex-role stereotype theory (Hollander & Yoder, 1980) supported current findings as there were many issues when comparing male and women leaders. Hollander and Yoder warned of the complexities when comparing male and women leaders associated with unfair stereotypes related to historical generalizations. Additionally, Eagly and Karau (2002) role congruity model assumed that a group would be positively evaluated when characteristics associated with the group align with typical social roles. Thus, current findings revealed senior-level women leaders suffered from the role congruity model where many within the CCCU

hierarchical ranks stereotypically assumed males should be in a position of senior-level leadership. The failure to view the behavior of women as a function of their context, such as a CCCU senior-level leader rather than a gender characteristic, was a major flaw found across the majority of participant leadership experiences and proved to be a significant barrier in their attainment and success in a leadership role.

### **Traditional Institutional Barriers**

The CCCU has typically been tied to traditional Christian rules when making leadership decisions. Participants repeatedly spoke of institutional decisions related explicitly to theological traditions, which presented a clear barrier for women leaders. Johnson and Peña (2012) promoted conservative Christian communities that echoed gender traditions based on theological practices. Furthermore, religion remained a historical field where women were influential but were denied authoritarian positions due to Christian communities who held on to gender roles (Porterfield, 2013). Findings coincided with previous literature and displayed powerful institutional leaders were open to a more progressive stance on women's leadership roles, but institutional traditions almost always took precedence.

One of the participants reiterated the biggest barrier to women leadership within the CCCU was uniquely tied to institutional theological beliefs and denominations. She stated, “I think it’s fear of conflict with the denominations” and another participant shared,

I guess to get back to theology, there’s not quite the freedom and then there are sometimes in the president’s office and with the trustees I don’t quite feel the freedom because things are all pretty stagnant. You know it’s still kind of stuck in the past a little bit. There are some board of trustee members who are wonderful, and they want to move ahead. I had a few trustees who wanted me to apply for the president’s position.



Findings alluded to many CCCU institutions being perceived and changing the doctrine of biblical tradition rather than simply changing individual beliefs. There was recognition for institutional theological progress within the findings, yet institutions appeared uncomfortable with change, and the progressive perception was implied through multiple participant responses. The notion of “why would an institution change the leadership stance if they are doing just fine the way they are?” was a statement mentioned by many. However, findings showed the overarching key barrier when referring to institutional traditions was directly tied to the denomination of the specific institution. A CCCU institution that was traditionally related to a tradition where women were deemed to not be in leadership positions was an obvious and significant barrier for lack of women’s leadership representation. One participant clarified, “I think it depends on the schools’ denominational ties in their church ties would, in my opinion, that’s probably the number one driver.”

Findings outlined the correlation between the CCCU institutional stance on women leadership and women’s ability to attain a senior-level leadership role. Participants made it abundantly clear that the institutional theological stance on women's leadership provided key support or a substantial barrier to the success of a woman leader within the CCCU. Seltzer and Ynaus (2017) confirmed many scholars failed to consider the impact of religion, specifically denominational influences, on gender bias. Furthermore, the interplay of religion and women's leadership could be viewed from the standpoint of a Christian school versus a secular school to advance similarities and differences between women's leadership opportunities (Knecht & Ecklund, 2014).

Current findings outlined all study participants experienced barriers personally or were aware of barriers tied to an individual, institutional belief, which hindered women leadership

within the CCCU. Avishai (2016) reiterated the experiences and traditions provided in Christian higher education were critical to distinguish as most Christian higher education institutions were built on tradition. Due to many CCCU institutions built according to practices with specific gender role stereotypes in place, religious traditions and gender studies were rife with contradictions and tensions. Many Christian higher education institutions were built on traditional religious doctrines and ideologies hundreds of years ago (Dzubinski, 2016).

Yet, current research findings suggested today's society was complicated where many participants did not necessarily blame one individual institution, rather, the effect of embedded Christian traditions which many CCCU institutions followed. One participant affirmed:

I believe that it is embedded in Christian higher education because we are so connected to the North American evangelical church that is so far behind on understanding kingdom immunity. We then go by the way of how our churches go. I believe that institutionally it's fraud.

Research findings outlined traditional CCCU institutional theological beliefs in addition to women leaders balancing family and work was a major challenge. Chan (2019) reiterated the concept of evangelical traditions as a house deeply divided between women's place evangelically and within the family. The author argued the need to go beyond the acceptance of women and leadership where men and women were not preassigned to traditional roles.

Throughout the findings process, most participants spoke of the negative impact embedded Christian views had on the family work dynamic. Participants made it clear that women were expected to succeed as a mother, wife, and a leader, whereas males were set with differing expectations. One participant mentioned,

I think that maybe even the national conversation has started to shift away from good for women to good for families because you've got two parents working with kids and you create the systems where you must be there and that was incredibly challenging. There are some institutional habits, if you will, that we've not been able to change yet.

Smith (2017), Smith-Hollins et al. (2015), and Thelin (2011) promoted traditional historical roles outlined women as ones assigned to child-rearing, which hindered their ability to attain a leadership position. Brue (2018) further posited the expansion of work-life balanced dialogue presented the barrier of women attempting to progress into senior leadership positions while managing nonwork obligations. Expectations to manage a family and a leadership role were confirmed by study findings as senior-level women leaders were often required to be the primary caregiver, reiterating the traditional family cultural expectation within CCCU settings.

Cheung and Halpern (2010) delineated the integration of work and family roles to provide mutual opportunities and overlapping role demands resulting in work-life imbalance. Study findings coincided with similar perceptions of nonwomen as a participant shared, "I even had a board member ask me in the interview, do you think you can balance this kind of work with a family and marriage?" Questions challenging women's leadership balance were confirmed consistently within the findings where many CCCU male leaders were typically used to women adopting traditional roles at home and work. Another participant explained, "There is a history of conflict because of differing missions, churches versus educational institutions. That's always going to be a point of tension."

Braun and Peus (2018) argued there was growing pressure for women to acquire more leadership positions, and Debebe (2011) opposed stereotypical roles of women within family constructs after stating males should be required and were fully capable of taking on the same

roles as women within the family and professionally. Current findings promoted the barrier of embedded Christian traditions tied to CCCU church and denominational affiliations. A fascinating take on such traditions was aptly articulated by multiple participants who outlined that there was not necessarily a power struggle, merely a lack of recognition for the unconscious, Christian roles and traditions created over generations of CCCU institutions.

### **Hierarchal Disconnect**

The hierarchies within the CCCU typically had a challenging relationship between women and evangelical traditions, which was exacerbated in the CCCU institutional setting (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Institutions tied to the CCCU have consistently carried inherent evangelical traditions and implications due to their historical Christian background. Christian higher education settings have typically been closed off, and many women felt rejected or ostracized. CCCU institutions tended to report politically conservative mantras and rejected ideas and influences that were perceived to weaken their institutional faith (Lancaster et al., 2019). Study findings coincided with a hierarchical disconnect or reliance on traditional theological practices and doctrines that CCCU institutions had relied on since institutions were formed. A lack of progression within CCCU institutions was acknowledged and explained by multiple participants, specifically when focusing on unique unconscious groups such as the Old Boys Network (OBN).

The Old Boys Network (OBN) outlined the lack of progression at CCCU institutions towards senior-level leaders. Participants outlined this subconscious hierarchical male-dominated network as a significant barrier. Barton (2019) mentioned many Christian higher education leaders historically understood succession planning as involving a 'good old boys' network to hire their next candidate. Current findings suggested the lack of perspective within many CCCU

leadership environments where the Old Boys Network (OBN) was a real network of males with strong ties to the institution while limiting women's leadership roles. One participant shared her first-hand experience,

I remember when we had our former president, he has a president's house, and he has some senior vice president and other folks who would come over and have coffee with him before meetings. And I remember I asked him, I said I can stop by, you know, at your house? I noticed you know, so and so and so, and so is coming over. I want to go over some things with you. He said, well, let's just wait. I'll just try to get to my office, you know, and we can meet with you in my office once my secretaries there. I think it's just because I was woman. I mean, I'm second in command to the president, but he still wouldn't meet with me alone.

The findings promoted that most participants had suffered from the Old Boys Network (OBN) barrier in limiting their ability to enter and succeed in senior-level leadership within the CCCU.

Though there were countless findings that outlined the negative nature of the OBN, the most pertinent finding was the unconscious barrier that the OBN caused toward women leaders that negatively impacted the leadership. One participant posited,

Very little of the lack of mobility for women is blatantly explicit. I often say that about racism too, it's not the blatant hate crimes that inhibit racial justice to be seen and known. It's the subtleties of the daily unconscious way in which we don't even realize we're in systems that oppress. It's the unconscious things. It's also the way that the systems have decided to limit the opportunities for women.

Findings outlined systematic hierarchical disconnect within the CCCU, which could be overshadowed or covered in a group such as the OBN in which there was not a dedicated,

tangible group, rather a collection of males who discounted women leadership and tied their actions to traditional CCCU beliefs.

Since the establishment of CCCU institutions, women's representation and leadership have been scarce. The underrepresentation of women has long been associated with evangelical traditions and hierarchical rigidity (Joeckel & Chesnes, 2012; Longman et al., 2011). The pressures of CCCU hierarchy and women feeling isolated on higher education campuses have led to women experiencing unwelcoming climates (Vaccaro, 2010). The participants noted the extreme disconnect between members at the Board of Trustees level. One participant stated,

A president's cabinet, often, the colleagues don't understand academia. When the majority of the people who are part of the cabinet do not understand academia or what academics is, it's often a challenge to have to communicate not only the value but the paradigm.

Findings denoted there were serious disconnects between the value of individual jobs such as an academic role versus an advancement role. More importantly, participants outlined the lack of perspective of board members to understand the value of a woman leader at a CCCU institutional senior leadership level.

Participants spoke of their lack of opportunity to advance in their field due to being a woman tied to an institutional board disconnect. One instance a participant described:

The board chair called me and said, well, we would like to invite you as a finalist, and you are going to be interviewed and will make a final decision, but I need to tell you it was not unanimous. And I found out later that the unanimous aspect didn't happen because I'm a mother. They weren't sure. Members of the search committee weren't sure how I would handle being a president and being a mother.

Dahlvig (2013) promoted equality between men and women have been pervasive and rooted in religious tradition within CCCU environments which discovered women leadership. Many CCCU communities were defined by masculine norms, the endorsement of essential gender differences, separate roles for men and women, and respect for leadership. Study findings provided stoic reminders of the barriers women leaders face simply due to the agenda versus a hierarchical disconnect within the CCCU leadership. Participants shared the need for Board of Trustee members to become unified in respecting senior-level women leaders.

### **Women's Representation**

Throughout the findings, participants consistently outlined the lack of women's representation in senior-level leadership within the CCCU. Findings indicated that those simply were not enough women in positions of leadership where information and experiences could be compared with women in similar positions. One participant shared, "Where would someone like myself go 10 years ago when I was moving into leadership? Where would I go to get mentorship from a woman if there are no women in leadership in an institution?" The implication that there were few women in the CCCU available to provide mentorship was associated with women's leadership disparities predominantly related to the evangelical culture of the CCCU. Women's leadership opportunities were limited due to the stained-glass ceiling rooted in deeply held beliefs about authority structures and gender roles (Dahlvig & Longman, 2014). Consequently, Dahlvig and Longman (2014) argued the fundamental assumption of theological and political homogeneity militated against women agencies, causing CCCU member institutions to fall significantly behind in following societal norms.

The nonprogressive nature of women's leadership within the CCCU supported the basic theoretical framework of the role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and the sex-role

stereotype theory (Hollander & Yoder, 1980). Hollander and Yoder suggested women leaders had real unfair types tied to their position due to historical generalizations. The authors outlined the need for sensitivity and rigor when analyzing male and women leaders to not get caught in historical myths that negatively impacted the advancement of the woman gender in leadership positions. Additionally, the role congruity model coined by Eagly and Karau (2002) proposed regardless of the profession, women experienced role congruity and proposed that a group will be positively evaluated when characteristics associated with a group align with typical social roles. Yet, in a male-dominated field such as CCCU senior leadership, women would fall foul to role congruity.

Findings clearly outlined that there were simply few women in CCU leadership positions. They were limited colleagues to rely on as women who broke the barriers of reaching senior-level leadership wanted to excel in that role and had scarce time to collaborate with women in similar positions. One participant articulated breaking down the barriers of CCCU leadership by indicating,

You are one of the ones breaking the barriers of what you're in, and it's now trying to get the next group in the next group in. It's challenging because I feel like once you break in, you're trying to just stay afloat by doing your job, not necessarily thinking about, well, how do we help everybody else?

Research showed participants experienced multiple barriers to acquiring their leadership position, which led to senior-level women leaders having nothing left to provide for the next aspiring group of women leaders. Participants consistently outlined that they simply were not enough women in which information and experiences could be compared on a regular basis.



## **Lack of Mentorship**

In the context of the CCCU community, all participants spoke of the correlation between mentorship and women's senior-level leadership representation. Research suggested the intentionality and consistency of mentors had a prominent effect on the ability of a woman to acquire a senior-level leadership role. Conversely, the lack of mentorship experienced was a significant barrier to women acquiring senior-level leadership positions. One participant explained the importance of a mentor on one's ability to acquire a senior-level leadership role,

Honestly, I would say that if I would call anyone a mentor, it would have been my previous provost. He made very conscious efforts on a regular basis, once a month or every other month, to make sure that we touch base and talk about things that are going on and how to pivot as needs arise.

The explanation of a positive mentor was few and far between in the study research. Despite multiple participants outlining the need for consistent mental interaction, many participants spoke of the need to feel mentored and supported internally within their institution, but those experiences were few and far between. Current findings suggested many participants had external mentors, one's outside of education and the CCCU organization, to provide perspective while outlining overarching leadership characteristics.

However, research findings pointed to the lack of specific women leaders within the CCCU were associated with a lack of mentorship and a lack of representation. Zimmerman et al. (2020) advocated the critical need for women's leadership representation in higher education was a direct result of the availability of mentorship programs and developmental initiatives for women. There was a significant pressure and reliance on current women leaders to serve as role models, where women who were already in leadership roles had to be persistent and persuasive

in advocating for future leaders (Ekine, 2018). Yet, findings suggested the expectation for current senior-level women leaders to be role models while succeeding at that current role appeared to be a challenging balancing act. Turner-Moffatt (2019) expressed the importance of normalizing gender diversity in leadership to advance the use of mentorship programs but noted the current lack of women leaders and role models within the CCCU.

All participants spoke with the need to feel mentored and supported, while many pointed toward the benefits of having an external mentor. However, participants started on the leadership journey due to their own accord and not because of a mentorship program. Though Latu et al. (2015) and Mackey (2018) outlined the accessibility of women mentors and developmental initiatives provided aspiring women with the confidence to pursue leadership positions. Current research findings pointed to few participants who partook in a woman-oriented mentorship program. Participants experienced mentorship through an external mentor or simply through a rite of succession when many participants relied on the individual who was formally in their role. In multiple instances, participants alluded to employing a life coach to be mentored and walk-through leadership decisions and characteristics due to the lack of accessibility or quality mentors that the women participants could trust and be vulnerable without being perceived negatively for showing emotion.

### **Leadership Styles**

The research outlined that senior-level women leaders for consistently relational and empowering with those they lead. Most participants employed at least a facet of a servant-leadership style. One participant stated, “I think we need to, as women in leadership, empower other women,” where the idea of empowerment was directly tied to the relationship leaders had with their staff. Reiterating the servant-leadership mindset, multiple participants described the

concept of empowering staff as getting on their level, such as working with them in the trenches. One participant described,

I think this goes back to my leadership style, and that is, empowering people, providing, and getting and not being afraid to get in the trenches with everyone else get my hands dirty, or whatever however you want to describe that. Really engaging people with that, we're all in this together, so let's collaborate, work as a team type thing.

The research was evident in promoting the significant weight put forth by all participants toward the relational development and engagement of senior-level women leaders and their staff.

Another participant affirmed, "I'm also very relational, and so people feel like they can approach me about anything." The relational aspect of women's leadership was supported by prior literature, which outlined emotional intelligence as crucial to the understanding of the underrepresentation of women leaders (Gouws, 2008).

Research promoted that women's emotional intelligence coincided with their ability to find relational value and empower those they led. Mayer et al. (2017) mentioned that women were very aware of self-regard and empathy while supporting work colleagues on an optimal level. Additionally, Bausch et al. (2014) indicated women with high self-efficacy had a significant influence on a leadership challenge and the belief they had in themselves as a leader to complete tasks. Current research promoted the themes of leadership empowerment and relational development going hand in hand consistently across most participants. However, participants outlined on an individual leadership characteristic level one's ability to treat employees well while being challenged to balance authority while not being perceived as being above somebody.

Research promoted the number of detailed participants employed within their leadership style in response to barriers tied to stereotypes, traditions, hierarchical disconnect, a lack of women's representation, and mentorship opportunities. Guillén et al. (2018) affirmed the apparent bias between male and women leaders, especially women leaders who exemplified high levels of self-efficacy. The author suggested women did not reap the same rewards as males who performed similarly, and biases surpassed a simple gender bias. Bias was outlined by participants throughout the study where leadership characteristics had to be formed to combat the barriers to being prepared to lead within a CCCU environment.

Countless participants spoke of being the only woman within the leadership realm at their institution. Thus, to combat potential isolation, participants consistently outlined the need to over-prepare for leadership situations. One participant maintained,

For a woman, I think stopping and listening first and asking probing questions to seek understanding is just going to be so key to your ability then to strategically decide what to say next. Because you will encounter people that have a problem with you being a woman.

Simply being a woman was a barrier where participants acquired specific leadership characteristics to garner respect. Another participant shared a similar viewpoint, "I think women need to choose their words wisely and how they get their meaning across in a more eloquent way, I feel like women need to always be on their toes." Participants spoke of the need to be always prepared and transparent when leading to gain leadership respect. Furthermore, respect was gained through exemplary performance. Participants felt they needed to prove themselves and pursue excellence to be respected by their peers. Findings encouraged the importance of

leadership characteristics such as problem-solving and a willingness to take on problems to gain respect from work colleagues and exemplify leadership ability.

Overarching leader characteristics across most participants included the ability to gain respect through excellence, over-prepare, take on problems and problem solve, empower employees, lead through service, and exemplify transparency to ensure that they were received positively by their peers. As one participant concluded, “You have to disaggregate and then analyze. And to move into any kind of leadership, you need to be able to do that.” Though findings suggested similar leadership characteristics to what one would expect with a male or female leader, throughout the research process, it became apparent that the participants felt like they needed to go above and beyond. Participants attempted to excel in every facet of their leadership journey, ascension, and current role. Striving to excel as a leader uniquely coincided with the feeling that women were not only underrepresented but those who broke the barriers to enter senior-level leadership within the CCCU by fighting and clawing every day to gain the respect they deserved.

### **Study Recommendations**

This section includes a discussion of the recommendations for CCCU institutions and how such institutions can progress the representation and outlook of future women senior-level leaders. When concluding the study findings, several implications from the study lead to future recommendations, including increased mentor advocacy and leadership development, board training, trajectory planning, climate surveys, and a call to progress the understanding and philosophy of many CCCU member institutions, specifically within the leadership realm.

## **Mentor and Leadership Development Program**

Cãnas et al. (2019) and Ekine (2018) advocated women's fellowship programs were the cornerstone for women to climb the academic ladder where women gained authenticity when they partook in mentoring activities. Study findings revealed the importance of an established mentoring program for aspiring women leaders within the CCCU. It is critical that the CCCU establishes a foundational mentoring program that is recognized within the CCCU hierarchy as a respected and prominent program. The establishment of a major mentoring program that allows aspiring women leaders to partake in purposefully cultured training to meet the needs of women and the needs of the CCCU leadership landscape is critical to progress women's leadership.

Although one recognizes current mentoring programs within the CCCU, such as the Women's Leadership Development Institute (WLDI), the program does not suffice in making the necessary steps forward to advance women leadership within the CCCU. There is a current need to create a program providing mentorship opportunities within the CCCU that becomes a recognized pipeline leadership program for senior-level leadership is necessary moving forward. Such a mentoring program cannot simply be recognized by only women within the CCCU but must be a nationally recognized mentorship and development program to succeed in advancing and supporting women's leadership.

For progression in women leadership, there must be a developmental program for senior-level women leaders who are already in leadership positions to continue to grow as a leader. There can be a development program for emerging leaders, but there must be a focus moving forward to support those who currently reside in leadership positions. A development initiative would not only support and further their leadership positions but puts the individuals in a place where they can potentially mentor and help future aspiring women leaders. Additionally, there is

a need to create development programs for current women leaders internally within the CCCU environment and externally in the local community and even on a national level.

Findings suggested overarching leadership characteristics applied regardless of one's leadership field, and the ability to share leadership experiences is critical for the continued growth of current CCCU women leaders. Applying a leadership development program would include reaching out to leaders outside of the CCCU to partake in development initiatives consistently. Insala (2018) advocated the elimination of stereotypes and double standards toward women can be achieved through mentoring programs. Aspiring women leaders must be encouraged and supported by their institutions to attend networking gatherings, meet with leaders on a local or national level, and be provided access to mentorship and development opportunities. It is of utmost importance for the CCCU to establish a top-class mentoring and development program recognized on a national level inside and outside the CCCU environment for women to be represented and supported effectively in senior-level leadership roles.

### **Senior-Level Leadership Training**

The goal of many leaders was to maintain a balance between work and family responsibilities where work-life balance should be the forefront of policy discourse within organizations (Gregory & Milner, 2009). Findings implicated stereotypical gender norms did not allow women leaders to be treated the same as males. Actual documented experiences from multiple participants outlined the unconscious gender biases and assumptions made against women leaders, which at times lead to women leaders turning on fellow women leaders. The lack of awareness from fellow leadership members impacted women's ability to lead even when unconscious in nature.

The CCCU has to offer a starting point where leaders currently in the field are trained and aware of stereotypes and assumptions and the negative effect they could have on a leader. Women leaders are consistently limited due to gendered roles tied to Christian traditions and assumptions made over generations of CCCU institutions operating in a specific traditional format. Whether individuals like it or not, women leaders are treated differently from male leaders in CCCU settings. Although, differing treatments of leaders may come with more expectations if they are unable to fulfill their professional duties. Findings categorically outlined women leaders were fully capable of succeeding in their role, making wide institutional decisions, managing people, and successfully fulfilling their role as a senior-level leader at the same level if not better than a male.

Findings outlined the embedded Christian traditions tied to CCCU institutions were a significant barrier for women leaders. Thus, traditions and practices coinciding with CCCU hierarchies must be addressed. At the Board of Trustee level, individuals must be fully aware of the leadership characteristics required to aid a higher education Christian institution regardless of gender. The higher echelons of CCCU leadership require understanding and awareness of the perspectives of women leaders. Providing training on the perspectives of women leaders and general leadership practices tied to the needs of current society allows institutional leaders to be informed in multiple leadership capacities. Elements of leadership that were presented in the findings require training for those who are already in leadership roles so they can fully understand the sex-role stereotype theory, role congruity, prescriptive workplace bias, mentorship, potential hierarchical disconnects, and the need for women's representation at the highest level of leadership within the CCCU.



The basic provision of training and perspective for those specifically who have been within the CCCU setting for a prolonged period is necessary to allow the institution and those who lead to remain current while implementing Christian traditions effectively. Mackey (2018) affirmed women are required to be empowered within an organization and should not be expected to single-handedly change cultures and values without sufficient support in place. Consequently, it is critical for leadership committees and individuals to remain current on leadership practices, male and women leadership roles, potential biases that may enter the workplace, and the ability to coincide institutional traditions and goals with the support of their women leaders.

### **Hiring Practices**

Findings outlined women leaders had varied leadership characteristics to suit any leadership situation, worked consistently over-prepared for their role, were educated or most times over-educated for their position, and gained respect through excellence and empowerment of those they lead. Research implied that there is no reason why women should be underrepresented in a CCCU leadership setting. Typically, women leaders promoted a resiliency and drive that could be compared with any leader due to the challenging journey one endured to make it to a senior-level leadership position and break the traditional CCCU leadership barriers.

Participants offered a potential solution to the lack of progressive theological and traditional interpretations of women's roles within CCCU leadership. Despite most participants mentioning their ability to adopt their current role was due to the institutional employer taking a more aggressive approach, most participants associated the progression with a new administration. Moving forward, institutions must remove gender from hiring processes and the ability to lead. Future leaders must be evaluated on their ability and if they are suited for the role.

To progress, women's representation within CCCU leadership institutions must review their theological stance on leadership. Most progressions did not occur simply due to institutions sticking with what they had always done, even if their traditions or institutional goals allowed them to hire women leaders. Institutions must approach new leadership roles from the perspective of who would be best for the job rather than what is easiest or what an institution has always done. Despite elements of institutional progression suggested within the findings, institutions must advocate for women's leadership and justify the need for effective leaders regardless of gender. Thus, as institutions progress to new hiring practices, all CCCU institutions must take into perspective why gender was a mitigating factor that negated women that negates women from acquiring senior-level leadership positions.

### **Trajectory Plan**

Findings affirmed the ability of women leaders to succeed within the CCCU. Consequently, it is critical to utilize this research and promote a trajectory plan for current and aspiring women leaders, specifically within the CCCU leadership environment. Investing in women leaders is critical to not only increase women's representation but ensure current women leaders do not look externally for help mentorship or other career fields. There is a need for a trajectory plan with specific target goals to achieve women's representation numbers moving forward. There must be an established plan to achieve a certain gender representation by a certain date while receiving advocacy specifically from male leaders within the CCCU and externally who could influence women leadership within the CCCU in the future. Recognition of senior-level leaders by males who understand the importance of increased women's representation opens doors and encourages current and aspiring women leaders. Findings

promoted the critical need for males to speak out and those that had significantly empowered women who now currently reside in senior-level leadership positions within the CCCU.

### **Future Research**

Future research can continue to discover women's experiences within the CCCU environment. Research could be expanded to cover the perspectives of all women within the CCCU and garner the experiences from senior-level women leaders in non CCCU higher institutions. Comparing women's representation and potential barriers inside the CCCU environment and externally would provide key research comparing the potential benefits of working in a secular or nonsecular institution.

Exploring specific leadership characteristics of those who acquired a senior-level leadership role within the CCCU would be beneficial for aspiring women leaders. Though this study focused primarily on the barriers women leaders experience, further research could coincide with the successes of current senior-level women leaders and provide the context of how they lead daily. Examining successful women's leadership characteristics promotes the qualities aspiring women leaders may need to acquire to succeed as a leader in the future.

Though the study recognized the importance and influence senior-level women leaders had, further research could be applied to the employees that the woman leader leads daily. Providing the perspective of those being led by a senior-level woman leader affords context of how an institution and the individuals who work for the leader perceive them and their decisions daily. Such a study exploration could be applied on a grander scale as to how the leader is perceived institutionally, in the community, and on a grander national level if applicable.

Finally, other literature and research must emphasize the importance of a mentoring and development initiative for women tide to their eventual success as a leader. Providing

correlations between women who walked through mentorship programs versus those who operated on more of an individual level, we provide fascinating details coinciding with the leadership characteristics, perceptions, and growth of women leaders who have partaken in mentorship and development programs.

### **Personal Resonance**

When beginning this research journey to provide the perspective of senior-level women leaders within specific Christian environments, I was positive of their ability to succeed as a leader. However, throughout the research process, I have only been heartened and inspired by the absolute ability for women to succeed at the highest level of Christian higher education leadership. However, I never expected women leaders to be so vulnerable, so open in sharing the journey women experienced to reach the highest leadership level. This research study allowed me to view first-hand the resiliency, God-given ability, and drive of women at the top leadership level.

Though the leaders I had the pleasure of interacting with exhibited countless leadership qualities, their reliance on their faith to guide the professional and personal path was encouraging when evaluating Christian leaders. Women leaders had an unwavering trust in God to lead them and open the doors they required to reach the heights of their profession. The humbleness shown by the women leaders was a pleasure to be a part of. Women leaders who had walked through differing upbringings, challenging professional journeys, navigated families, and still succeeded in all professional and personal capacities only furthered my advocacy for women's representation at the highest levels of Christian higher education.

The women interviewed promoted and unwavering faith. They displayed bravery to take steps into unknown professional territories, challenged leadership norms and lived in accordance

with God's will for their lives. The greatest advocacy one could put forth for this research and future research would be simple for one to interact with a woman senior-level leader within a CCCU construct. One will soon understand how utterly brilliant and faithful these individuals are. If anything, I am grateful I had the opportunity to even speak with a small group of these fascinating, fearless, God-loving leaders.

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## Appendix A: Invitation Letter

Date

Name

Address

Dear Participant,

You are part of a select group of women who currently serve as a senior-level leaders within the higher education Christian community (CCCU). The small population of which you are a part is a key topic of my dissertation topic in which I hope to understand the experience you have as a senior-level female leader. I am hopeful you are available and able to participate in this important study.

I am a doctoral candidate at Abilene Christian University where I am studying organizational leadership with a specific emphasis on higher education and the female leadership population within the EdD program. I am in the process of completing my dissertation through the utilization of qualitative research to gain insight into the experiences and potential barriers senior-level female leaders face within CCCU settings. Dr. Jennifer Butcher is my dissertation chair who has a wealth of knowledge and expertise, specifically in female studies, diversity, and higher education. The study will serve as a qualitative study focusing on the current experiences and perceptions of senior-level female leaders within a specific Christian community (CCCU). The topic of female leadership representation, their journeys, experiences, and barriers are a significant personal interest of mine. Despite extensive research related to barriers female educational leaders face, few studies exist on female leadership representation within the CCCU community. My hope is to focus on the experiences of senior-level female leaders who have

succeeded as a leader in the CCCU setting to provide the context of female leadership experiences to encourage aspiring female leaders specifically within the CCCU setting.

I plan to conduct interviews as early as May 2021 and would welcome the opportunity to speak with you as a participant in my research study. The qualitative study would include a semistructured interview that I would anticipate lasting approximately one hour with the intention to schedule an interview time that is most convenient for you.

It would be an honor to have an opportunity to gain your perspective on your female leadership journey and the position you currently reside. If you agree to participate, you will receive a follow-up phone call to schedule an interview. Though your time is precious, I would be extremely grateful to have the opportunity to visit and believe you would make a significant contribution to the body of research related to female leadership, specifically within a CCCU environment.

Kind regards,

Andy Stewart

Doctoral Candidate,

Abilene Christian University



**Appendix B: IRB Approval****ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY***Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World***Office of Research and Sponsored Programs**320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103  
325-674-2885

July 16, 2021

Andrew Stewart  
Department of Graduate and Professional Studies  
Abilene Christian University

Dear Andy,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Examining the Barriers Women Face in Achieving Senior-Level Leadership Roles at Council for Christian Colleges and Universities",

(IRB#21-078 ) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

*Megan Roth*Megan Roth, Ph.D.  
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

### **Appendix C: Informed Consent for Study Participation**

My name is Andrew Stewart, and I am a Doctoral candidate at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas. I am currently conducting a study on the barriers females face in achieving senior-level leadership roles at Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) institutions. The purpose of inviting you to participate in the study is because of your current role as a senior-level female leader at a CCCU institution. The goal is for study participants to provide context to your current leadership experiences and the journey that led you to your current role. Fellow study participants are all female senior-level leaders employed at a CCCU institution who have occupied their role for a minimum of 2 years.

The purpose of this study is to further understand the barriers females face in attaining senior-level leadership positions at CCCU affiliated institutions. You have been requested to participate in an interview that will last approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. My goal as the principal investigator is to ask questions concerning your experiences as a senior-level leader within your current CCCU community. The interview will be in a semistructured format, where there are no wrong answers. Rather, authentic responses outlining your experiences as a senior-level leader are welcomed. At any point during the interview, you may decline to answer any question and may choose to stop the interview. I will request your permission to video audio record the interview.

As previously outlined in your invitation letter, all information collected within this study is confidential and will remain confidential. Responses will remain anonymous and the use of pseudonyms for participants and anyone mentioned by participants will be employed throughout the interview process. All video and audio tape recordings and transcripts will be saved on a password-protected computer file and external hard drive. The research team will be the only

individuals with access to the recordings. However, if you have previously agreed to participate in the study, you reserve the right at any point throughout the study and data collection process to withdraw as a participant. At the point of withdrawal, all data associated with you will be deleted immediately from both the computer file and the external hard drive. Additionally, if the researcher requires your withdrawal from the study without your consent, you will be notified.

Despite the immense effort to maintain confidentiality and security within the research process, please note there is an extremely small chance that confidentiality may be compromised. There will be no direct benefit or compensation paid to you for participating in the study, yet your willingness to participate will further research informing CCCU institutions and female higher education leadership experiences. Participation in the study is not mandatory, and there are no disciplinary measures associated with those who elect to not participate.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, you may contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx. Additionally, you may also contact my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Jennifer Butcher at xxx-xxx-xxxx. If a report needs to be filed related to research problems you may also contact Dr. Megan Roth, Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board chair at xxxxx@acu.edu.

### **CONSENT AGREEMENT:**

I agree to participate in this study.

Yes

No

I give the researcher my consent to video and audio record my interview.

Yes

No

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Participant's Name (Please print)

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Date

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Participant's Signature

---

Investigator's Name (Please print)

---

Date

---

Investigator's Signature

### Appendix D: Guided Interview Protocol

- Good Morning/ Afternoon/ Evening. As outlined in the informed consent letter you previously signed, may I record this interview session?
- To reiterate, all information acquired from this interview will be kept confidential and your responses will be kept anonymous.
- Thank you again for your participation and willingness to take time out of your busy schedule to help this body of research.
- If you are ready, let us begin. Research Question: What barriers have you experienced as senior-level female leader at a CCCU institution?
- **Q1.** How have senior-level female leaders traversed their Christian identity, gender, and leadership within CCCU settings?
  - Describe your Christian/faith upbringing. Was it aligned with stereotypical CCCU beliefs?
  - Tell me about your educational background. How did you get started on your education journey?
  - What leadership experiences and opportunities did you have while growing up?
    - Did you experience barriers that limited leadership opportunities while growing up?
  - When did you begin the journey to become a senior-level female leader? What spurred your desire to become an educational leader?
  - How have you navigated the traditional leadership beliefs of CCCU institutions as a female leader?

- What are your biggest challenges as a leader, specifically within the CCCU setting?
- What have been your biggest successes as a leader, specifically within the CCCU setting?
- How do you find your validation as a female leader within a CCCU setting?
- Have there been instances where CCCU values have helped or hindered our leadership position?
- Do you feel gender representation is justified within CCCU leadership environments?
- Do you feel comfortable in your current role?
- Have you experienced any gender stereotypes within a CCCU setting that have helped or hindered your position?

Let us shift gears and look into your preparation and mentorship experiences in order to acquire the current position you hold.

- **Q2.** What mentorship programs or mentors aided journey and current leadership attainment? If so, explain the mentoring experience?
  - Tell me about mentors you have had?
  - How did the mentors help you acquire your current leadership position?
  - Have you partaken or do you advocate for specific mentorship programs that encourage females to acquire positions of leadership?
  - How were prepared for your current position from a mentoring perspective?
  - Who do you approach for leadership advice?

- Do you believe there are effective mentorship programs and networking in place to encourage aspiring female educational leaders?
  - Who is part of your work network?
  - Who is part of your social network?
- Do you believe females are provided mentorship opportunities and representation in order to succeed as a leader? What about within CCCU environments?
- As a mentor yourself, what advice would you provide to aspiring female leaders specifically within the CCCU?

We have talked about your journey and preparation as a leader. Now I want to gain a little insight into your current position as a senior-level female leader and your aspirations as a leader in the future.

**Q3.** How do senior-level leaders learn to lead within a traditional higher education Christian community? How do you acquire the skills, knowledge and experience to lead within the CCCU?

- Do you feel as though you are free to lead professionally and spiritually within your work community? How do you achieve this?
- Do you believe you lead similar to fellow CCCU female leaders or you lead from more of an independent, unique standpoint?
- Does the traditional higher education environment present any challenges as a female leader?
- What successful leadership strategies have you implemented that has allowed you to acquire a leadership position?
- What do you envision for yourself as a leader?

- How do you feel about female leadership representation within traditional higher education Christian settings? Do you believe any changes need to be made?

### Conclusion

These are a little more far-reaching and visionary questions to close out the interview.

- What characteristics do you believe you need to succeed as a female leader?
- If you were to give one piece of advice before acquiring your current role, what would it be?
- If you were to live out your professional career again, would you choose to lead within a CCCU community?
- Do you have any future leadership aspirations or plans?

Is there anything I have not asked you that you wish I should have or any topic you would like to divulge any more information?

That concludes our interview. Once again, thank you for your time. Once data and transcriptions have been processed, you will receive a 'Member Check Letter' that will allow you to review the data and an opportunity to discuss the findings before publication.

Once again, thank you for your time.



## Appendix E: Research Participation Follow-Up and Confirmation

Dear Research Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my Doctorate study titled “Examining the Barriers Women Face in Achieving Senior-Level Leadership Roles at Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.” I understand all of you are in positions of senior-level leadership and are on very tight schedules. My hope is that this interview process and your participation in this study is seamless.

To move forward with a zoom interview, I require the following items below to be completed at your earliest convenience.

1. Click here and select a date and time for your interview. All times are central time. Your names will not be shared with any other participants as outlined in the invitation. **The access code for the sign-up is "0000."** If there is not a date that works for you within the scheduled time frame offered, please reply to this email with a few potential dates and times that may work for your schedule. **All times are central time.**
2. Look out for a consent form sent via HelloSign directly to your email address within the next 24 hours. Once you view the form, please sign and date (electronically). The form will be sent directly back to the Principal Investigator (Andy Stewart) once completed.
3. Once you have completed the two outlined steps above, you will receive a confirmation email. The confirmation email will include:
  1. Confirmation of interview date and time.
  2. A zoom meeting link that you will access on the day of the interview.
  3. A guided interview protocol provides a base as to the type of questions that will be asked during the interview.

Please find the consent form and invitation letter attached in this email for reference, not to complete. To reiterate, the only form you need to complete is the form sent via Hellosign. Additionally, I have received a couple of questions regarding study confidentiality. Please refer to the consent form attached or sent via HelloSign, which addresses study privacy and confidentiality.

If you have any questions at all regarding the interview process or any of the research, please contact me immediately via email (xxxxxxx@acu.edu) or by phone (xxx-xxx-xxxx).

Once again, I appreciate your willingness to sacrifice valuable time to help add to this research study.

Sincerely,

Andy Stewart

Doctoral Candidate

Abilene Christian University

## **Appendix F: Member Check Letter and Participation Acknowledgment**

Dear Participant,

I hope this letter finds you well. I wanted to reiterate my thanks for your participation in my doctoral study. Your sacrifice of time and enlightenment of your personal experience as a female senior level leader helps promote and awareness for females currently serving in similar positions and females aspiring for such positions in the future. Your contribution to this study has allowed final completion of 'The Barriers Female Senior-level Leaders Face at Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) institutions.'

As I embark on the final stretch of dissertation process and make my final edits to the study, I wanted to reach out to you and provide an opportunity for you to review the findings chapter attached in this communication. The purpose of defining's review is to provide you an opportunity to discuss any of the findings with me is the principal researcher before the final dissertation is available for public viewing.

Due to this information being copyrighted, please do not share the information in any form and keep this information confidential at this time. The final dissertation will be available electronically on ACU Digital Commons. Again, if you have any questions or concerns you may contact me at xxxxxx@acu.edu or xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Thank you for your time and efforts throughout this process and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind Regards,

Andy Stewart

### Appendix G: Coding Matrix

#### Research Question #1

How have senior-level female leaders traversed their Christian identity, gender, and leadership within CCCU settings?

Themes	Categories	Descriptions	Evidence & Sub-Categories
#1 Christian Upbringing	Culturally Christian	Interviewees growing up in a Christian home or connect to Christianity in some capacity.	<p>“My parents attended a Christian Church there, they still go to the same church as part of where my grandparents went to church, so it's definitely been part of my <u>heritage</u>.” Participant N</p> <p>“Sure. So, um, by God's grace, I <u>grew up in a Christian home, Christian family</u>.” Participant F</p>
	Honoring God/ God-driven decisions	Interviewees alluded to traversing their leadership role as a direct result of honoring God and leadership decisions were related to their faith.	<p>“I grew up with the idea that God <u>actually calls</u> people to do different things all the time, so we have several different callings.” Participant F</p> <p>“I firmly believe- I believe that God works in around and through us, right? To achieve his end goal.” Participant I</p>
#2 Leadership development	Leadership skillset	Interviewees referred to their skillset which coincided with	“Have you ever thought about becoming a

		effective leadership qualities.	<p>university professor?" And I said, "No, never thought of that."</p> <p>They kept saying, "<u>You should really think about that.</u> <u>You're a good communicator. You have a really good grasp of things with people, you understand education.</u> So, they ended up recruiting me to become the director of their teacher education program."</p> <p>Participant E</p>
	Athletic pathways	Interviewees referred to their athletic experiences growing up as a direct correlation to leadership opportunities or skillset later in life.	<p>"You know, I think it was interesting in- in my small town, <u>the women's athletics were historically stronger</u> than the men's and I've always wondered if that doesn't have something to do with it because that's kind of unique to the-the generation that I was able to grow up in as opposed to, you know, before Title IX. I really do think that that provided an opportunity. So we had our softball team was very famous. Our-our track was really good. Volleyball was really good. Um, and-and it was funny because</p>

			<p>the men's sports at the time I went through weren't near as- weren't near as strong.          And so I think it just, um, <u>I do think that had something to do with the confidence, of the young women</u> that I've seen come out of even that high school.”          Participant C</p> <p>“<u>Athletics was a big part of my life</u> and so many of my leadership opportunities emerged through athletics or confidence building, I think as well. I would point back to those experiences, they were really big for me in terms of, again, being a leader and teamwork.”          Participant O</p>
<p>#3 Opportunities</p>	<p>Alma mater connections</p>	<p>Interviewees referred to networks or connections to their alma mate/ currently work in a leadership role at alma mater.</p>	<p>“The connection and history with the university. My dad graduated from here, so I can remember coming down here as a child and we would come down for homecoming and reunions and various things. I can remember it being a fun destination to be a part of this</p>

			community, even as a kid.”  Participant N
	Taking Opportunities	Interviewees alluded to the willingness of aspiring senior-level female leaders to take any opportunity provided to get their foot in the door of leadership.	“Look for <u>opportunities to make a difference</u> . Then that's just speaking from personal experience. Many of the projects that I took on, I've always joked that in my second life, I would be a lawyer because I find gaps and loopholes and things like that. One of the things that I did for many years was just trying to shore up some of those gaps in our academic policies and things like that.”  Participant K
	Risk Taker/Tapped/ Doors open	Interviewees alluded to taking a risk in their career or being encouraged by others to take the leap into the leadership realm when it became available.	“I was in-- teaching in a high school. I was an administrator in a public high school, um, I was an administrator in a Christian high school. Um, all of those, I was <u>continuously tapped</u> on to be a leader, so there was just this constant sense of leadership opportunity.”  Participant F
	Early leadership opportunities	Interviewees referred to their opportunity to participate as a leader from an early age.	<u>I had opportunities to do things that most young people</u> as a whole in the states

			<p>(recheck quote) don't have much less females in evangelical households if you will. I have parents who are very supportive and never said you can't do this because you're a girl.”</p> <p>Participant L</p>
#4 Female Catalysts	Females of Influence	Interviewees referred to their mentor being a female who was in a high-ranking leadership position.	<p>“A very strong, powerful, godly female leader, um, really paved the way for that. And-and also for me, she continues <u>to be a mentor to me in her retirement.</u> And I can see in hindsight how she has really, really paved the way for me to continue to advance.</p> <p>Participant G</p>
	The need for females supporting females/ Catalysts	Interviewees alluded to female leaders supporting and networking with fellow females who are current or aspiring senior-level female leaders.	<p>“The number one thing that actually changes the culture to shift <u>women is when they see women in leadership,</u> it's even not even mentoring. Because often, mentoring comes from women that aren't in leadership. <u>They just listen to women, tell other younger women how to manage it.</u> What young women actually need to see</p>



			<p>are leaders in the academy, vice presidents of academic affairs, deans, department chairs that are women. Then they need to also see faculty members who are women in male-dominated fields. Then we need to add of color so that they can see the representation. In fact, there's research after research study that shows it's the representation of what they see first that tells them I can do that too.”</p> <p>Participant M</p>
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### Research Question #2

What barriers have senior-level female leaders experienced at a Council for Christian Colleges and Universities institution?

Themes	Categories	Descriptions	Evidence & Sub-Categories
#1 Stereotypes	Social Norms	Interviewees referred to conversations where assumptions were made regarding family life and items stereotypically tied to female roles.	<p>“I’ll give you an example. We let women lead at our institution. It’s like saying, “We let women preach.” Who’s letting? Do you hear the language? We allow. <u>That alone speaks to the system. We</u></p>

			<p><u>actually stroke ourselves with pride, how good we're doing.</u> Until we recognize these things, it won't change. We need to start cultivating our women in students, our women students to become these women of tomorrow so to speak. That they become the women today.</p> <p>Participant M</p>
	<p>Male vs. female perceptions</p>	<p>Interviewees referred to actions and conversations specifically tied to gender while limiting female leadership.</p>	<p>“So about four or five of us would come and we would have our meetings. Um, but before the meeting, the actual meet of the meetings, um, occur, you know, you do the small talk, right? And, um, those typically were football, you know, the games- football, um, baseball, anything that-- and the funny thing is, they'll say, I'm sorry we're talking about this.” As if I don't know anything about football. As if I don't know anything about baseball, well, I don't care as much as they do, so that's right. You know, I'm not gonna go Sunday night football, you</p>

			<p>know? Um, I only follow one team. Um, I don't care for the rest, um, and if they're not blind up. And if they lost, I'm not gonna say anything about it. There-there was this definitely an underlining, <u>this is the boys conversation and you're the only girl kinda tone</u> and they don't mean it that way. So I know where their heart is at. So, but that's the culture that was”</p> <p>Participant J</p>
	<p>Conversation Awareness</p>	<p>Interviewees alluded to the lack of awareness as to the continued promotion of stereotypes within the CCCU setting.</p>	<p>“When I first started, um, the role, I learned pretty quickly that the only way was going to be respected as if I really knew what I was doing. And I was walking into rooms often where I knew nothing. And so, I learned to ask really good questions. And, um, over the years, I didn't walk into a room <u>where they assumed I was there to take minutes for the meeting</u>. When all the men were sitting, like I would sit in on early on construction meetings and people assumed I was the minute taker, not the person who was</p>

			<p>actually making the final decision and paying the bills.”</p> <p>Participant B</p>
#2 Christian Higher Education vs. Institutional Traditions	Institutional decisions	Interviewees referred to individual CCCU institutions limiting female leadership success.	<p>“I do, you know, especially, I guess, to get back to theology, there's not quite the freedom. And then there are sometimes in the president's office and with the trustees, I don't quite feel the freedom because that's where it's- things are still all pretty stagnant. You know, it's still kind of, uh, stuck in the past a little bit. There are some board of trustee members who are wonderful and they wanna move ahead. I had a few trustees who wanted me to apply for the president's position.”</p> <p>Participant A</p>
	Embedded Christian higher education traditions	Interviewees referred to embedded Christian traditions tied to CCCU institutions limiting female leadership success.	<p>'I'll say it this way. I believe that it is <u>embedded in Christian higher Ed.</u> Because we are so connected to the North American Evangelical Church that is so far behind on understanding kingdom immunity. We then go by the way of how our churches go. I believe that institutionally it's</p>

			<p>fraud. Now, I believe that the CCCU by what its intentions are and what they're trying to do is to move that needle, hence why they have the diversity commissioners.”</p> <p>Participant M</p>
	<p>Progressive Institutional beliefs and understanding</p>	<p>Interviewees referred to their need for there to be more a progressive approach to institutional traditions while understanding what support females need to allow females to lead within the CCCU.</p>	<p>“Yes, I am in a position of leadership. I would say that that is primarily due to a newer administration. 2018, we had a change in president, 2019, we had a change in provost, 2020, we had a change in our CFO, so really, in the last four years, I think all of our senior-level or executive-level positions have changed. With that new leadership, there's been a <u>change in the approach to women in leadership.</u>”</p> <p>Participant K</p>
<p>#3 Hierarchal Disconnect</p>	<p>Old Boys Club</p>	<p>Interviewees alluded to a group of males with strong ties to the institution limiting female leadership roles.</p>	<p>Well, it's just this crazy dynamic and-- 'Cause I remember when we had our former president, he was here 22 years and uh, he has a president's house and he has some senior vice president and</p>

			<p>other folks who would come over and have coffee with him at 7:30 before meetings. And I remember I asked him, I said, said, uh, "Can I stop by, you know, at your house? I noticed you know, so and so and so, and so is coming over. I wanna go over some things with you." He said, "Well, let's just wait. I can-- I'll just try to get to my office, you know, and we can meet with you- and I'll meet with you in my office once my secretary's there." Again, I think it's just because I was female. I mean, I'm second in command to the president, but yet he still wouldn't meet with me alone."</p> <p>Participant A</p> <p>There are times when, um- and-and it's probably because I have- I've seen this pattern of behavior for years, um, there tends to sometimes be a good old boy's, uh, network. There's seems to be sometimes a talking over, um, but at the same time, if I am direct and blunt, um,</p>
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			<p>then my male colleagues are offended that I have been so direct and they want me to be less direct. Um, and- and so there's this they-they will talk over me sometimes or at least try to and then when I'm straight to the point, they-- their feelings get hurt.</p> <p>Participant F</p>
	Board of Trustees/ Cabinet Disconnect	Interviewees referred to a disconnect between institutional leadership beliefs and goals compared to the Board of Trustees/ Cabinet.	<p>“A president's cabinet, oftentimes, the colleagues <u>don't understand</u> academia. So when you have the majority of the people who are part of the cabinet not understanding academia or what academics is- it's-it's often a challenge to have to communicate, um, not only the value but the paradigm.”</p> <p>Participant F</p>
#5 Female Representation	Lack of female senior-level leaders	Interviewees alluded to the simple data that there simply are not enough female senior-level leaders.	<p>“Where would someone like myself go 10 years ago when I was moving into leadership, where would I go to get mentorship from a female <u>if there are no women in leadership</u> in an institution? I think that would</p>

			<p>actually be really beneficial.”</p> <p>Participant I</p>
	Need for a trajectory plan	Interviewees alluded to the need of individual institutions and the CCCU to create a trajectory plan with specified goals and timeframes to increase female leadership representation.	<p>“I really believe that they should make a <u>trajectory plan</u> and write it down.”</p> <p>Participant M</p>
	Male dominant/majority	Interviewees referred to most of their mentors being male.	<p>“I've had- the mentors that I've had, <u>they're male.</u>”</p> <p><u>Participant A</u></p>
	Male leaders supporting female leaders	Interviewees referred to the importance to of male leaders advocating on behalf of current and aspiring female senior-level leaders.	<p>“There's a movement, there's a growing <u>number of men who are beginning to understand and they need to speak.</u> Because often, women, and people of color are starting to say, "Do you want to pay the cost too? Because we always pay the cost." People often wonder, how come the shelf life, so to speak of women in leadership is three to three to five years. Because we pay the cost. We either decide to move on, because now we've exhausted our</p>



			<p>agency, our capital has been expended, or we're just like, "I need to get out to here. Toxic." Men can stay and stay and stay because they don't have to pay the cost. <u>I would like to see men who get it, call other men who don't get it to account.</u>"</p> <p>Participant M</p>
#6 Lack of support or Mentorship	Consistent and Intentional mentor interaction	Interviewees referred to the importance of consistent interaction with mentor for effective mentorship.	<p>"Honestly, I would say that if I would call anyone a mentor, it would have been my previous provost. He retired two years ago, but he promoted me into my first administrative position. <u>Very conscious efforts on a regular basis</u>, once a month or every other month, to make sure that we touch base and talk about things that are going on and how to pivot as needs arise or whatever."</p> <p>Participant K</p>
	Boss/ formally in position	Interviewees alluded to their mentor either being their current boss or an individual who was formally in their current role.	<p>"I think I have always valued mentorship, learning from others. I've-- <u>our former provost</u> who had been- who's retired, she had been at .... for 30 years. We had attended the same church."</p>

			<p>Participant H</p> <p>“I would say it's multiple people speaking into me, and most of the time not being aware that I was maybe being mentored. Certainly, they were probably not aware either. I think of my predecessor in this role, . . . , who held this role for a while, as well as our current president.”</p> <p>Participant N</p>
	Mentor outside of education/ External environment.	Interviewees referred to their mentor being an individual outside of higher education.	<p>“I grew up in a single-family home kind of helped me think through things about where I wanted to be. He wanted to be encouraged, kinda encouraged my family in different ways. Um, <u>I wouldn't think of him as a mentor in the same way I do now as a mentor</u>, but if I look back, he was really a critical person in the path I took.”</p> <p>Participant B</p>

### Research Question #3

What leadership style have senior-level leaders employed within a traditional higher education religious community?

Themes	Categories	Descriptions	Evidence & Sub-Categories
#1 Employee First Mentality/ Relational	Empowerment/ Servant leadership	Interviewees referred to their need to empower and serve those they lead.	<p>“I think we need to, as women in leadership, empower other women.”</p> <p>Table 1. Number of Participant(s) in Senior-Level Leadership Roles .....79</p> <p>Table 2. Occurrence of Codes in Each Theme by Participant82</p> <p>Participant D</p>
	Relational/ Staff Development	Interviewees referred to the importance of continually developing those they lead professionally and relationally.	<p>“I’m also <u>very relational</u>, and so I’m - People feel like they can approach me about anything. So because of that, they-- I will find out things that are going on in departments or in the institution that other leaders don't know anything about, and then I'll be able to report, "Hey, just so you guys know, there's a lot of people that are feeling this," or "This is an issue that's coming up." And they will be like, "How do you know that? I haven't heard anything about that.”</p> <p>Participant E</p>
#2 Critical Leadership Characteristics	Preparation and understanding	Interviewees referred to the importance to	<p>“And for a woman, I think stopping and listening first and asking probing questions <u>to seek</u></p>

		<p>overly prepare and understand specifically before entering leadership settings with fellow senior-level leaders.</p>	<p><u>understanding</u> is just going to be so key to your ability then to strategically decide what to say next. Because you will encounter people that have a problem with you being female. But I would say the same thing to a male.” Participant I</p>
	Transparent	<p>Interviewees referred to the ability to be open and honest with the employees they lead.</p>	<p>“I just have to be <u>really transparent</u> or people will think I'm being like-like, you know, all of the bad words that come to mind with female leadership. I mean, including like manipulative and tricky and I'm like, no-no like I'll tell you exactly where I'm headed and where I'm going.”  Participant C</p>
	Respect through excellence	<p>Interviewees alluded that they gained respect as a leader through their performance in a senior-level leadership role.</p>	<p>“I think the leadership roles that I was given were mostly given to me because of, I would use the word competence. I think I was just highly viewed as someone <u>who pursued excellence</u> in all they do.”  Participant M</p>
	Problem solver	<p>Interviewees referred to their willingness and effectiveness in being decisive and solving problems quickly.</p>	<p>“You have got to think about how, um, everything within an organization connects to another. So how do you <u>problem-solve?</u> You have to disaggregate and then analyze. And to move into any kind of leadership, you need to-to be able to do that.”  Participant F</p>