

WOMEN UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS WHO BREAK THROUGH THE GLASS
CEILING: AT WHAT PRICE?

by
Stacy Ann Volnick

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
College of Education
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Florida Atlantic University

Boca Raton, FL

December 2022

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's dissertation advisors, Dr. Deborah Floyd and Dr. Patricia Maslin-Ostrowski, Department of Educational Leadership and Research Methodology, and has been approved by all members of the supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of the College of Education and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I couldn't have gone on this journey without the love and support from my family – my entire family and I want to acknowledge them. They have provided encouragement not only on this work but throughout so many things in my life. This year has been overwhelmed with so many challenges, yet their support and care has allowed me to press on and complete this work.

To my sister and brother-in-law John. You both are always there for me, and it has always meant the world to me. To my sister Michele - you are my sister and my best friend and your support through this journey has been insurmountable. You pushed when there were times I wanted to quit. I am grateful for that.

To my niece Annie and nephew John for being the lights of my life and making me so proud of your own accomplishments. To my father for not only being such a wonderful person and parent but always reminding me that my mother is always with me and proud of my accomplishments. The support and love from my family doesn't stop there – thank you and hugs to Ryan, Connor, Tyler, Mimi, Tibor, Kim, Elio, Uncle Frank, Brett, and Anthony. In good times and in bad, we rally around each other, and you all have done that for me. There are so many friends and family who I appreciate – you know who you are, and I am here because of each and every single one of you.

\ To my committee – thank you Dr. Deborah Floyd, Dr. Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, and Dr. Robert Shockley. Your guidance along this path has provided me an opportunity to produce a dissertation that I am proud of. Dr. Floyd – you have provided me professional

guidance over the years, and I am eternally grateful. When life got challenged - it was the three words both you and Dr. Pat reminded me of – Bird by Bird.... Thank you doesn't begin to express my gratitude.

Last but not least – thank you to the women presidents who were so generous with their time, with their lives, and with their stories. To Alice, Claire, Eleanor, Olivia, Sophia, Victoria, and Lucy - you are strong and brave. It is through such bravery in telling your stories that the path for the next woman aspiring to the presidency might just be paved with the advice you all so generously shared making her trek a little less rocky.

ABSTRACT

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On average, the American university president is a white man in his early 60s. Progress has been slow for women in this role. This study examined the university presidency with a focus on the woman president experience. The hypothesis was that based on factors such as the glass ceiling and glass cliff, gender affects the experiences of women university presidents. The purpose of this study was to understand the personal and professional meaning-making of breaking through the glass ceiling for women who have held or currently hold the position of president in higher education. The research methodology selected for this study was qualitative with a phenomenological design. There were two guiding research questions, which serve to understand the essence of the experiences of women who serve or have served in the role of president in higher education. The research questions are (a) how do women perceive the impact of the glass ceiling and/or the glass cliff on negotiating the role of university president from ascension to attainment? and (b) how do women university presidents perceive the price they have paid, personally and professionally, for

breaking through the glass ceiling? The study sample size consisted of seven current or former women university presidents. The data collection method was semi-structured interviews. This study served to provide insight that may help identify support systems for women in the workplace, changes in perceptions of women in leadership, and how gender roles unfold in both the personal and professional lives of women university presidents

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mother. She was a key figure in my life and left this world when neither she nor this universe was ready to lose her. She remains with me and has provided a guiding light as I embarked on and completed this journey. Mom - I thank you for always pushing me, supporting me, and even sometimes shoving me to the finish line. I know you are with me celebrating this moment in my life.

WOMEN UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS WHO BREAK THROUGH THE GLASS
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Study Background

The demographic profile of America's college and university presidents remains predominately white and men (Gagliardi et al., 2017). This study will examine the women university presidency. This study did not assume that the women experience is the same as the experience of men. Instead, this study aimed to document what the women experience is directly from those who lived such an experience.

While progress has been made, it has been slow, and the experience of the women university president differs from that of their men counterparts (Gagliardi, 2017). The most current research on university and college presidency was published by the American Council of Education (ACE) in a report titled, *The American College President Study: 2017* (Gagliardi et al., 2017). The study reported that in 2016, women comprised 30% of college presidents, just up slightly from 21% in 2001 (Gagliardi et al., 2017). The same study reported that only 8% of doctoral-granting institutions have women presidents and 78% of women are holding the role of president for the first time (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Table 1 reports the percentage of presidencies held by women for 2001-2016.

Table 1*Higher Education Institutions with Female Presidents*

Institution Type	2001	2006	2011	2016
<i>All institutions*</i>				
Doctorate-granting	13.3	13.7	22.3	21.8
Master's	20.3	21.7	22.8	29.1
Bachelor's	18.7	23.3	22.9	27.9
Associate	26.8	28.7	33.0	35.8
Special focus	14.8	16.4	20.5	30.6
Total**	21.1	23.0	26.4	30.1
<i>Public</i>				
Doctorate-granting	15.7	16.0	23.9	23.2
Master's	20.9	23.1	22.9	30.3
Bachelor's	18.2	34.4	27.5	32.8
Associate	27.0	28.9	32.3	36.0
Special focus	22.0	29.0	21.4	40.0
Total**	23.9	26.5	29.4	32.8
<i>Private Not-for-Profit</i>				
Doctorate-granting	8.7	7.6	20.7	19.6
Master's	19.6	20.3	22.5	28.6
Bachelor's	18.8	21.1	22.3	26.3
Associate	27.6	34.0	40.7	34.8
Special focus	13.7	13.4	17.8	29.3
Total**	17.9	18.7	21.9	27.2

Note. *Includes public, private, not-for-profit, and private for-profit institutions. **Total includes institutions classified as “Other”, which includes institutions not included in Carnegie Classifications, such as some state higher education systems. (Gagliardi et al., 2017, p. 17)

The same study reported on diversity and inclusion. According to the study, 17% of college presidents are racial minorities with 36% leading associate colleges and 5% of college presidents being women of color (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

Further, study reported relationship status for both men and women college presidents. According to the study, in 2016, women college presidents reported the

following relationship status: 10% divorced, 10% never married, and 75% married. In contrast, men college presidents reported 4% divorced, 4% never married, and 90% married (Gagliardi et al., 2017). The data revealed critical discrepancies between men and women college presidents' relationship status. Women college presidents have altered their careers to care for others at a considerable rate more than their men peers. In 2001, 2% of men presidents reported altering their career to care of others (i.e., children, spouse, parents, other) and 16% in 2016, while 26% of the women reported altering their careers for the same in 2001 and 32% in 2016 (Gagliardi et al., 2017). The ACE report, *Pipelines, Pathways, and Institutional Leadership: An Update on the Status of Women* provided data which indicated that 89% of men college presidents reported having children (Johnson, 2017). At the same time, 74% of women reported having children (Johnson, 2017). These statistics showed women presidents are less likely to be married, less likely to have children, and more likely to have altered their career to care for a dependent, spouse, partner, parent, or family member than their men counterparts.

In 2017, Johnson described the pipeline myth as an explanation of why women hold such few leadership positions in higher education, including university president. The pipeline myth is the persistent idea that too few women are qualified (e.g., degree-holding) for leadership positions (Johnson, 2017). On the contrary, the report indicated that since 2006 women have earned more than 50% of all doctoral degrees (Johnson, 2017). As a matter of fact, women have received more than 50% of all degrees since as early as 1978. Therefore, based on these data, women are materially qualified for the position of university president at higher rates than men. However, it elicits the question: why are more women not holding the university president role?

Governing boards of universities hold an essential role in the selection of candidates and hiring of the president. Additionally, they are central to setting the strategic direction of the organization. Data show that men outnumber women on both public and independent governing boards by more than two to one (Johnson, 2017). Women hold 31.7% of board seats at both public and private institutions, while women represent 22.6% of board chairs at public institutions and 24.1% at private institutions (Johnson, 2017).

As Johnson (2017) reported, for over three decades, women have earned more than half of degrees (e.g., bachelors), yet still hold only 30% of all university president roles. It is clear that historically women have not reached the ranks of executive leadership roles at the same rate as men. Women still face significant barriers to advancement to the C-suite in higher education. One such barrier is the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling is a metaphor used to describe the largely invisible barrier that women face as they attempt to reach the upper echelons of management (Ryan & Haslam, 2006). The glass ceiling is a phrase first introduced in the 1980s. In 1991, Congress found that despite a dramatically growing presence of women in the workplace, women and minorities remained underrepresented in management positions in business and that artificial barriers were inhibiting their advancement (Johns, 2013). In 1991, Congress enacted the Glass Ceiling Act and the Title II of the Civil Rights Act, establishing the Glass Ceiling Commission. The barriers between women and the executive suite were reaffirmed in the report issued by the Glass Ceiling Commission in 1995 (Johns, 2013). The commission reported four barriers that were holding women back. These barriers included (1) societal, (2) governmental, (3) internal business, and (4) business structure

barriers (Johns, 2013).

Societal barriers were associated with opportunity and attainment, prejudice and bias, and cultural, gender, and color-based differences (Johns, 2013). Governmental barriers were described as a weakness in the collection and disaggregation of employment-related data, and lack of vigorous and consistent monitoring for compliance with affirmative action programs (Johns, 2013). Internal and business structure barriers include recruitment and outreach barriers, corporate climate barriers such as different gender communication styles, behaviors, and ways of socializing. Other barriers include lack of mentoring, different standards of employment evaluation for women and men, and little or no access to information networks of communication (Johns, 2013).

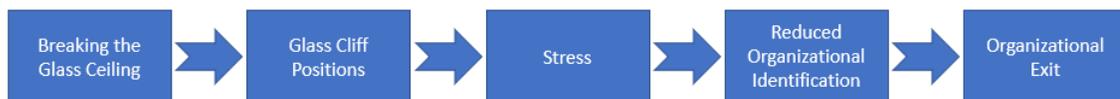
A second barrier is the glass cliff. Ryan and Haslam (2006) described the glass cliff as the tendency for women's leadership positions to be more precarious than those occupied by men and to be associated with higher risk and failure. A leader in research on the glass cliff phenomenon is Michelle Ryan. In a 2006 study, Ryan and Haslam cited that only 5% of the women participants doubted the existence of the glass cliff, while 50% of the men participants doubted the same. There are other factors cited that contribute to women feeling their positions are risky or precarious, which include informal networks. Women are often excluded from these networks in the workplace. Ryan and Haslam (2006) suggested that women may be excluded from these information networks for several reasons including that networks often develop around traditional men activities, such as after-work trips to the pub or golf course. Furthermore, because women are more likely to take on a disproportionate share of childcare responsibilities, they are often unable to become—or to stay—involved in out-of-work activities that

build informal networks be they traditionally masculine enterprises or those that are more inclusive (Ryan & Haslam, 2006).

The consequences of the glass cliff often lead to failure and adverse implications for the organization. A large body of research suggests that as individuals who experience high levels of work-related stress are likely to distance themselves from the organization. This is referred to as the gender-stress-disidentification model—the appointment of women to glass cliff positions damages the women who hold them and their organizations (Ryan & Haslam, 2006). Ryan and Haslam (2006) used Figure 1 to describe the model.

Figure 1

The Gender-Stress-Disidentification Model^T



Note. Adapted by from Ryan & Haslam, (2006, p. 46).

Overt forms of gender discrimination have subsided due to laws, organizational awareness and emphasis on equality of opportunity. However, this does not mean that gender discrimination has been eliminated. Instead, there is evidence to suggest that “it has just gone underground” (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2003). For those women who have broken through the glass ceiling or experienced the glass cliff phenomenon, what price did they pay personally and professionally? This overarching question guided this qualitative study. In order to gain an understanding of the price of success for current and former women university and college presidents, two guiding research questions were identified. It is through the experiences shared by the women leaders in this study that

common themes were identified.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study is the representation disparity that exists between women and men in the role of president in higher education, and the challenges women presidents uniquely face. It is evident from the most recent data cited from *The American College President Study: 2017* that women comprise more than 50% of college graduates yet hold only 30% of college president positions (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Further, it is evident from the same study that women have remarkable differences in relationship status with only 75% reporting being married compared to 90% of their men colleagues (Gagliardi et al., 2017). The study reported that 32% of women have altered their career to care for a dependent as compared to only 16% of their men colleagues (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

The Glass Ceiling Commission, in 1995, affirmed that there are barriers women face as they aspire to the executive suite compared to men (Johns, 2013). Many women in senior-level leadership roles obtain their positions during times of organizational crisis leading to a professional career barrier known as the glass cliff effect, which accompanies a higher risk of failure (Ryan & Haslam, 2009). This creates increased stress for women leaders and causes women departing senior management positions at greater rates than men (Ryan & Haslam, 2006). This study sought to gain insight into what price is paid for persistence in breaking through the glass ceiling and/or experiencing the glass cliff effect.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of the experience, personally and professionally, of breaking through the glass ceiling and/or

experiencing the glass cliff for women who currently hold or have held the role of president in higher education. The price paid was generally defined as those sacrifices made, including work-life balance, emotional and physical well-being, and professional challenges and sacrifices that go to the overall well-being of the individual.

Research Questions

There are two research questions that guided this study. They both served to understand the essence of the experiences of women who serve or have served in the role of president in higher education. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) How do women perceive the impact of the glass ceiling and/or the glass cliff on negotiating the role of university president from ascension to attainment?
- 2) How do women university presidents perceive the meaning of the price they have paid, personally and professionally, for breaking through the glass ceiling?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that there are persistent issues facing women as they aspire to and attain the position of university president. This study revealed, through the participant experiences, what the price of success was to each personally and professionally. Common themes emerged. It is important that women understand the obstacles faced by those who came before them to better prepare them for those that lie ahead. It was anticipated that this study would reveal what motivated women to persevere during their ascension to the presidency and serving in the role. Finally, the results of this study may create an opportunity for institutions of higher education to transform their perspectives of leadership from exclusionary to inclusive. This could provide greater opportunities for women to aspire to the presidency and attain those roles based on

nothing more than their experience, readiness, and abilities to lead and move forward the strategic initiatives and missions of those academic organizations.

The personal narratives provided insights on the challenges women face as they sought success in this role. The personal stories provided insight into the significant representation disparity between the number of women versus men that hold this role and provided opportunity to discover how a noted shift might be possible in lessening this disproportion. Further, this study provided opportunities to lessen the gender gap and provide insight into how organizations can be on the forefront of such initiatives.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was adapted from Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2002) study of the wounded leader or wounding. The meaning of wounding is imbedded in the realms of mythology and medicine (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). Inevitably, however, leadership wounding points toward issues in the personal realm of vulnerability, isolation, fear, and power. These are elemental and inevitable by-products that become the shadow aspects of leadership work. They form a foundation for our understanding of the wound (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. 17).

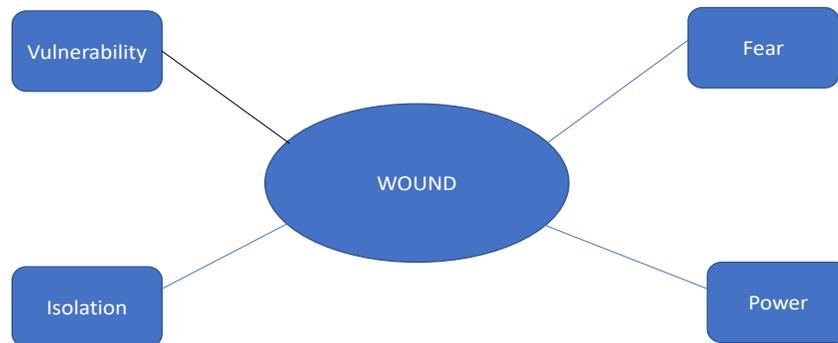
Similarly, wounding is an inevitable part of leadership; it might have to be considered part of the job (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2002). This researcher made the assumption that women in higher education presidential roles, by virtue of the role, have experienced a leadership wound. A wound is akin to an illness that reflects some of the same characteristics: loss of control, predictability, and functioning, disassociation, fear, and anger among others (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998). The wounding

experience is not unique to women but this study focused on the experiences of women in college and university presidential positions. The wounding experience provides an opportunity for individuals to examine their leadership successes and failures. The model adapted from the wounding experience depicts the anatomy of a wound. This model is important when considering the personal stories of women university presidents and how they perceived the effect of their wounding experiences on their presidency. The anatomy, shown in Figure 2, depicts four facets: (a) vulnerability, (b) isolation, (c) fear, and (d) power.

Figure 2

The Anatomy of a Wound

The wounded leader - anatomy of a "wound"



Note. Adapted from Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski *The Wounded Leader* (2002)

In the anatomy of a wound, vulnerability is not represented as a weakness but rather as a strength (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). The emphasis is on the inner landscape of leadership vulnerability and the sources of wounding that can be understood and determined from the inside out (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). Isolation refers to the inevitable separation or exclusion that a leader must experience. Necessary boundaries in leadership life require a degree of administrative isolation relating to personal and professional roles, visibility, decision making (“the buck stops here”), and confidentiality (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). Fear is a factor in the professional lives of most leaders. Fear in leadership takes on various guises. For example, fear of appearing weak, fear of failure, fear of change and of not changing, and fear of being judged and criticized (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). Fear does not always work

in detriment of the leader but can serve to one's benefit. Finally, power leaves leaders aware of their vulnerability and their dependence on others (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). Leaders often realize that they have little real power. Power is often viewed as control when it is mostly about influencing others in leading change. The conceptual framework of wounding enhanced this study by offering a model to understand or analyze the stories of the participants. Categorizing the personal stories into the relevant parts of the anatomy of a wound established or highlighted commonality, in part, among the various experiences.

Definition of Terms

Terms relevant to women in higher education leadership and specifically the university or college presidency discussed throughout this study include the following:

- *Bullying*: An act of aggression that is intended to cause harm or distress. It typically repeated over time, and that occurs among individuals whose relationship is characterized by a power imbalance (Kowalski et al., 2018).
- *Cyberbullying*: Sharing the same characteristics as bullying except the medium by which the bullying occurs is the Internet and/or text messages (Kowalski et al., 2018).
- *Glass Ceiling*: Glass ceiling is a metaphor used to describe the largely invisible barrier that women face as they attempt to reach the upper echelons of management (Ryan & Haslam, 2006).
- *Glass Cliff*: Refers to the tendency for women to be more likely than men to be appointed to leadership positions that are risky and precarious (Ryan et al., 2015).
- *Leadership Wound*: A wound is akin to an illness that reflects some of the same

characteristics – loss of control, predictability, and functioning, disassociation, fear, anger, etc. (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 1998).

- *Mobbing*: Psychological terror or mobbing in working life means hostile and unethical communication which is directed in a systematic way by one or a number of persons mainly toward one individual. There are also cases where such mobbing is mutual until one of the participants becomes the underdog. These actions take place often (almost every day) and over a long period (at least for six months) and, because of this frequency and duration, result in considerable psychic, psychosomatic and social misery (Leymann, 1990).
- *The Pipeline Myth*: The persistent idea that there are too few women qualified (e.g., degree-holding) for leadership positions (Johnson, 2017, p. 2).
- *Workplace Bullying*: Instances where an employee is repeatedly and over a period of time exposed to negative acts (i.e. constant abuse, offensive remarks or teasing, ridicule, or social exclusion) from co-workers, supervisors, or subordinates (Kowalski et al., 2018).

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the meaning of the experience, personally and professionally, of breaking through the glass ceiling for women who hold or have held the role of university president. There were two guiding research questions. They both served to understand the essence of the experiences of women who serve or have served in the role of president in higher education. The research questions were 1) how do women perceive the glass ceiling or glass cliff as being relevant to their careers as they aspired to and attained the presidency in higher

education? and 2) How do women university presidents perceive meaning of the price they have paid, personally and professionally, for breaking through the glass ceiling?

This conceptual framework for this study was viewing it through the lens of the wounded leader. In looking through the lens or anatomy of a wound, facets of vulnerability, isolation, fear, and power were central notions as common themes were identified from participant interviews. This study intended to get to the essence of the impact of the presidency on the personal. In the chapter to follow, a review of the literature is included to understand the research central to this topic. In the third chapter, the methodology of this study is presented. The fourth chapter will outline the sample demographics and profile of each president and present the findings. The fifth, and final chapter, concludes with a discussion and presents implications for future research, policy and practice.

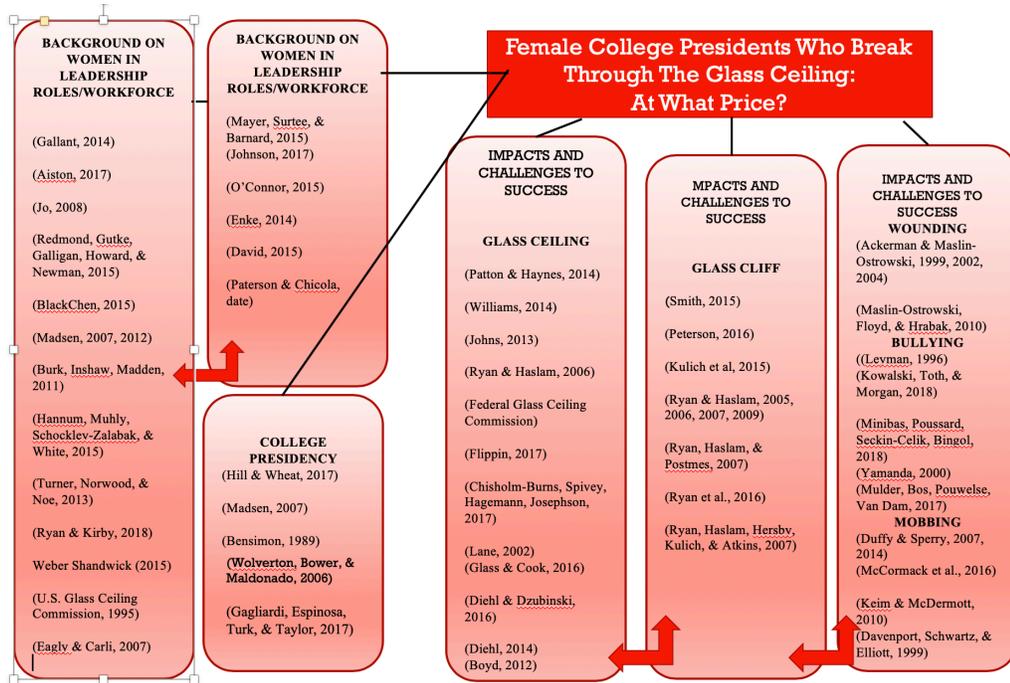
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior research on women college and university presidents can provide a context to understand the lived experiences of these women. The backdrop for this study includes the existing literature on the (a) university presidency, (b) women presidents, and (c) challenges women in executive-level positions face.

The source of information used in this study came from the Florida Atlantic University Libraries, online searches, and references from other scholars and professors. This literature review is divided into three broad sections and sub-sections that provide: (a) an overview of women in leadership roles in the workforce, which delineates the background on women in senior and executive-level roles, as well as organizational gender equality; (b) the university presidency, which outlines the role of the university president, and the demographics of the university president; and (c) challenges to success for women in senior and executive-level roles, which includes the glass ceiling, glass cliff, wounding, bullying, and mobbing.

Figure 3

Literature Map



Overview of Women in Leadership Roles in the Workforce

This section provides a background on women in leadership roles in the workforce. There is significant body of literature that indicates a pay-gap between genders, but more intriguing is the disparity between men and women who hold executive-level positions. Eagly and Carli (2007) use the metaphor labyrinth to describe what confronts women in their professional careers. Passage through the labyrinth is not direct or straightforward, but requires persistence, awareness of self-progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie ahead (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This study attempts to identify the challenges women face as they make their way through this labyrinth to the C-suite in higher education, or the presidential office. The following sub-sections provide background on women in leadership roles. While this study is centered around women university presidents, obtaining an understanding of how women compete in the

executive world, generally, is beneficial to seek a general understanding of barriers women face in the senior and executive-level roles. Additionally, this literature review reflects the disparity between men and women in the professional world generally, not purely academia.

Background on women in senior and executive-level roles

The literature indicates that despite the number of years of progress by women in the workforce, within the C-suite, women remain as rare as hens' teeth (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In May 2019, *Fortune Magazine* published an article that reported that there are more women CEOs in Fortune 500 companies than ever before with 33 in these positions, or 6.6% (Zillman, 2019). While this research is focused on women university presidents, the disproportionate number of women versus men holding CEO positions demonstrates the evidence of the glass ceiling in the private for-profit sector.

The Weber Shandwick 2015 study, "Gender Equality in the Executive Ranks: A Paradox -- The Journey to 2030," identified key factors that contributed to women ascending to C-level positions. The study utilized an online tool to survey 327 senior executives across 55 countries in North America, EMEA (Europe, the Middle East, Africa), APAC (Asia Pacific) and Latin America. Half of the full sample included an exclusive segment of C-level executives, including CEOs. Weber Shandwick (2015) defined C-level executives as "those who work as executives for companies ranging in revenue size from \$250 million (U.S. Dollars) to more than \$10 billion" (p. 4). Whereas most gender equality studies tend to focus on mid-level or senior management positions, the Weber Shandwick (2015) report focused on C-suite executive roles.

Weber Shandwick (2015) identified a range of push and pull factors that support

and hinder women's advancement to the C-suite. Their study identified push factors, which included (a) media, (b) more competitive war for talent, (c) emerging recognition of return on investment (ROI), (d) women want it more, (e) millennials expect no less, and (f) stakeholder pressure. The study did not identify a single event that was likely to encourage gender equality at executive-levels. Instead, the researchers found expected pressure points to develop when the aforementioned six push factors aligned to create new patterns for gender equality. Weber Shandwick (2015) described media as "the powerhouse of push" (p. 7) when it comes to driving gender parity at senior levels. There are gender differences in the perception of the role of media has in encouraging women to ascend to C-level positions. The participants identified the top reasons for the increased public attention to C-suite gender equality. Sixty-one percent of men executives reported more media attention as the reason, while 60% of women executives reported the growing influence of other women executives as the reason. The study revealed that the aspirations of women to attain the executive-level positions were also a driving factor in the push towards gender equity with 76% of women interested in attaining those roles, while 56% of men shared the same interest.

Running counter to the push forces are the pull forces. Pull forces are defined as "internal and external factors that hinder women from pursuing C-level positions" (Weber Shandwick, 2015, p. 17). Pull forces included (a) C-suite focus elsewhere, (b) gender pipeline fatigue, (c) the glass ceiling remains intact, and (d) unequal pay undercuts motivation (Weber Shandwick, 2015). The study participants were asked to share which factors executives value when evaluating a new employer. The men executives reported support for women to advance into leadership positions at 19%, or

number 10 on the list. In contrast to this, women reported the support of women to advance into leadership positions at 43%, or number 5 on the same list. In reviewing the reported pull force of gender pipeline fatigue, the study revealed that “women executives had been sobered by decades spent in the pipeline watching very few women make it to the executive roles” (Weber Shandwick, 2015, p. 17). This resulted in skepticism in their organization’s ability to view women as capable to fill these seats. Of the women surveyed, 68% of women executives believed women’s contributions are undervalued by men, 47% believe their careers would have been more successful had they been men, and 42% agreed with the statement that women need to act like men in order to succeed in business (Weber Shandwick, 2015). The findings in this report suggest that organizations have not done a remarkable job, nor placed a concerted effort, in creating a focus on gender equity by pushing towards cultural shifts.

The Weber Shandwick (2015) study presented the push forces that supported gender equality toward the C-suite, as well as the pull forces that either stalled or counteracted those positive focused efforts. However, there are intentional organizational efforts that can be made to ensure more women fill C-level positions. Weber Shandwick (2015) identified gender-forward pioneers (GFPS) as those organizations that are leading in gender equality by (a) making gender equality a performance review measure, (b) requesting to be evaluated and advised by third parties on their gender equality practices, and (c) create a gender-forward committee.

Organizational Gender Inequality

In the article *How Diversity Can Drive Innovation*, Hewlett et al (2013) presented their research on diversity, which was completed through a nationally representative

survey of 1,800 professionals, 40 case studies, and numerous focus groups and interviews. Hewlett et al. (2013) identified and scrutinized two kinds of diversity: inherent and acquired. Inherent diversity involves traits you are born with, such as gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Hewlett et al., 2013). Acquired diversity involves traits you gain from experience, such as working in another country and gaining an understanding of cultural differences as a result, (Hewlett et al., 2013). Hewlett et al. (2013) referenced to companies whose leaders exhibited at least three inherent and three acquired diversity traits as having two-dimensional diversity (2D). Their study results were astonishing. They correlated diversity in leadership with market outcomes revealing that companies with 2D diversity out-innovate and out-perform those companies without 2D diversity at a staggering rate (Hewlett et al., 2013). Companies with 2D diversity reported a 45% increase in market share and a 70% increase in identification of a new market (Hewlett et al., 2013). Those companies that were not identified as having 2D diversity in leadership reported that women were 20% less likely than straight white men to win endorsement for their ideas (Hewlett et al., 2013). The review of this literature reveals that organizations authentically focused on gender equity and leadership diversity outperform those that do not. This indicator in itself should be the “*push*” for organizations to focus on such initiatives.

The University Presidency

The university president is synonymous with the CEO of a company or organization. In this position, the leader has tremendous responsibility over the organization. This section describes the role of the university president and demographics associated with the position. A much-cited study is *The American College President*

Study: 2017 (Gagliardi et al., 2017), which provided comprehensive information on the position.

The Role of the University President

While the position of the university president has evolved over time, its primary purpose continues to be to serve as the face of the institution. However, to better understand the current position, this study draws from *The American College President Study: 2017*, which is the most comprehensive national survey to date of college and university presidents of accredited, degree-granting, U.S. higher education institutions (Johnson, 2017). The 2017 study surveyed all presidents with a valid email address. Of the 3,615 surveys sent, 1,546 or 42.8% responded (Gagliardi et al., 2017). An area of focus of the study is the duties and responsibilities of the university president. Specifically, the survey collected data and reported on what are the key challenges presidents face, and how they spend their time. With 60.8% of the respondents citing the top challenge as never enough money, the other remaining of the top five, in the order of frequency, were: (a) faculty resistance to change, (b) lack of time to think, (c) problems inherited from the previous leadership, and (d) belief by others you are infinitely accessible (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Additionally, the study detailed how presidents spent their time. The top response reported by 64.9% of the respondents was budget and financial management, and the other top four responses were: (a) fundraising, (b) managing a senior-level team, and (c) governing board relations (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

The Demographics of the University Presidency

I sought to understand the lived experiences of the leaders who have defied the odds and occupy, or have occupied, the role of university president: women university

presidents. In order to seek an understanding of their experiences, it is important to discuss the current demographics of the American university presidency. The *American College President Study: 2017* is the most recent study conducted. The study reported that in 2017, 30.1% of college presidents were women; only up seven percentage points over the past decade (Gagliardi et al., 2017). The demographic profile reported the typical college president was on average a 62-year-old white man (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Further, while only 17% of college presidents are racial minorities, the study reported that 89% of college presidents think it is important for presidents to ensure regular review of policies to eliminate gender bias. As a commitment to diversity and inclusion, 45% of the included institutions assert to have initiatives to attract both female and racial minority faculty (Gagliardi et al., 2017). This gender disparity not only exists in the presidency but also on the boards that select the leader of the institution. Data demonstrated that men outnumbered women on both public and independent governing boards by more than two to one, with only 22% of board chairs being women (Johnson, 2017). In an effort to better understand the challenges women face that aspire to the role, it is important to demonstrate, through the data, the topography of the academy. *The American College President Study: 2017* cited three key takeaways, which included: (a) diversifying the presidency will continue to grow in importance, (b) dollars remain an area of primary focus, and (c) data-informed decision making that prioritizes student success will continue to grow in importance (Gagliardi et al., 2017).

Gagliardi et al. (2017) reported gender differences among respondents focused on personal life, which included: marital status, children, and altering career paths for personal reasons. The results indicated a clear gender disparity among the respondents.

Table 2 represents data reported in the study, and is reflective of the gender differences related to the personal life of the presidents. The data clearly indicated that women presidents were: (a) less likely to have ever been married, (b) more likely to be divorced, (c) less likely to have children, (d) more likely to have altered their career progress to care for someone, and (e) more likely to have altered their career progression for a spouse or partner. A review of the literature suggests that women continue to take on the main responsibility of family life demands.

Table 2*American College President Study: 2017: Personal Background Survey Results^a*

<u>Survey Question</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
<i>Have you ever altered your career progress to care for a dependent, spouse, or parent?</i>		
No	83.7	68.4
Yes, left position	2.6	3.9
Yes, reduced schedule/worked part-time	2.4	8.1
Yes, postponed seeking tenure	0.2	0.2
Yes, postponed job search	8.9	15.0
Yes, Other	2.4	4.4
<i>Have you ever altered your career progression for your spouse or partner's career?</i>		
Yes	16.9	31.3
No	77.5	54.9
Not Applicable	5.7	13.9
<i>Has your spouse or partner altered his or her career progression for your career?</i>		
Yes	67.3	52.4
No	26.8	32.4
Not Applicable	5.8	15.2
<i>Relationship Status</i>		
Never married (member of a religious order)	2.2	2.9
Never Married	1.8	7.1
Married	89.8	74.7
Domestic Partner	.07	2.4
Separated	0.3	0.0
Divorced	4.4	9.9
Widower/Widow	0.9	3.1
<i>Do you have children?</i>		
Yes	88.6	73.7
No	11.4	26.3
<i>If so, are your children under 18?</i>		
Yes	23.6	16.7
No	76.4	83.3

Note. ^a(Gagliardi et al., 2017)

A review of the literature revealed that there exist numerous reasons why women are not represented in the university president position more significantly. There are also additional factors including a belief that there are not numbers of women prepared for those roles. The pipeline myth is the persistent idea that there are too few women

qualified (e.g. degree holding) for leadership positions (Johnson, 2017). The data demonstrated just the opposite, revealing that women are being prepared at a greater rate than men with women earning more than half of all degrees awarded (Johnson, 2017).

Challenges to Success

The literature denotes several challenges women who seek senior-level and executive roles face. While many other challenges were identified, for the purposes of this study, I have chosen to focus on those that are external to the individual. External factors include those that are not explicitly related to the individual's personality, leadership style, effectiveness in the role, approach in dealing with organizational crisis, or the like. Thus, the challenges are not those within the leader's direct control. Instead, my focus for this study is on: (a) the glass ceiling, (b) the glass cliff, (c) wounding, (d) bullying, and (e) mobbing. It is noted that while this study is focused on current and former women university presidents, the challenges identified here do not necessarily just apply to women.

Glass Ceiling

In reviewing the literature regarding the glass ceiling phenomenon, it is essential to understand the history of the concept. The phrase glass ceiling was first used in 1984 in an Adweek profile of Gay Bryant, editor at that time of *Working Woman Magazine* (Boyd, 2008). Later in 1985, the national chairwoman of the National Organization for Women (NOW) used the phrase in an interview with United Press International, to state that without the women's movement, women would have no chance of moving beyond the glass ceiling (Boyd, 2008). The term was popularized in a 1986 *Wall Street Journal* article about challenges women face in the business world.

In 1991, the U.S. Congress found that despite a dramatically growing presence of women in the workforce, women and minorities remained underrepresented in management positions in business and that artificial barriers were inhibiting their advancement (Johns, 2013). As a result, in Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1991, U.S. Congress enacted the Glass Ceiling Act, establishing the Glass Ceiling Commission (Johns, 2013). The United States Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) defined the glass ceiling as “the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements” (p. 4).

The vision and mission of the commission was published in their final report. The vision, as presented, was “A national corporate leadership fully aware that shifting demographics and economic restructuring make diversity at management and decision-making levels a prerequisite for the long-term success of the United States in domestic and global marketplaces” (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 1). The mission as reported, was:

There is established a Glass Ceiling Commission to conduct a study and prepare recommendations concerning – 1) Eliminating artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities; and 2) Increasing the opportunities and development experiences of women and minorities to foster advancement of women and minorities to management and decision-making positions in business. (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 4)

In the final report of the Commission, the message from the chair included,

The “glass ceiling” is a concept that betrays America’s most cherished principles.

It is the unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements. (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 4)

The findings of the report confirmed the persistence of the glass ceiling. The report indicated that in Fortune 500, 1000, and 2000 companies, 97% of senior managers are white and 95-97% are men (U.S. Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). The Commission identified four categories of barriers preventing women from achieving upward mobility into senior and executive positions. These categories included: societal, governmental, internal business, and business structural barriers (Johns, 2013). Johns (2013) stated that these barriers still exist today and academia must play a role in promoting leadership gender diversity. Educational leadership programs most often embrace predominant leadership theories that fail to help students go beyond a narrow structural model and equip them to address issues of social justice, diversity, and gender (Johns 2013). A review of the literature as presented here demonstrates that significantly fewer women hold top positions, particularly in C-level and executive settings. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of those women who have broken through the glass ceiling and attained roles of university presidents. Further, it is expected that this study will reveal the challenges and barriers the presidents faced during their ascension and attainment of such roles. A factor that could provide for greater opportunities for women may be revealed by Johns (2019), which is the notion that leadership theories and programs should revise how they teach so that, relevant to this study, more women are prepared for the top job in academia.

There is considerable literature around the glass ceiling phenomenon. What is

most remarkable is the minimal amount of qualitative research in the area. Jackson and O’Callaghan’s (2009) cataloged this literature and discovered 66 publications concerning the glass ceiling effect, but only 9.1% were grounded in qualitative methods. These qualitative perspectives on the glass ceiling effects remain central to providing a more nuanced understanding of how this phenomenon affects various populations (Patton & Haynes, 2014). This is a central concern to this study; uncovering the understanding or meaning the participants assign to their experiences as women university presidents.

In exploring the literature about the glass ceiling, there is evidence to suggest that organizational change is needed to lessen the presence of such a phenomenon. Damon Williams (2014) stated that while more women and people of color occupy positions of leadership in higher education than ever before, the top of the career ladder remains inaccessible for diverse groups. “The lack of racial and gender diversity at the senior levels of institutions is partially a result of glass ceiling effects, which have yielded a higher education landscape where only 23% of university presidents are women, and only 14% of university presidents are ethically and racially diverse” (Williams, 2014, p. 75). In much of the literature, the ever-present challenge is a lack of appropriately prepared senior leaders ready to take on executive leadership roles.

Glass Cliff

The term glass cliff was coined in 2004 by Michelle Ryan and Alexander Haslam, professors at the University of Exeter. While the concept of the glass ceiling is well used and understood as a barrier faced by women and other minoritized groups, the literature review revealed that the glass cliff is yet another barrier women encounter. The glass cliff refers to the tendency for women to be more likely than men to be appointed to

leadership positions that are risky and precarious (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Ryan and Haslam (2005) conducted a study to investigate the monthly share price of FTSE 100 companies on the London Stock Exchange, both directly and indirectly after the appointment of men or women board members. Ryan and Haslam (2005) reported that in a time of general stock market downturn the appointment of a woman to the board did not lead to a subsequent drop in company performance. The 2005 study determined more noteworthy was that for the months prior to an appointment of a woman, share prices were experiencing poor performance.

The question Ryan and Haslam sought to answer in their research was focused on why women are more likely than men to be placed in risky leadership positions. Ryan and Haslam (2007) suggested that while implicit theories exist, other psychological factors are at work in addition to other processes that are related to a range of social and organizational realities. Glass cliffs arise from a confluence of both social psychological and social structural factors. These factors include those that are deliberate (e.g., reflecting overt sexism or discrimination in the workplace), those that are inadvertent (e.g., arising from beliefs about the distinct competencies of man and women), those that are malign (e.g., a desire to find a scapegoat), as well as those that are benign (e.g., a desire to appoint women to available positions) (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

In a 2007, Ryan and Haslam conducted a qualitative study conducted to uncover participants' explanations for the glass cliff after reading the phenomenon on an online news site. The study revealed that there are clear gender differences in men's and women's attitudes towards the glass cliff and the explanations they generate to explain the phenomenon. According to the study, women were more likely to acknowledge the

existence of the glass cliff as a barrier to women's progress, while men were more likely to question the validity of research into the phenomenon and downplayed the dangers associated with it (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

The depth of studies conducted on the phenomenon suggested that glass cliffs are not a reflection of differences in the qualifications, experience, or the age of men and women (Kulich et al., 2015). Instead, the literature indicates there are organizational patterns for the engagement of such a phenomenon. Ryan and Haslam (2006) termed the Gender-Stress-Disidentification Model (see Figure 1), which is a model reflecting the appointment of women to glass cliff positions, and the damage that these positions cause to these women. Further, there was a link between the barriers that women face resulting from the glass cliff and the decision to abandon conventional careers (Ryan & Haslam, 2006). In exploring the literature, it is evident that often women voluntarily chose to opt-out of their professions due to the stresses of the glass cliff, among others (Ryan & Haslam, 2006).

Wounding

The review of the literature on challenges leaders face includes the wounding experience. The wounding experience, unlike the glass ceiling or glass cliff, is not one shared only by women and minoritized populations. It is, instead, one shared by all leaders at one point or another in their career. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) offer this overview of the wounding experience, "the meaning of wounding is imbedded in the realms of mythology and medicine. Inevitably, through leadership, wounding points towards issues in the personal realm of vulnerability, isolation, fear, and power" (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. 17).

In the article “The Wounded Leader and Emotional Learning in the Schoolhouse” (2004), Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski shared in their findings of a phenomenological study of 65 school leaders. The review of this literature revealed that while the previously listed anatomy of a wound (i.e., vulnerability, isolation, fear, and power) might appear to be damaging; however, that is not always the case. The same characteristics of wounding also offer opportunities for personal growth. A leader may avert feelings associated with vulnerability. Still, the leader may discover their true self by opening the wound, where the vulnerability may be seen as a strength instead of a weakness (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004).

Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski (2002, 2004) provided insight into the wounding process as one that gave leaders the opportunity for personal and professional growth. “Leadership selves are unmade and remade through crisis; however, we have come to believe that there are no purely individual solutions to leadership wounding. There are strategies, better and worse ways, of managing leadership lives.” (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004. p. 324). Media may play a role in the wounding of a leader, as well. Today, reports are immediate. The smallest of rumors can escalate into campaigns for good or ill within minutes via the Internet, blogs, electronic news, and Twitter (Maslin-Ostrowski et al., 2010).

Maslin-Ostrwoski et al. (2010) conducted a qualitative study to describe a wounding experience from the perspective of community college presidents relative to the new media. New media is defined as “encompassing; the Internet, the social media (e.g., blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, instant messaging), newspapers that report online, as well as traditional and broadcast outlets” (Maslin-Ostrowski et al., 2004, p. 30).

The study cited identifying that at times a leader's integrity and identity may be questioned and played out in this new media. Additionally, the study suggests that this new media may be a catalyst for administrative departures today.

In a March 2010 *New Directions for Community Colleges* article, "Beyond the Headlines: Wounding and the Community College Presidency", recommendations were provided to survive leadership challenges such as wounding. The recommendations provided included; leader as a learner, power for good, emotional maturity, and stay connected (Floyd, Maslin-Ostrowski, and Hrabak, 2010). These recommendations provide steps for a leader to manage a leadership crisis.

In the August 2019 *Insider Higher Education* online article, "Tweeting on the Front Lines: Think Managing a University's Social Media Account is Easy, Think Again," McKenzie reported that there is a significant need to manage a university's social media. McKenzie (2019) explained that it is of utmost importance for universities to provide timely and accurate information, which includes crisis. Social media managers, often part of a larger university communications unit, are working in a young and still evolving field. Faceless, nameless and often working behind the scenes, how they do the job can nonetheless "make or break" an institution's reputation (McKenzie, 2019). The same holds true about the university administrator or president's reputation.

Building upon Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2002, 2004) research on the wounded leader, Espinal conducted a study titled "The Wounded Leader: A qualitative study on how 6 superintendents describe and understand a wounding experience (Espinal, 2021). The purpose of Espinal's study was "to describe and understand how six superintendents discussed a leadership crisis or wounding experiences; what it meant to

them, and how, if at all, they believe their wounding experience influenced them professionally and personally. I also hoped to understand and describe how these superintendents coped with and responded to wounds from their practice (p. 4).

In addition to the wounding elements found in Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's research on wounding, Espinal (2021) found that anger was experienced by five of the six participants when describing how they perceived their leadership wounding experiences.

The present study will utilize wounding as a conceptual framework. More specifically, the anatomy of a wound, which includes vulnerability, isolation, fear, and power. These are, according to Ackermann and Ostrowski (2002), inevitable by-products and the foundation for understanding a wound. It is noted that this proposed study may reveal other facets of the anatomy of a wound. The literature surrounding vulnerability, isolation, fear, and power was reviewed.

Vulnerability

In Raymond Callahan's (1962) *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*, he discussed vulnerability and public education. According to Callahan (1962), as early as the 1900s, the professional survival of school superintendents was dependent on their ability to appease their most influential critics. This phenomenon increased the vulnerability of leaders to public opinion and pressure. Public opinion became even more powerful as media, such as newspapers, reached a larger audience. Since the 1900s, the influence of the media has increased at a significant rate with the introduction of new media (e.g., social media, texting, online news, and Internet). Instant access to newsfeed only heightens the vulnerability Callahan (1962) wrote took place at the hands of the media more than one-hundred years ago.

Academic leaders are vulnerable to expressions or votes of no confidence. These votes do not often result in the leader being removed from office, but they do have meaning. In a study published by Frantz and Lawson (2017), they looked at votes of no confidence in academia. Frantz and Lawson (2017) attributed the numbers of votes to: “The emergence of a stronger, more corporate managerial control of decision-making in many institutions can set the stage for conflict. That tension may lead faculty to look more critically at institutional leadership” (p. 67). This study identified 349 expressions of no confidence over fifteen years in all Carnegie public and private institutions. Table 3 depicts the objects of expression by position and gender. Over 64 percent of the expressions were directed to the institution’s president. Table 4 illustrates the reasons for the expressions. The two primary reasons for the expressions were the leaders’ (a) failure to adapt, and (b) poor interpersonal skills (Frantz & Lawson, 2017).

Table 3

Objects of Expression by Position and Gender^a

<u>Position</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Male/Female</u>	<u>M/F Percentage</u>
President	224	64.2	164 / 60	73.2 / 26.8
Provost	34	9.7	26 / 8	76.5 / 23.5
Dean	10	2.9	6 / 4	60 / 40
VP Finance	7	2.0	5 / 2	71.4 / 28.6
System President	27	7.7	25 / 2	92.6 / 7.4
Governing Board	23	6.6	NA	
Board Member(s)	9	2.6	8 / 1	89 / 11
Other*	15	4.3	9 / 3	75 / 25
M/F Public			180 / 61	74.7 / 25.3
M/F Private			63 / 19	77.5 / 22.5
Totals	349	100%	243 / 80	75.2 / 24.8

Note. Duplicated count; numbers include ten expressions of confidence. At the campus

level, the title “president” includes campus level chancellors. ^aFrantz & Lawson (2017, p. 65)

Table 4*Reasons for the Expressions^a*

Reasons	No./Percentage
Difficulty Adapting (13)	241 / 33.8
Poor Interpersonal Skills (7)	173 / 24.3
Inability to Lead (14)	133 / 18.7
Failure to Meet Objectives (4)	74 / 10.4
Ethics (8)	52 / 7.3
Board Shortcomings (11)#	40 / 5.6
Total	713 / 100

Note. Includes duplicated counts due to multiple expressions against the same person.

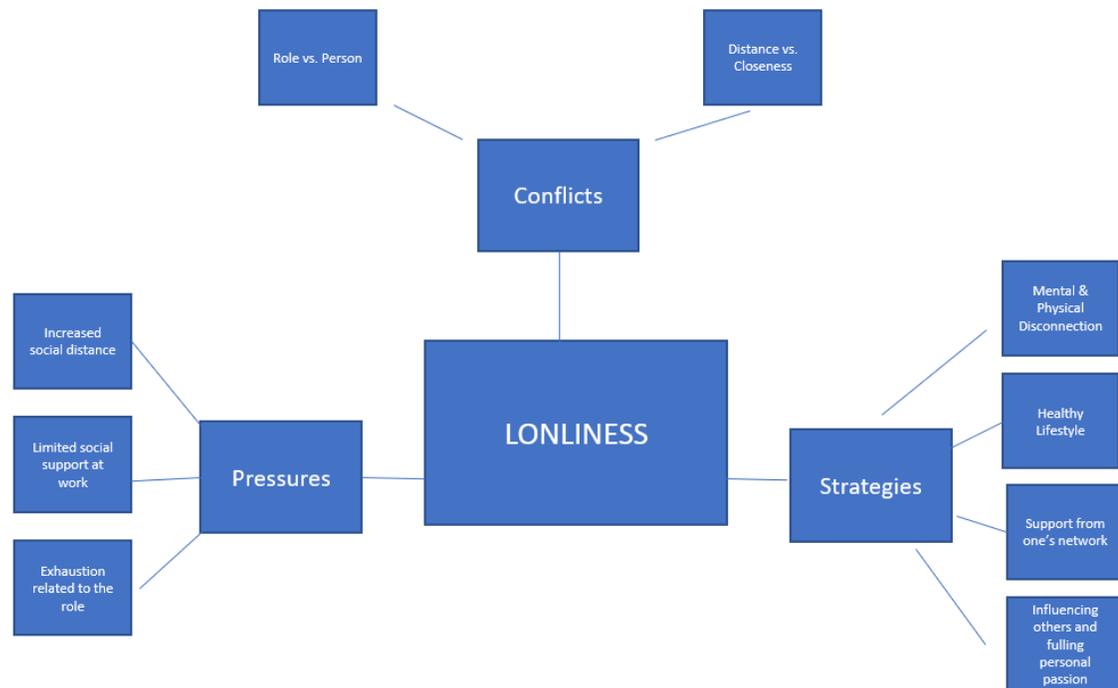
Numbers in () show each groups number of subcategories in Appendix A of full report; # applies only to expressions against governance boards or individual members. ^a(Frantz & Lawson, 2017, p. 67)

Isolation

Zumaeta (2019) asserted that very little research has been conducted exploring how leaders examine their role, especially in senior-level positions. In a study, Zumaeta (2019) examined socioemotional costs of being a high-ranking leader in a corporate environment. The qualitative study conducted in-depth interviews with 15 C-suite executives. The study revealed that loneliness is a professional hazard. Three themes emerged from this study around the global theme of loneliness: (a) pressures that lead to the feeling of loneliness, (b) conflicts related to the feeling of loneliness, and (c) strategies to cope with loneliness (Zumaeta, 2019). Further, Zumaeta (2019) identified three key pressures including: (a) social distancing, (b) lack of social support, and (c) exhaustion. Figure 5 summarizes the findings.

Figure 4

Findings on Study Regarding Executives and Loneliness



Note. Adapted from Zumaeta (2019, p. 117).

Zumaeta (2019) described social distancing as the pervasive barrier between leaders and subordinates. One of the participants in Zumaeta’s (2019) study stated:

It’s quite clear to me what I have to do in my role: I have to be cordial, explicit about the objectives. That doesn’t mean that in some specific moments I cannot open the window and say that I have two kids or what I did last weekend. But these moments are very limited and even calculated. (p. 117)

Zumaeta (2019) indicated that participants reported non-supportive relationships at work with subordinates and superiors as transactional, which was not only demoralizing but isolating. Lastly, the role of the executive was extremely demanding, leaving little energy left to invest in their personal lives (Zumaeta, 2019).

Fear

The fear of failure seems one that is plausible among executives. However, is the fear of success equally as plausible? In 1963, Abraham Zaelznik published *The Human Dilemmas of Leadership: Fear of Success and Fear of Failure Can Lead to an Executives Downfall*. Zaelznik (1963) asserted that the fear of failure can be matched with the fear of success. Zaelznik (1963) coined this the *Macbeth Complex* as he connected it to William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. According to Zaelznik (1963),

Macbeth, may experience in fantasy the idea that one achieves position only through displacing someone else. Success, therefore, brings with it feelings of guilt and the urge to undo or to reverse the behavior that led to the success. If such concerns are strong enough — and they exist in all of us to some degree — then we may see implemented the fear of success. (p. 53)

Two inner conflicts of an executive were examined, which included status anxiety and competition anxiety. An executive achieves success yet realizes there are inevitable changes within him or herself and in relationships with professional associates leading to status anxiety (Zaelznik, 1963). Competition anxiety relates specifically to a fear both success and failure (Zaelznik, 1963). Zaelznik (1963) offered that an executive must come to terms with being responsible for their own development. Assuming that responsibility puts the executive on the road to professional development and learning.

Power

The concept of power can be viewed from multiple perspectives. Power might be assumed as being part of an executive role. Executives attain a certain level of power based on their position. Literature revealed is the connection between power and the other

facets of a wound described here. Power is associated with fear, vulnerability, and loneliness.

In an article, “*Not So Lonely at the Top: The Relationship Between Power and Loneliness*,” the connection between both high-power and low-power roles were presented through the examination of eight different studies (Waytz et al., 2015). The studies examined showcased a significant relationship between power and the experience of loneliness. Why the connection? Waytz et al. (2015) indicated that with power comes an increased level of independence and personal control, which lead to a more self-focused individual. In the research cited by Waytz et al. (2015), self-focus lead to increased levels of dehumanization or a less compassionate individual. Conversely, other studies cited by Waytz et al. (2015), suggested that with high power positions comes increased access to social opportunities, which could enhance feelings of connection and security.

Workplace Bullying

Most have heard the expression schoolyard bully, but is this limited to children on the playground? A 2021 national survey of workers in the U.S. conducted by the Workplace Bullying Institute found that 66% of Americans are aware of workplace bullying while 73% of employed Americans are aware (Namie, 2021)). Furthermore, the study reported that 67 % of perpetrators are men and 33 % of perpetrators are women (Namie, 2021). Workplace demands, including the challenges of an increased and varied workforce, have led to an increased number of workplace bullying complaints (Name, 2021).

Bullying at work involves repeated negative actions and practices that are directed

at one or more workers. The behaviors are unwelcoming to the target and undertaken in circumstances where the target has difficulty in defending themselves. The behaviors may be carried out as a deliberate act or unconsciously. These behaviors cause humiliation, offence and distress to the target. The outcomes of the bullying behaviors have been shown to cause clinically significant distress and impairment in social, occupational, and other areas of functioning (Tehrani, 2012)

According to Tehrani (2012), workplace bullying involves a range of behaviors that can be violent or non-violent. Workplace bullying involves four main features: (a) the behaviors need to be perceived as negative and unwelcome, (b) they have to be persistent and long-term, (c) they need to involve an imbalance in power, and (d) they do not have to be intentional to cause bullying to have taken place (Tehrani, 2012, pp. 2-6).

While definitions involved negative behaviors, what specific actions constitute workplace bullying? In a March 2000 article, *The Phenomenon of "Workplace Bullying" and the Need for Status-Blind Hostile Work Environment Protection*, David Yamanda presented what overt and covert behaviors makes up workplace bullying:

aggressive eye contact, either by glaring or meaningful glances; giving the silent treatment; intimidating physical gestures, including finger pointing and slamming or throwing objects; yelling, screaming, and/or cursing at the target; angry outbursts or temper tantrums; nasty, rude, and hostile behavior toward the target; accusations of wrongdoing; insulting or belittling the target, often in front of other workers; excessive or harsh criticism of the target's work performance; spreading false rumors about the target; breaching the target's confidentiality; making unreasonable work demands of the target; withholding needed information; taking

credit for the target's work. (p. 50)

The definitions found in the literature described what workplace bullying; however, what are the strategies a perpetrator employs? Einarsen (1999) delineated five major categories that constitute workplace bullying strategies: (a) change the work tasks of a worker in some negative way or making the tasks difficult to perform, (b) social isolation by noncommunicating or exclusion, (c) personal attacks or ridiculing insulting remarks, (d) verbal threats through criticism or public humiliation, and (e) spreading rumors. While these descriptors are often included in definitions, Einarsen offers that these five categories are the strategies used and include varied behaviors in each.

A review of the literature revealed that little attention has been placed on gender differences in workplace bullying. Evidence suggests, however, that this is not a gender-neutral phenomenon. Women tend to be bullied about their personal values related to emotional-relational factors, whereas men tend to be bullied about their work performance, and experience more physical abuse than women (McCormack et al., 2018). Women supervisors and middle managers are more likely to be bullied by their men counterparts whereas women senior managers experience more bullying from supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates (McCormack et al., 2018). These experiences have an adverse effect on all aspects of the victim's life in and out of the workplace.

Cyberbullying

Technology has added another dimension to workplace bullying. While most of the literature is focused on face-to-face (FTF) bullying, the work environment has changed leading to initial examinations into a new workplace phenomenon: cyberbullying. Like FTF bullying, cyberbullying involves the same characteristics expect

the medium by which the bullying occurs is the Internet and/or text messages (Kowalski et al., 2018). Kowalski et al. (2018) presented that cyberbullying has a significant difference from traditional workplace FTF bullying. Cyberbullying can happen at any time and unlike bullying the perpetrators are often unknown to the victim and provides power to the perpetrator (Kowalski et al., 2018).

Kowalski et al. (2018) reported that while prevalence of FTF bullying in adulthood is low, it appears that traditional bullying that does occur in adulthood happens in the workplace. Table 5 presents the results of a study with results indicating that 30% of respondents experienced FTF bullying at least once and of those 53% experienced this at work, 72.7% of the respondents who were cyberbullied indicated that the perpetrators were colleagues or co-workers (Kowalski et al., 2018).

Table 5

Bullying Victimization and Timing^a

Time Period	Traditional Bullying		Cyberbullying	
	How Recent	When Did Majority Occur	How Recent	When Did Majority Occur
Elementary	10.6 (389)	19.8 (728)	0.8 (29)	1.0 (37)
Middle	17.0 (623)	27.6 (1014)	6.2 (226)	8.5 (311)
High School	22.1 (809)	20.00 (733)	13.1 (480)	16.1 (591)
College	10.6 (390)	4.7 (174)	13.1 (487)	12.0 (440)
Adulthood	19.4 (710)	7.5 (277)	24.2 (889)	20.1 (739)
No experience	20.3 (746)	20.3 (747)	42.4 (1556)	42.3 (1550)

Note. Numbers reported reflect percentages, with *n*'s in parentheses. ^a(Kowalski et al., 2018, p. 69)

The literature shows that the effects of workplace bullying are significant. Clinicians experienced in working with victims of terrorist bombings, major rail crashes, armed raids, rape, trafficking, body recovery, armed conflict and other major traumas, reported to find that victims of bullying were suffering very similar symptoms, and in the most extreme cases, the symptoms had a more profound impact on their psychological

and physical health and well-being (Tehrani, 2012).

Mobbing

A review of the literature makes a clear distinction between workplace mobbing and workplace bullying. They are not, as the literature shows, one in the same. In fact, workplace mobbing is presented as being much more severe than bullying. Mobbing involves an organizational element. According to Duffy and Sperry (2014), “key organizational members become involved in mobbing through overt or covert actions against a target, or through the failure to act to protect organizational members from abuse” (p. 8). This is the fundamental difference between mobbing and bullying. The organizational element makes mobbing much more damaging to the individual being mobbed than bullying. Davenport et al. (1999) describe workplace mobbing as:

A malicious attempt to force a person out of the workplace through unjustified accusations, humiliation, general harassment, emotional abuse, and/or terror. It is a “ganging up” by the leader(s), organization, superior, co-worker, or subordinate – who rallies others into systematic and frequent “mob-like” behavior.... The result is always injury – physical or mental distress or illness and social misery and, most often, expulsion from the workplace. (p. 40)

According to Davenport et al. (1999), the first major researcher to study workplace mobbing, who ran a clinic and published results was Heinz Leyman. Leyman described workplace mobbing similar to Davenport but emphasized the psychological trauma and the distinction of the length of time a victim is exposed to such attacks. In the 1990 article, *Mobbing and Psychological Terror at Workplace*, Leyman described mobbing as:

Psychical terror or mobbing in working life means hostile and unethical communication which is directed in a systematic way by one or a number of persons mainly toward one individual. There are also cases where such mobbing is mutual until one of the participants becomes the underdog. These actions take place often (almost every day) and over a long period (at least for six months) and, because of this frequency and duration, result in considerable psychic, psychosomatic and social misery. This definition eliminates temporary conflicts and focuses on the transition zone where the psychosocial situation starts to result in psychiatric and/or psychosomatic pathological states. (p. 120)

Davenport et al. (1999) cited that Leyman developed a typology of mobbing comprised of four main categories, which included: (a) impact on self-expression and the way we communicate, (b) attacks on one's social relationships, (c) attacks on your reputation, and (d) attacks on the quality of one's professional and life situation. The literature tells us that mobbing is generally triggered by some difference found in the victim such as: appearance, education, political views, culture, significantly higher work ethic, among other differences. A significant point is that if the difference is not a legally protected one then the victim has no legal protection.

Mobbing is a systematic process that intensifies over time. Leymann presents the five phases of a mobbing process as depicted in Figure 6. The fifth and final phase ends in expulsion from the workplace.

Figure 5

The Five Phases in the Mobbing Process



Note. Adapted from Davenport et al. (1999).

Davenport et al., (1999) described each of the phases: Phase 1 is characterized by a conflict that is not yet mobbing but can develop into such; Phase 2 is characterized by aggressive acts and psychological assaults; Phase 3 involves management playing a part by generally misjudging the situation if not already participants in the mobbing and begin isolation and expulsion process instead of support; Phase 4 brands victims as difficult or mentally ill; and Phase 5 results in expulsion (Davenport et al., 1999). The effects of mobbing do not subside post-expulsion.

The literature showcased that mobbing has debilitating effects on its victims. Duffy and Sperry (2014) identified the impact of being mobbed on one's health and well-being including a physical and psychological effect. While each impact has devastating effects on an individual, the psychological effects are noteworthy, in particular the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Duffy and Sperry (2007) cited that

while mobbing is called different names in different countries, the term psychological terrorism is also used to describe workplace mobbing. Like political terrorism, Duffy and Sperry (2014) cited, the victim knows that another wave of terror will come but when and to what end is unknown.

Eventually, the impacts on one's physical and psychological well-being impact their professional lives negatively as well. Unlike bullying, mobbing is a system attack on an individual which involves the organization. Mobbing, as Duffy and Sperry (2007) describe the effects of mobbing on one's physical and psychological well-being as having devastating effects which are akin to PTSD, among others. Unfortunately, the literature shows that mobbing often leads to the victim leaving after they realize they have little recourse.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature to provide a background on women in executive roles, the university presidency and the impacts and challenges women face as they aspire to reach top seat positions, such as C-suite executives or university presidents. The 2017 American College President Study provided a treasure-trove of data that among other things highlighted the gender disparity that exists within the role of university president. Factors such as the glass ceiling and glass cliff reviewed in this chapter provide context for what women face during ascension and attainment of the presidency. Additionally, workplace hazards such as bullying and mobbing that have a significant impact on their lives both in and out of the workplace.

The literature on wounding provides information on leadership wounding experienced at one point or another by all leaders. The anatomy of a leadership wound

was utilized as the conceptual framework for this study. Facets of a wound such as vulnerability, fear, power, and isolation were reviewed. The literature demonstrates that all leaders are susceptible to wounding and experience these facets in different ways.

This study uncovered the stories of the women presidents who participated in this study through qualitative research and discovered the essence of the lived experiences. Very little qualitative research exists delving into the experiences of executives from their point of view (Zumaeta, 2019). While quantitative studies have been conducted on the glass ceiling, only 9.1% of research on the subject is grounded in qualitative methods (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009) This lack of qualitative research demonstrates the need for such discovery.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology utilized for this study, which includes a discussion of the following areas: research design, sampling plan, data collection, data analysis, limitations and delimitations, trustworthiness, the role of the researcher, and concludes with a summary. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of the lived experiences of women who have served in the role of university president. This study sought to understand the experiences of current and former women university presidents who have broken through or tried to break through the glass ceiling and/or have experienced the glass cliff. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How do women perceive the impact of the glass ceiling and/or the glass cliff on negotiating the role of university president from ascension to attainment?
2. How do women university presidents perceive the meaning of the price they have paid, personally and professionally, for breaking through the glass ceiling?

Research Design

This study of women university presidents, and their lived experiences, was best served by a qualitative approach. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is conducted when the researcher wants to empower individuals, to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in the study. This method best fit the intent of this study—

to hear directly from those who have lived the experience of attaining success by breaking through the glass ceiling and/or experiencing the glass cliff. Van Manen (1979) defined qualitative research as:

... an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. (p. 520)

This study utilized a phenomenological design. According to Van Manen (1990), the main purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence - a “grasp of the very nature of the thing” (Van Manen, 1990). In this particular study design, the essence of one’s lived experience was the goal of research. Common themes emerged among the women presidents and were revealed in the data to understand the meaning of those shared experiences. Moustakas (1994) stated that phenomena are the building blocks of human sciences and the basis for all knowledge. This study aimed to uncover the personal stories of the current and former women university presidents. Van Manen (2017) described phenomenological research in a way that resonates with this goal:

Phenomenology, if practiced well, enthralls us with insights into the enigma of life as we experience it—the world as it gives and reveals itself to the wondering gaze— thus asking us to be forever attentive to the fascinating varieties and subtleties of primal lived experience and consciousness in all its remarkable complexities, fathomless depths, rich details, startling disturbances, and luring charms. (p. 778).

The individuals included in the study were those who experienced the phenomenon. The focus of this study was on women who have, or are presently serving, as university presidents, and the meaning they assigned to those lived experiences, specifically to their understanding of the price of such success. It is for this reason, that a phenomenological approach was appropriate.

The type of phenomenological study used was transcendental. Transcendental phenomenology is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this type of study, the researcher sets aside their experiences in order to take a fresh perspective at the phenomenon.

Sampling Plan

Site

This study focused on women university presidents across the United States. There was no specific criteria related to geographic location within the U.S., or institutional type used to determine a study site. The one criterion that was used, related to the site, was that participants must be or have been employed at a degree-granting, accredited university or college in the United States.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

This study utilized purposeful sampling to obtain a sample size of seven participants. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 96). Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that in phenomenological studies there is a much narrower range of

sampling strategies and suggest that criterion sampling is best suited. A criterion sampling strategy seeks cases that meet some criterion useful for quality assurance (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, Moustakas (1994) described the basis for which participants are selected in a phenomenological study as those who have experienced the phenomenon, are intensely interested in understanding its nature and meanings, and willing to participate in lengthy interviews. The phenomenon of holding the role of university president at some point in their career directed how the women were selected to be participants in this study. The purpose of the criterion sampling strategy is to identify cases that meet a set criterion for the phenomenological study. The criteria for participation included (a) self-identified women, and (b) women who have formerly or currently served in the role of university president in an accredited, degree-granting institution in the U.S.

Additionally, this study relied on a snowball sampling strategy. Presidents were identified nationally, and potential participants were identified by referral from individuals who knew others who have experienced the phenomenon being studied. It should be noted that, in qualitative research, samples tend to be purposeful and can evolve over time during fieldwork. Prospective participants in this study were identified from an available list of current and former women university and college presidents. These lists were available from simple Internet searches or higher education organizations that maintain such data. One such resource was the American Council of Education (ACE) who conducted and presented *The American College President Study: 2017* referenced in Chapter 2.

Women presidents were recruited through direct emails to prospective

participants who met the aforementioned criteria. Emails were followed by personal calls or emails. After the initial contact with a potential participant, in all cases but one, the scheduling and sharing of relevant documents including the consent form was with the participant's administrative assistant. Seven participants were selected for this study.

Individuals selected included women who are serving or have served in the role of president in higher education. Pseudonyms were used to keep the confidentiality of the presidents. The pseudonym names were selected by the researcher.

Data Collection

A thorough data collection strategy was paramount to the success of this study. Semi-structured interviews were the sole form of data collection. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described interviews as an oral form of the written survey (p. 109). This study focused on obtaining the personal stories of the presidents through one-on-one interviews to yield rich data. Interviews are a common data collection method of qualitative research. As Patton (2015) explained:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe... We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (p. 426)

An interview protocol was developed which included: an introduction, interview

questions, closing remarks and notes including interviewee, date, time and place of interview (see Appendix A). A crosswalk table of this interview questions and the applicable interview questions can be found in Appendix B. Additionally, the participants were asked to sign a consent form. The introduction included a description of the study including the purpose. One-on-one interviews were conducted over Zoom, a cloud-based videophone software tool, and audio recorded via Zoom as well as on a secondary recording device. The interviews were scheduled for a minimum of sixty minutes in length for a total of 7.25 hours. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of the presidents.

After the interviews were conducted, it was decided to contact the presidents to obtain racial and ethnicity information. Although race and ethnicity were not criteria for participation, that information assisted in demonstrating the diversity of the participants. Each president was contacted via email and asked how they self-identified with regards to race/ethnicity. All but one responded. This information is included in Table 6.

Data Analysis

The purpose and outcome of data analysis is to reveal to others through fresh insights what the researcher observed and discovered about the human condition (Saldaña, 2011). Coding is a method of discovery. Codes function as a way of patterning, classifying, and later rearranging each datum into emergent categories for further analysis (Saldaña, 2011). The next step in the analysis process after the coding process was to organize the data by themes. Themes are extended phrases or sentences that summarize the manifest (apparent) and latent (underlying) meanings of data (Saldaña, 2011). The findings were reported in a composite description that describes the “essence” of the

phenomenon, called the essential invariant structure (or essence) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This description speaks to the common experiences of the participants.

Once the interviews were concluded, the next step was to prepare the data for analysis. This included transcribing the interviews verbatim. A third-party was used to transcribe the interviews. The third party was not provided participant names or the pseudonyms but instead the interviews were coded Participant 1-7 or P1-P7. The transcribed interviews were used to obtain an understanding of the participants' experiences and how those experiences answered the research questions. The goal was to use the data to discover collective or common themes. Those themes offer insight into the personal stories that provide meaning or understanding on the price of success. Audio recordings and the transcribed interviews were used to reconnect with the data prior to analysis. Each participant's audio recording was listened to at least once after the interview concluded and again before starting the coding process. Additionally, each transcribed interview was read at least twice prior to coding.

This researcher initially intended on using MAXQDA (2021) software for the coding process. The software was prepared by importing the transcribed interviews. It was then decided, for this researcher, that manually coding the data was a better choice. It allowed a sole focus on the data versus an additional focus on the mechanics of a software application. Additionally, this study's sample size of seven made manual coding feasible. For larger sample sizes, MAXQDA (2021) and other applicable software packages would be more practical to the process. Instead, excel was utilized to manage the codes discovered through a manual pen and paper process.

Three coding cycles were completed in the data analysis process. During the

coding cycles, the research questions and conceptual framework guided the process. In the first cycle, *invivo* coding was used. *Invivo* coding uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data records as codes (Saldaña, 2021). The first cycle resulted in an expansive code list. In the second cycle of coding, descriptive coding was used. Descriptive coding assigns labels to data to summarize a word or short phrase – most often a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data (Saldaña, 2021). First and second cycle codes were combined to create a significantly expansive code list. The third cycle of coding employed pattern coding. Pattern coding assigns a category label (“meta code”) that identifies similarly coded data, organizes the corpus into sets, themes, or constructs and attributes meaning to that organization (Saldaña, 2021). This process culminated in identifying findings to answer the study's research questions.

It was important for this researcher to maintain objectivity through this process. As stated by Creswell (2014), “reflexivity means that that researcher reflects about how their biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status, share their interpretations formed during the study” (p. 247). In order to remain objective, a method of bracketing was used. Researchers set aside their experiences to take a fresh perspective towards the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental or psychological phenomenology is focused less on the interpretation of the researchers and more on the experiences as described by the participants. Transcendental means, “in which everything is fresh, as if for the first time” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). It is critical that the researcher is mindful of the need to remain objective. According to Van Manen (2014), bracketing can be difficult to implement because interpretations of the data incorporate assumptions

that the researcher brings to the table. While difficult, it was necessary so that the findings of this study are credible.

Trustworthiness

Member Checking

Once the interviews were concluded, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. The presidents were provided copies of the transcripts so each could review for accuracy. Further, qualitative credibility is critical to the research and was accomplished through a process of member checking. Member checking is used to determine the accuracy of qualitative findings (Creswell, 2014). One participant responded after receiving the transcribed interview. No changes were made.

Analytic Memos

The researcher kept analytical memos during the data collection process of interviewing the presidents, when reviewing the transcriptions, and during coding. An analytic memo is a “think piece” of reflexive freewriting, a narrative that sets in your words your interpretations of the data (Saldana, 2011). These memos were helpful in providing additional data beyond the transcripts that included the emotional responses the participants had among other reactions to the interview questions and reflection on their experiences beyond the words of the transcripts.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

This study could be perceived as limited in two ways. First, the sample size was relatively small with seven participants yet is consistent with phenomenology. Limiting the number of participants assisted in obtaining in-depth data from each interviewee. This

provided an opportunity to delve deep into each participant's individual story. Second, one data collection strategy was used. Semi-structured interviews were used, as is customary with a phenomenological approach. Observations or documents were not included in the strategy.

Delimitations

There are five delimitations of this study. First, the women participants were selected based on self-identified gender. Second, race and ethnicity were not a selection criterion for participation in the study. Third, the participants in this study were not selected from a particular age demographic;. Fourth, institutions of the participants were an accredited degree granting college or university. The study was not focused on a particular classification of institution such as doctoral-granting, community college, or liberal arts. Lastly, participants were delimited to women who have held the role of president at an institution of higher learning within the United States

Role of the Researcher

It is important to position myself as the researcher in this study. I had to recognize and disclose any personal assumptions, biases, or experiences that may shape this study. While I have not served in the role of university president, there is an acknowledgement that as a women executive leader in higher education, there are experiences that may have been relevant to the topic. With over 30 years in higher education administration, I had to recognize my own personal experiences that could have shaped or influenced this study. While currently serving as a vice president, the ascension to this role was many years and subjected to many of the challenges presented in the literature review. I have personally witnessed men selected or appointed into senior and executive-level roles that

have had relatively little higher education experience and at salaries considerable higher than women. This practice continues today. I have witnessed bullying and mobbing tactics that have resulted in termination or resignation from the organization.

Additionally, my professional experiences, coupled with the effect on my personal work-life balance, have drawn me into this area of study. My experiences with gender bias, work-life balance, gender inequity have prompted my interest in hearing the stories from others to determine if a common-thread binds them or us. I believe that the women executive experience is different from the men experience. While I do not know nor will I attempt to know in this study what the men experience is, I submit that the research presented in the literature review describes the experience as being different. It was critical that I did not allow my assumptions or beliefs to affect or shape the data. I did not want to assume that my truth is the truth of others. Instead, I sought to obtain a genuine understanding of each of the participant's experiences and how they answered my research questions.

My experiences are bracketed. Prior beliefs about a phenomenon of interest are temporarily put aside, or bracketed, so as not to interfere with seeing or intuiting the elements or structure of the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This allowed me to approach the data without skewing the results based on my preconceived notions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the research methodology that was used for this qualitative phenomenological study. Because this study sought to understand women university presidents and their perceptions on the price paid for their success, a qualitative phenomenological study was best suited. The chapter described the rationale for using a

qualitative approach, the sampling plan, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and role of the researcher. In the next chapter, profiles of the presidents and the study findings will be presented.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPANT PROFILES AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present both the participant profiles and findings. The participant profiles are presented first in order to provide an introduction to the seven presidents in this study. The profiles provide context for the findings, which are presented later in this chapter.

Participant Profiles

All participants in this study were either currently serving as university presidents (5 participants) at the time of the study or previously served in the role (2 participants). To protect the confidentiality of the women, pseudonyms were assigned. All presidents' careers were grounded in higher education with one exception. For a short time, Olivia left higher education to assume an appointment elsewhere and then returned to education at the conclusion of that assignment. Four participants self-identified as White, one as Hispanic/Latina, one as Black, and one did not disclose. Four of the seven presidents experienced being the first woman in roles served during their academic professional career. Additional professional and personal demographic data is provided in Table 6.

Table 6*Participant Demographics*

Participant Name	Current/Former College/University President	Public/Private College/University	Location	Career Profile	Current Relationship Status	Children	First Women Experience	Race/Ethnicity
Olivia	Former	Public Land Grant University	South	Higher Education w/1 appt outside	Married/Husband	No	Yes	Hispanic/Latina
Sophia	Former	Public Research University	North	All Higher Education	Married/Husband	Yes		White
Eleanor	Current	Public University	South	All Higher Education	Married/Husband	Yes	Yes	Did Not Disclose
69 Victoria	Current	Public University	South	All Higher Education	Divorced	Yes	Yes	White
Lucy	Current	Public University	South	All Higher Education	Married/Husband	No	Yes	White
Claire	Current	Public Land Grant University	Midwest	All Higher Education	Married/Husband	Yes		White
Alice	Current	Private Liberal Arts College	Midwest	All Higher Education	Married/Husband	No		Black

Alice

Alice is a current president of a private liberal arts college in the Midwest. She obtained the role through a traditional search process. Alice self identifies as Black, is married, and has no children. She made a point of expressing that due to the focus on her career she married later in life at nearly fifty years old and at that point was unable to think of having children. Alice did describe this as a regret or sacrifice as she expressed that she loved children and would have liked to have been a mother. Like all of the other presidents, Alice didn't aspire to be a college president. She did; however, hold administrative roles in academia. Alice spoke about what she believed to be differences in how men and women view their own self and how they approach opportunities. Alice said:

Because we don't see enough of us in the role, we then believe we can't do it.

And I always say, a stereotypical man, if a job description has ten things that are required and the stereotypical man has two, he's like, "Oh, I'm going for that job!

And I'm going to get it! "And the stereotypical woman is like, "Oh, I've got to have nine out of ten, and even then, if I don't have the tenth, then maybe I'm not going to be competitive." Right? So that's a barrier. Just our own self-doubt.

Alice shared a great deal during the interview about gender barriers, bias, and her own regrets or sacrifices. She provided advice about both personal and professional aspirations urging that if there is something we want then we need to make that a priority – personally and professionally.

Claire

Claire is a current president of a public university in the Midwest. Claire obtained

her role through a traditional search. Claire self identifies as White, is married, and has children. While she didn't describe an intentional path of the presidency, she was much more definitive in sharing her professional journey than the other presidents in that the administrative side of academia was her desire. Claire also shared that seeking advice is something that she realized early on was critical to her administrative future. In discussing gender barriers, Claire was much more reluctant or deliberate in not assigning gendered differences or barriers as factors she experienced along the way. More precisely, she expressed that in terms of breaking through the glass ceiling and assuming the role of university president, she said:

In terms of how I broke through - I think in many ways, the journey is the same for everyone, regardless of gender differences, disciplinary differences, etc. You've got to put yourself in positions of being able to attain the appropriate skills. The skills that are sought in positions like this are not naturally acquired. They have to be purposefully acquired. You need to network; you need to be intentional about making sure you're thought of as a potential candidate. That's something that doesn't happen organically.

While Claire was not as immediate as the other women to speak of barriers as gender specific, she eventually shared that gender may very well have been a factor in the challenges she faced along her professional journey.

Eleanor

Eleanor is a current president of a liberal arts university in the South. She did not disclose race or ethnicity. Eleanor is married with two children. Her career path started as a faculty member and eventually led her to administrative roles in academia. Eleanor

shared quite a bit about the challenges of balancing a family and her career pointing to a particular time when she had to turn down an administrative role to focus on her young family. Her husband's career was such that while he traveled often, when he was home, he was able to assume much of the childcare responsibilities. However, when he traveled, those responsibilities rested solely with Eleanor. She also shared a great deal about the inner conflict you experience trying to balance it all. In responding to the balance, she said:

But you know, I have the day as an administrator. It's hard to get out in time! And when you're driving through traffic. I can't count all the times that I'm driving through traffic, I'm on the phone with the daycare center saying, "Don't put the kids out on the curb! I'm on my way! So, I still think it's uneven and while I wouldn't have given up any of it, I wish we could find a better way so it's not so stressful. On the mom.

Eleanor shared a great deal about her husband's role in assisting with the childcare responsibilities and how that support was instrumental in her professional success. With that said, she did share that she believed no matter the level of support from your husband, the childcare responsibilities fall on the mother. It was, however, the support from her husband that in her perspective afforded her the opportunity for professional success while balancing the personal and professional responsibilities.

Lucy

Lucy is a current president of a public university in the South. Lucy self identifies as White. She is married, and she and her husband have no children. She shared that she never aspired to the role of university president. The nature of Lucy's husband's career

was such that he was able to follow her as she professional journey took her from institution to institution. Throughout the course of the interview, Lucy shared a great deal about her personal and professional journey, but she also shared what other women shared with her about how they viewed that journey. She found that they often viewed it as a life without balance. She expressed that those interactions of sharing made her realize that she needed to be a better mentor to aspiring women. In sharing one such experience, Lucy said that she was encouraging young women to think of the academy and administrative opportunities and shared that one young woman said: “[Lucy], we don’t want to be like you. You work so hard, and your work all the time. And we don’t want to live like that. We want to have a life.”

What was particularly interesting about speaking with Lucy was that she not only shared her perspectives on her professional journey but also the perspectives others shared with her about their view on her life – professionally and personally.

Olivia

Olivia is a former president of a large public land grant university in the South and currently serves on the faculty at the same institution. Olivia self identifies as Hispanic/Latina. She is married, and she and her husband have no children. Olivia shared that she always met her professional critics with a desire to “show them”. She said that her whole life, she met the challenges presented by the skeptics and said “Really? I’m going to show you.” Olivia described her professional journey as being a scientist with no aspirations of being an administrator. She was appointed into several administrative roles including a role of university president. While a search was established, the committee was not satisfied with the candidates and approached Olivia about assuming the role. She

agreed and was appointed the first woman president. Olivia shared that there are critics along the way. She said:

The key is proving yourself to the naysayers, is what it is. Obviously getting the educational bonafides is key. Proving myself to the naysayers, getting myself out of my comfort zone, which is what got me to meet certain people, that unbeknownst to me, would take me on a different path. And using your what's your anchor, what is it that is going to guide you? And good things happen when you do those things. It's not easy. I'm gonna tell you. It was not easy."

Olivia shared a great deal about being the first throughout her career. Her firsts were not only as a first woman in a department, or dean but the first Hispanic/Latina woman. Her perspective on being able to balance her professional and personal life she attributed to not having children making it less complicated.

Sophia

Sophia is a former president of a large public research university in the North and is currently a faculty member. Sophia self identifies as White. She is married and has children. While serving as president, her children were school age. She had no aspirations of becoming a university president, but her professional journey did include opportunities to assume administrative roles in academia. Sophia shared a considerable number of personal thoughts on not only her experiences as a woman leading a university, but the experiences women shared with her and their perception of what the sacrifices might be for woman administrators. Sophia also shared a great deal about how she felt men might be treated under similar circumstances along the way. During the interview, Sophia did not attribute professional challenges she experienced to gender. She shared how her

straightforwardness was often met by critics who would believe she needed to soften her approach. Sophia shared that one particular supervisor tried to “tone her down” and said:

Like, once he said to me in a review, “I know that you make good decisions and all of that, but when someone asks you to make a decision, just act like you need to think about it longer”. Now, I just don’t think that is something he would say to a guy. Like, I would be decisive, but I’m supposed to be gentler in how I come to things. So, I think a lot of my ---- whether people liked it or didn’t, they were always kind of conflating my straightforwardness with my gender and being taken aback by it.

Sophia was particularly insightful on how others perceived her yet how much it was in conflict with who she is. She is straightforward, decisive, and ambitious by her own account and yet shared that this is often not perceived positively by others. Sophia even shared that in two different roles, she was given gendered nicknames that would not be viewed as flattering by most.

Victoria

Victoria is a current president of a public university in the South. She self identifies as White. She is divorced and has three children. When sharing about her divorce, Victoria paused and said, “so much for having it all.” Victoria specifically stated that she had no aspirations of being a president until she became a provost. Victoria shared so much about being a mother, and how that impacts the career. She also was very clear that throughout it all, her children have always been her priority. She said, “I do think the kids are the priority and they’re going to be around with me forever.”

Unlike the other women, Victoria shared a great deal about her personal health

struggles battling cancer in a very public way. From this experience, she realized that not only did she not pay enough attention to her own health but that women in general don't because they have so many varied responsibilities both personally and professionally. This was a piece of advice she provided that women need to pay attention to their health and take time to focus on it.

Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of the experience, personally and professionally, of breaking through the glass ceiling and/or experiencing the glass cliff for women who currently hold or have held the role of president in higher education. To reiterate, glass ceiling is a metaphor used to describe the largely invisible barrier that women face as they attempt to reach the upper echelons of management (Ryan & Haslam, 2006). Glass cliff refers to the tendency for women to be more likely than men to be appointed to leadership positions that are risky and precarious (Ryan et al., 2015). The price paid was generally defined as those sacrifices made, including work-life balance, emotional and physical well-being, and professional challenges and sacrifices that go to the overall well-being of the individual. The lived experiences of the seven study participants were captured through in-depth, one-on-one interviews. When conducting the interviews, the research questions guided the process, and the findings were developed from the data collected through the lens of the conceptual framework of the wounded leader. The wounded leader and the anatomy of a wound were introduced in Chapter 1 and further expanded upon in Chapter 2. Data collected through interviews helped to answer the research questions of this study:

1. How do women perceive the impact of the glass ceiling and/or the glass cliff on negotiating the role of university president from ascension to attainment?
2. How do women university presidents perceive the meaning of the price paid personally or professionally for breaking through the glass ceiling?

During the interviews, the participants were asked to describe their experience as university and college presidents. The interview questions were designed to obtain data to answer the two research questions. The data were analyzed through the lens of the conceptual framework of the wounded leader. The anatomy of a wound was applied to the data and the elements of vulnerability, fear, isolation, and power emerged. The presidents were extremely forthcoming in their responses to the interview questions. In some ways, I perceived the process to be somewhat cathartic for them. Several displayed a visible emotional response (weepy and shaking their heads) when sharing their stories.

Two findings and six supporting themes emerged in this study.

Finding 1) Women university presidents are faced with and navigate barriers along their professional journey.

Theme 1: Gender barriers and bias are alive and well in academia.

Theme 2: The importance of navigating barriers by getting out of your comfort zone.

Theme 3: The authentic self-versus the character others perceive you to be.

Finding 2) Women university presidents have unique perspectives on the price they paid for professional success.

Theme 1: Wounding is part of the job

Theme 2: The experiences of mobbing.

Theme 2: Having it all is about having *your* all.

Theme 3: Advice borne from lessons learned.

Each finding helps to create a more comprehensive understanding of the essence of the women's experience of becoming a president. The findings address how the women perceived the impact of the glass ceiling and/or glass cliff on negotiating the role of university president, and the meaning of the price paid for breaking through the glass ceiling. The first finding, Women university presidents are faced with and navigate barriers along their professional journey offers insight that directly answers the first research question. The second finding, Women university presidents have unique perspectives on the price paid for professional success, answers the second research question.

**Finding 1: Women University Presidents are Faced with and Navigate Barriers
Along their Professional Journey**

Over the course of the interview all presidents described barriers they faced and how they navigated them along their professional journey. Specifically, six of the seven women described gender barriers and shared their experiences in detail, with several examples each. The seventh participant (Claire) was hesitant in attributing challenges she faced to gender. Three themes emerged from the participants' experience Gender barriers and bias are alive and well in academia; and: The importance of navigating barriers by getting out of your comfort zone; and The authentic self-versus the character others perceive you to be. The finding not only answers the first research question but also the elements of wounding including isolation, vulnerability, and fear emerged.

Theme 1: Gender barriers and bias are alive and well in academia

The first theme of this finding reflects the gender barriers and bias the women experienced in their careers as they broke through the glass ceiling. While the presidency reflects the pinnacle of their career path, they were faced with ceilings along the way. All seven women shared accounts of gender barriers they experienced. The sub-themes of theme 1 are motherhood bias, isolated discomfort with naming gender a barrier, first woman experience, the glass cliff, and overcoming barriers: it is what it is.

Motherhood Bias

Four of the seven presidents have children and three of them, Eleanor, Sophia, and Victoria, shared accounts of barriers and bias associated with being a mother – not a parent – but rather a woman with a child or children. Eleanor shared her experiences with gender barriers discussing one particular instance as a mother of young children and being approached about an opportunity of an interim Dean position. Eleanor shared the conversation the President had with her regarding this role. She expressed a desire to take on the role and he responded by asking if she was able to do it with having two young babies. Eleanor remembered responding to the president by saying, “I’ve handled everything else; I think I could handle being the interim dean. You know. Not a problem.” The position did not go to Eleanor and was given to a male counterpart.

Victoria recounted a time when she was the only woman in the department. She had three children and after the first child she approached her chair about needing to be out for maternity leave. She was told that the university didn’t have a maternity leave policy. Victoria said she responded, “well, we can work through that and ultimately it became that I helped define the policy for the campus.” After that, the university started

sending people who wanted to be on maternity leave to Victoria for guidance. Victoria said, “And I’m like. Wait! Help! So those are the sorts of things like you... my oldest one is 26 now. So, you think, OK 25-26 years later, I am sure they have a policy and a set of practices. But at that point, they were still sort of... they had not figured it out, right.”

Similar to Victoria, Eleanor described her work when she was Faculty Senate President. Eleanor shared that during her tenure in the role, they were bargaining, which was an interesting time to be in leadership. She had young twin babies at the time, and focused on ways to help women, particularly those with children. She said, “to think about the whole clock for promotion, and what it looked like, and how we could build it into the collective bargaining agreement.”

While Sophia didn’t share a time when she personally experienced bias being a mother, she did share concerns about mothers being challenged with balance. This was her reason for seeking administrative roles. She felt that you could control your schedule more as compared to a faculty position. She said,

you can tell people when you are going to have meetings. And one of the things that used to happen in the department is a lot of 4 pm and 4:30 pm colloquia. And I thought to myself, if I’m ever in charge of anything, I’m going to have that changed to noon. And we did. Because the moms couldn’t make it to any of these things, because they are all running off to the daycare.

Claire shared that she has children but did not account for a time that she was faced with professional challenges because of being a mother. Claire did say, “being very fortunate is having children who appreciate and feel part of our familial success.” She attributed this to simply luck but acknowledged that we can make our own luck.

Isolated Discomfort with Naming Gender a Barrier

While all the presidents conceded that gender barriers existed, one participant seemed less comfortable describing them as gender barriers. When Sophia was asked if she faced barriers, specifically gender barriers along the way, she wrestled with the issue. She conceded that she did feel gender played a role in her career, but it was not something that could be said with complete certainty. When asked to share her thoughts and her experience with barriers, she said:

You know, I think probably one thing that you see in the literature, and that you know from other women is that you really can't ascribe much to gender. You don't know: Is it me? Is it my complications? Is it my gender? And so, there's always going to be that mystery there. Was I treated with disrespect because that's a disrespectful person, or was it because of my gender? I think I have been incredibly lucky. I mean, when I talk to other women presidents, women administrators about the kind of insults they've had, and the kind of sexism they've faced, I feel like I was able to skirt it well. There were some jobs that I feel like I didn't get because I was a woman. But again, can I say that definitely? No. It's just my gut. And I feel like somebody that who's looking for that. I don't think most women are, but I am sensitive to it.

Sophia spent a considerable amount of time on this particular topic. As she moved through this topic it seemed evident that she did consider gender as a barrier but didn't resolve it definitively. Further, she said: "One of the things I've learned after interviewing for so many jobs, getting jobs, and not getting jobs, is to try to depersonalize it. Otherwise, you can't survive it emotionally." Sophia's resolve to depersonalize it for

emotional survival was the rationale behind how she approached the topic of gender barriers. Not assigning gender as a reason or the reason for not being selected for roles and the like protected her emotionally.

First Woman Experiences

Four of the seven presidents served in roles where they were the first woman. During the interviews, Eleanor, Lucy, Olivia, and Victoria recounted numerous “first woman” experiences. This did not just relate to the presidency but throughout academia including the first woman in the department, first woman chair, first woman dean, and first women president. For those presidents who served as the first woman in their roles, they described a great deal of bias attached to that experience.

Eleanor, Lucy, Olivia, and Victoria shared that they were the first woman in their president roles and in several others during the ascension to president. To emphasize, Eleanor, Victoria, and Lucy are currently serving presidents and the first women to serve in the presidency. Olivia, a past president, was the first woman in her academic department, first woman dean, and finally the first woman president. In each appointment, she was also the first Hispanic/Latina woman as well. Eleanor described her interaction during a search process with a member of the committee. She shared that this member said to her: “Well, I’m so pleased to see you here as a successful woman.” Eleanor said she did get several questions during her interview related to possibly being the first woman selected as president and what she thought about that. Eleanor reflected that in that moment she asked herself what if she were a male candidate. During the interview process for the president of the university, Eleanor’s gender was highlighted during the interview via comments and directly in questions posed to her.

Lucy shared that there were barriers and challenges along the way, but she didn't think of them like that. She said,

I was the first ever tenured female in the department. No one looks like you, no one is your age, and they all have women spouses, they're taking care of those kinds of things. So, I think there probably were barriers. I never thought of them like that to be quite honest with you. I'm glad I didn't. Because if I thought of them like that, it might have been a little bit harder.

Like Olivia, Eleanor and Victoria, Lucy was the first woman president at her institution and shared that early on she realized that this came with an overwhelming responsibility. Young women would approach her expressing their pleasure with Lucy being the first woman. Lucy didn't realize that she was a role model for so many that didn't even know her. She recalled times when a young woman would walk up to her and say, "Wow, if you can be president, then I can do whatever it is that I want to do."

While there were so many firsts along their way, Olivia shared her belief that there are more opportunities now and shared her frustration with being the first during her career. She said:

I was always the first this, first that, first the other. And I would say to people in speeches that I've given, I don't want to be the first of nothing. And I don't want you to be the first of nothing. If you're still the first woman in whatever position, it's great that you are doing it, don't get me wrong, but it says something that a long time has lapsed without there being the diversity that you need.

Olivia discussed her credentials with great confidence however when describing her role as university president she shared that as the first woman president, the

university was accustomed to the president's wife or first lady but in her case, they were unsure how to manage this. She shared that the university community didn't even know how to address her husband. The university was used to having a first lady and all that went with that, which included selecting a cause or initiative and having the wife serve as its champion. This impacted how Olivia navigated her role and the role of her family when assuming office. Olivia said:

For people it was a source of curiosity. It was like, "Oh is this your husband?"

And I think there's bias there because when it is a man president and the wife, at least before, years ago, the wife tended not to have a career. In general, whereas there I was, I'm the president, and my husband has a career.

Olivia described the confusion attached with how to manage the role of her husband while others shared accounts of how they were treated including nicknames and sexist comments. Sophia explained that there were a lot of gendered nicknames that while she said they made her laugh, they were probably not funny. Eleanor shared that while attending a university function, she remembered being introduced as the prettiest chancellor the University ever had and shared that sometimes you just must laugh understanding that this is still a very male-centric culture.

Victoria shared that she was the first woman faculty member in her department. She shared that she had the good fortune of being on every committee preparing her for new opportunities that came along. Victoria shared what a male colleague said to her. He said, "You see, [Victoria], we're just setting you up so that you learn everything so that you can be in charge one day." Fast forward, Victoria currently serves as the first female president at her university.

Sophia shared a time when she was doing training sessions for women who sought administrative roles. Sophia remembered she shared with the woman the things they needed to know. She said, “Not to worry about the time that people don’t like you or they’re calling you a bitch because they already have.” She continued by sharing that even if you haven’t heard it, they are saying it in private thus the need to develop thick skin. Several presidents addressed the issue of name calling and nicknames attached to them, and all concluded by saying like Sophia, you must have thick skin.

The Glass Cliff

Eleanor and Sophia shared experiences that are in alignment with the glass cliff phenomenon. The glass cliff is defined as the tendency for women’s leadership positions to be more precarious than those occupied by men and to be associated with higher risk and failure (Ryan & Haslam, 2006, p. 13).

Previously, I discussed that Eleanor did not get appointed to an interim dean position. Eleanor attributed it to gender barriers, especially motherhood barriers. Eleanor shared that one year later, the selected candidate was removed from office. At that time, Eleanor said she “was put in the role to clean up the mess.” Like Eleanor, Sophia suddenly found herself in a presidency during precarious times. Only one year into a provost role, the president of the university suddenly died. She stepped in and described the atmosphere at the university by saying, “it was really grim, because he hadn’t been there that long himself. They had been through a bunch of presidents, and they finally felt like they had a proper president so they were excited about that so there was a huge disappointment in people.” Sophia shared that it took nearly five months before people started moving forward. About a year later a search started for a permanent president.

Sophia shared that she was asked if she wanted to be in the search. She decided it was not the right decision for her citing that it was a bad way to come into the presidency. Eleanor and Sophia while different were both placed in positions at precarious times in their organizations. Sophia made the decision that leaving her organization after serving as interim president was in her best interest professionally.

Overcoming Barriers: It is what it is

During the interviews with the presidents, none of them described the barriers faced as stop signs to their career trajectory. On the contrary, their experiences demonstrated that they managed the barriers and challenges with great strength. Claire, for example, shared that she felt it was disingenuous to say there were barriers without instead saying there were barriers she overcame or rather walls she went around and achieved what she did by attaining the role of President. Claire did admit that she felt the barriers were probably gender based while some may have been disciplinary. Claire said, “I don’t think there’s any question that the experience you have if you come up as a woman is different.”

Eleanor remembered a time in her early years in academic administration. She and her colleagues were discussing curriculum decisions and they were in disagreement, so they took a break. Eleanor said the men got up and were going into the men’s room. They told her they would make the decision in the restroom and let her know what they decided. Eleanor recalled that she got up, followed the men and said, “Well, I’m coming in with ya!” She added, “Sometimes you have to realize that it is what it is and then you just have to find a way to have your voice and work through those things.”

Alice shared that based on her upbringing and what her mother, in particular,

instilled in her, she didn't see gender as a limitation. Alice said, I didn't see my gender as a limitation. That doesn't mean that along my professional journey, I didn't have interactions that caused me to wonder whether people were treating me the same as they would treat somebody who was not female." This is really how she managed the barriers.

Theme 1 provided insights into beginning to answer the first research question. Insights emerged from the interview questions concentrated on barriers. It gave an opportunity for the women to focus on barriers they may have experienced in their professional career leading up to and including the presidency. Six of the seven women shared, without hesitation, their experiences with gender barriers while one was initially hesitant on calling gender a barrier. The wounding themes of isolation, power, and vulnerability implicitly emerged in this theme. While the participants did not explicitly use the wounding themes of isolation, power, and vulnerability, the stories they shared were in alignment. In sharing their stories, they were direct, they were emotional, but most of all they were strong.

Theme 2: Navigating personal barriers by *Getting out of your comfort zone*

Two subthemes emerged from theme 2: Pushing Oneself and Navigating Barriers with Support from Others.

Pushing Oneself

While all participants stated that the university presidency was not a role they aspired to, Olivia, Alice, and Lucy shared that they needed to get out of their comfort zone and push themselves during their professional journey to the presidency.

Olivia shared that she pushed herself out of her comfort zone to meet different people. In putting herself out there and meeting different people opportunities opened up

for her. Olivia said,

I'm not the smartest person in the world by any means, but by pushing myself out of my comfort zone, I got to meet [her] and because of that meeting, when someone asked [for recommendations], she said, [Olivia]! And so, off I went to [job] which I never imagined in my wildest dreams.

Lucy shared that often we don't see in ourselves what others do. She shared that this has been her experience along her professional journey. Lucy reflected on an experience with a former dean. She said, "he supported me, and gave me a lot of encouragement, encouraged me to lead." Lucy said that she had similar experiences where others saw in her what she could not see pushing her to apply for positions along the way including the presidency, to which she never aspired.

Similarly, Alice discussed that while working up the administrative ladder in higher education, she often had to push herself. Alice described herself as competitive; however, she did express that men often go for things whereas women sit back and need encouragement. She said, "mentors continued to encourage me, continue to encourage me to step out of what I saw as my comfort zone, which ultimately led to me applying for – and getting – the job as President."

Navigating Barriers with Support from Others

All seven presidents described the need to have others who believe in you provide encouragement to seek higher level positions in academia and ultimately the presidency. All participants described the importance of and the influence of mentors, and the support from others in their lives when navigating barriers. Two discussed the need for women to support other women and noted that it was another woman who either nominated them

for the role or encouraged them to apply.

Alice shared that she had mentors who encouraged her along her professional journey. She was encouraged to consider the presidency and was nominated by a woman. Alice said that a male mentor told her, “[Alice], I see you as a president. You may not see yourself this way, but I see you as a president”. Alice believes women minimize their capacity when in fact, for her, she had all the skills and experience needed to not only be considered for the role but to be selected as president.

Lucy shared that she had mentors along the way that gave her the confidence in her leadership abilities. She described one particular mentor who supported and encouraged her to take on administrative roles. Lucy said, “I do think that people do sometimes see in others what you don’t see in yourself.” Lucy’s mentors saw something in her and continued to encourage her to apply for positions. She described herself as fortunate to have such support, which ultimately lead to the presidency.

Similarly, Victoria shared that there was a supportive male colleague who said to her, “You see, [Victoria], we’re just setting you up so that you can learn everything so that you can be in charge one day”. Victoria shared that she agreed and then sat on every committee she could to learn as much about the organization as possible and others then saw her abilities. She recounted being approached by the provost to come work in the provost office. She accepted that role, later becoming interim provost.

Olivia indicated that meeting people along the way was critical to her professional success. That networking provided a depth of professional contacts that then knew her, her experience, and where she would excel. Olivia was approached by the Board of Regents and asked if she would be interested in the presidency and so she became the

first woman Hispanic president of the university. Olivia shared that the support from the faculty was critical to her success in the role since her selection was not through a traditional search. She shared, “I had to convince the faculty, so I told them about myself and how this whole thing happened. And I’ll never forget it, it was a faculty senate meeting – they gave me a standing ovation and I’m like okay we’re good.”

Sophia shared that a former board member was influential and supportive of her professionally. Sophia remembered, “He always protected me. He always believed in me. He felt protective of me in the most ungendered way”. Sophia said that this same individual was the person that helped and supported her. She didn’t refer to him as a mentor in terms of providing advice but instead “it was more in the way of giving me backbone.”

Claire shared that when she started thinking about the presidency, she knew she needed to seek advice and mentorship. Claire said,

Seek mentorship and advice. I don’t know if everybody tells you that. I believe deeply in mentorship, both giving and receiving. So, when I became interested, after the fork in the road moment. In the earliest of days of perhaps taking the administrative side rather than becoming a full-time scholar, I sought advice. And then I took the advice [laughter] – those are two different things.

Alice shared that mentorship is important, but she also stated that if eighty percent of college presidents are White men, and eighty percent of them are mentoring other White men, where do women get their mentorship from? Alice is committed to mentoring others to help bridge that gap that clearly exists. She is the only participant who drew upon the support or modeling of a significant woman in her life, in addition to having

mentors. While others shared about a woman in their professional circles who supported them, none shared about an influential woman such as a mother, grandmother, sister, and so on. Alice discussed the influence of her mother in demonstrating to her that there were no limits. Alice's parents were divorced and while she expressed the positive influence of her father, she was raised in an all-female household. She did acknowledge that she faced gender and racial barriers along the way but that never limited her or prevented her from achieving her goals. Alice described her mother as a powerful woman. She said, "Powerful in the sense that she told my sisters and told me that we could absolutely dream to be anything that we wanted to be." Alice's mother was a healthcare practitioner, and always involved in things that put her as Alice described, "in charge of stuff". The influence of Alice's mother taught her that gender was not a limitation. According to Alice, her mother defined for her an image of women.

Eleanor shared experiences along her career where she received support from others. In particular, she shared a time when she was interested in a dean's position. Eleanor recounted approaching a male colleague and asked him if she should "do this dean thing". She remembered him responding by saying, "[Eleanor], you're one of the best administrators I've ever worked with. You get to be the boss, the dean! This is the one you for. You just have to do it.". Eleanor shared that she did get the role and the conversation with her colleague just stayed with her.

Theme 2 provided additional insight into answering the first research question. The participants shared their experiences on navigating personal barriers. Personal barriers tend to describe those impediments placed before them by them. Three of the seven participants shared that they needed to get out of their own comfort zone to move

forward in their careers while all seven described support they received from others as motivation or push they needed to attain professional success. This theme is in alignment with the wounding element of fear. Fear in leadership takes on various guises such as fear of appearing weak, fear of failure, fear of change and of not changing, and fear of being judged and criticized (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). Lucy may have expressed it best when she explained that we don't see in ourselves what others see in us. That sentiment was prevalent in each presidents' experiences that they shared but by being pushed by themselves or someone else, they took the chance and achieved the presidency.

Theme 3: The Authentic Self-Versus the Character Others Perceive You to Be

Five of the seven women overcame gender barriers by remaining true to their authentic self and recognizing that there is often divergence between who you really are, and the perception others have of who you are. While this was presented as a conflict or barrier, Lucy, Olivia, Sophia, Victoria, and Claire shared that they just needed to be true to themselves versus creating a character of themselves to fit the perception.

Representing the women presidents' experience, Lucy discussed her professional journey which included participating in several presidential searches. She shared that what she found through those processes, is that she got better about being herself rather than what she thought the search committees wanted her to be. She described herself as a hugger and likes to be around people. She said she doesn't use fancy words and probably takes longer to get to the point than maybe she should. Lucy finally shared she realized that she is her authentic self, and if she wasn't what the search committees were looking for then she wasn't the right person for the job. Lucy said, "I think a lot of times women,

we try to do what people want”. She continued how over time she got better at being authentic versus trying to discover who they were looking for and being that person. She recalled even responding to questions with the answers she thought they wanted to hear versus what she believed to be the right response to the “what would you do or what do you think” questions. Ultimately, Lucy said she got more comfortable in who she was.

Similarly, Oliva realized early on that she could not please everyone and almost any given day someone will be mad at you. Olivia said, “I figured, OK, I just have to guide myself, what is going to be my anchor? And my anchor was [field of research].” She said her appointment to president was not done through a search, but it still had to be approved. Additionally, she had to convince the faculty that she was the right choice. She recalled going before faculty senate and received a standing ovation. Oliva shared that she believes that reasonable people can be reasoned with. She said, “I always try to come across as, ‘This is me. What you see is what you get.’ and at the time I guess it was refreshing.”

Sophia also emphasized her belief that women by nature are afraid people aren’t going to like us. Sophia said:

No matter how many times I have said to myself I’m not here to make friends, as they say on the Bachelor, I’m here to do the job for the governor, for the university, for the trustees. Even late in my presidency, I can’t tell you how many times my chief of staff – who’s a woman, she’s a lot like me, she’s tougher than me – we would have to fight with somebody or terminate them. And it would get a little rough. And they would leave my office and I would say “Do you think I was too mean?”. I mean after all I’ve been through, after how many personnel

matters, I've dealt with. And she would say, "No" you need somebody like that, to say, "No, you weren't."

Sophia opened up about how she believed that women question us and what others think of us and believed this simply isn't something men do. In the situation she shared, Sophia said, "Male presidents I know wouldn't have given it a second thought. You know. Don't let the door slam you on the way out."

Similarly, Victoria shared that when a tough decision is made, you often wonder how it is perceived by other people. She said she does that all the time. Claire described the concept most vividly by likening it to unknowingly being a character in a play. Claire said,

There is a character "also known as". And that person has opinions, and meant things, made decisions, expressed sentiments, that have nothing to do with me – the actual me. They are perceived, and they take on a life of their own. And because of that, when you say the truth – how you really feel, or what your decision really was – for those who believed where the perception of the character was reality, the reality then becomes dishonest, or lacking integrity. And then you are accused of lacking integrity or being a liar.

Claire shared that she believed that it is hard for people to hate up close. Claire believed that if people would take the time to get to know people individually, all of that would dissipate. She recognized that isn't practical.

Theme 3 was quite an interesting topic. Five of the seven presidents shared through their experiences that there was a divergence between who they were and who others believed them to be. Further, they shared the need to be true to themselves but

recognized that their role as president was a creation or character of who they were. This made them vulnerable to having others question who they were as women, as leaders, and as presidents or as Claire described, a character invented by others based on who they believed them to be.

To sum up the first finding, collectively, the women described the barriers faced along their professional journey and how they navigated them. They shared their experiences attributed to gender barriers. They shared strategies for overcoming these barriers including how getting out their comfort zone ultimately led them to the presidency and how important it is to remain true to oneself in spite of the fact that often that may conflict with how others perceived them. The data answered the first research question through the lens of the conceptual framework whereby the concepts of wounding, including vulnerability, isolation, power, and fear, emerged as described at the conclusion of each theme.

The second finding focuses on the participants' perceptions of the price paid for their professional success and will be discussed next.

Finding 2: Women University Presidents Have Unique Perspectives on the Price Paid for Professional Success

Over the course of the interviews, the presidents were asked to describe their experiences and the meaning of the price they have paid, personally and professionally, for breaking through the glass ceiling. Four themes emerged from their experiences. Wounding is part of the job; Six of the seven presidents described wounding experiences they faced in detail, with several examples each. These experiences were not only faced when they served as university presidents but along their entire professional journey. The

women shared these experiences with detail, and in some cases displayed a vulnerability or emotional response during the interview. Secondly, mobbing experiences were shared by three presidents. The third theme that emerged related to the question posed to participants about the concept of having it all. Lastly, each shared advice for women who may have aspirations of being a college or university president. They were very forthcoming with this advice from lessons they learned along their entire professional trajectory.

Finding two answered the second research question and the elements of vulnerability, power(less), fear, and isolation implicitly and explicitly emerged.

Theme 1: Wounding is Part of the Job

The participants were asked about their experiences with wounding in their careers. The definition of wounding was provided, so they could respond with an understanding of the concept. While six presidents provided wounding experiences, naming their experiences “wounding” was something new to them. Their responses were not limited to the period in time serving as president but also in the roles leading up to the presidency. Six of the seven presidents shared that they experienced wounding in their professional careers. On the other hand, Victoria shared she was fortunate to have never experienced what would be described as a wounding experience. Of the six who recounted wounding experiences, five used the term hurt to describe how the experience made them feel. Alice used the term powerless to describe how her experience made her feel. Leadership wounds hurt and can make even presidents feel powerless.

To review, leadership wounding points toward issues in the personal realm of vulnerability, isolation, fear, and power. These are elemental and inevitable by-products

that become the shadow aspects of leadership work. They form a foundation for our understanding of the wound (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. 17).

Alice's Experience

When Alice was asked if she had ever experienced wounding in her professional career, she immediately responded, "Wow! I probably have a few!" Alice shared a time when she felt her choices were being limited because she was a female. It was a time when a colleague became her boss. It was not a positive experience, but she struggled to make it work. Alice shared that she learned a lot of lessons that she would later use. During the time she hadn't learned those lessons yet because she wasn't able to step back and look at the situation clearly. Alice shared that this difficult situation with a change in leadership led to a negative impact on her overall wellness. Alice said, "I started making mistakes. I started just not being who I am, how I typically like to show up." Alice shared that her posture, her interactions with people, her presence, showed that it was not a healthy situation and she felt powerless.

Alice continued by sharing that after so much about her was transformed by this wounding experience, her staff did an intervention. Alice reflected that they went to her and said "You cannot stay here. We see what's happening to you. You are not you. You need to get out of here." Alice said that while she hadn't gotten to the place yet where she decided to leave, everything about her was changed. Alice reflected and then told me that she felt how much her staff cared and loved her to do such an intervention. Alice paused and said, "I just didn't feel like myself at all. In ways that I hope I don't ever have to revisit." Alice's wounding experience caused her great emotional and physical responses. She became distanced from her true identity. As she described, even her posture and how

she carried herself changed.

Olivia's Experience

When asked about wounding, Olivia shared an experience that ultimately led to her stepping down as president. While she was president, there was a system initiative to do, among other things, change instruction at the universities. The initiative would result in professors that only teach and professors that only do research. Additionally, there was discussion regarding tenure. Olivia believed these policy initiatives at the state level would infringe upon faculty's academic freedom and future career opportunities. Olivia pushed back but she did not have the support of her board. This created significant tensions for Olivia, and she focused on how doing the right thing would be ultimately in conflict with her board. This conflict or lack of support created an emotional wounding experience for Olivia. While she had the support of faculty, it was not enough. Olivia did express a great deal of gratitude towards the faculty's support of her. This conflict between wanting to do what was right and what the board wanted resulted in Olivia stepping down as president. Olivia said, "The nice thing about it is I had the support of the faculty, which was enormous to me, because they gave me a tremendous sense of...I know I did the right thing, and they know I did the right thing. But it hurts. That hurt for sure." Olivia shared that right after she stepped down, the faculty took a vote of no confidence against the Chancellor and a year later he was fired. Olivia had already stepped down and returned to the faculty. Olivia was quite pensive in sharing that the Board of Regents up until this point had expressed to her that she was doing a great job but then didn't support her. The Board went along with what the Chancellor wanted to do, until he was ultimately fired. She said again, "you know, that hurt for sure."

Lucy's Experience

When Lucy was asked about a wounding experience, she admitted that she was not familiar with the term. She said that she didn't really think about her relevant experiences as being those of wounding at first. She did, however, determine that after some reflection she had, in fact, experienced being wounded. Similar to Alice's experience, Lucy shared her wounding experience as one where she was not selected for a position. She shared that this experience was one where she felt very personally wounded. She was serving as an interim dean of a university and encouraged to apply for the permanent position which she did. She shared that her colleagues thought she was doing a great job. Her boss at the time decided on bringing in only two candidates and did not include Lucy, who was the third candidate. She was not interviewed for the position. She said, "I cried for two or three days. I never thought to be honest with you that I was crying over a job. Now in hindsight it seems kind of silly, but I felt very wounded." Lucy said that she had put everything into that job and moved the university forward. Further, she said, "I remember that feeling of just two or three days just sitting, almost numb-like. At the time, it felt like I had just been stabbed. Just kind of like yeah, you've done all this, but you're worthless." Lucy described her experience as deep emotional pain which is consistent with the overall wounding experience. This experience as Lucy described caused her to question her own self-identify and her self-worth. In reflection she shared that now it seems "silly" but that in no way trivializes the wounding experience at the time it happened. Lucy shared that one of the things she learned during her time in leadership is more of what not to do than what to do.

Lucy concluded this part of the interview by saying, "I think that I felt pretty

wounded then. It's really emotional pain, as in the definition. But it is like I said, it was also a turning point as well."

Eleanor's Experience

Similar to Lucy, the experience was a performance related issue. Eleanor described a time she characterized as hurtful, more hurtful than the second experience she shared. She was an associate dean and pregnant at the time. It was her year to be evaluated which included surveying the faculty about her performance as an administrator. The survey tool included an opportunity for those completing to include comments. Eleanor said one of the survey comments which caused her great hurt said, "[Eleanor] is only good at birthing babies." This experience demonstrated a disconnect between who Eleanor was as a professional and how some people misrepresented her and diminished her role and the work she had already done because she was a mother. It questioned who she was and her capabilities as a whole person – being both a professional and a mother.

Sophia's Experience

Sophia shared a wounding experience she endured while serving as president. Before she discussed the particular instance, she wanted to distinguish that in her view being wounded didn't equate with being a victim. Sophia said, "because I wasn't a victim." Her emphasis of this distinction seemed important to her. She described her wounding experience by first saying "I was hurt."

Sophia shared that a Title IX case erupted on campus involving five different women who had been assaulted or harassed. These women, Sophia explained, felt that the university did not protect them enough or did not respond particularly well. Sophia said

that there was a great deal of name calling on campus including calling her a misogynist, irresponsible, did not care about women, and she did not care about sexual assault. She said she was shocked by such public statements about her by people that did not know her. Sophia shared, “I was just stunned by it. And I was hurt by it.” Similar to Alice, Sophia’s well-being suffered. She revealed that it was a bad time for her and her behavior towards others suffered. She would snap at people. She shared that she was afraid. She feared that she would be hounded out of office. This fear was so overwhelming that she contacted her board chair to reevaluate her contract just in case she returned to faculty. Then one day, Sophia said her Title IX officer and others asked to have a meeting with her where she said they all cried a little. Sophia shared,

they said, “we feel badly watching you feel bad.” And it was just, it was good therapy. You know, I cried in front of everybody because I did realize, but I had not shown to them, how hurt I was. We were all hurt together but I was the lightning rod.

This wounding experience, in Sophia’s own account, had a profound effect on her. She said, “I would say emotionally, whenever the issue would come up or something like it, I would say it took at least two years to feel like I could talk about it without – you know.....” Sophia concluded by imparting words of advice, “If you are going to be in this line of work, be prepared for the name calling and have tough skin to endure it.”

Claire’s Experience

While Claire didn’t share a particular wounding experience, she did have her own interesting perspective on wounding. Additionally, she shared that by virtue of her leadership role her integrity is called into question, and she described that as causing

pain. Claire said, “

wounding feels more dramatic than how I would characterize that category. It’s almost like colors on a paint chip that are complementary to each other. Where wound is the darkest color, I would put myself in one of the lighter colors.

Further, Claire said,

Your reputation is all you have, in many ways, at the end of the day. And in fact, it’s not all you have. You have many other things, but it can feel that way when it’s questioned. And so, that is something I never had to experience before because I lived my life a certain way. I had never, ever, been accused of anything that would call my integrity into question. But by virtue of the work, my integrity is called into question on a regular basis in this job. I don’t like that. I don’t know if I would put it all the way in the darkest color on the wound paint chip, but I can’t say it’s pleasant, and it does cause pain.

The six participants that shared their wounding experiences did so with great detail. One participant became emotional during the interview. Others demonstrated emotional responses by their body language or sighs during their recounting wounding experiences. The elements of wounding were revealed in the stories the six women shared. Fear and power(less) were explicitly revealed while isolation and vulnerability were implicitly revealed. Sophia shared about putting what she experienced into perspective. She said, “My family was always, we’d just tough it out. My father’s a Holocaust survivor, you know. So, it’s like.....” She continued, “sometimes things would get really bad, and I’d be like, well at least I didn’t live the Holocaust. It’s like let’s keep it in perspective.”

Theme 1 focused on specific wounding experiences the presidents were comfortable sharing. Six women shared their perspectives and particulars on times when they felt wounded. The themes of wounding including vulnerability, power, fear, and isolation were revealed in their stories both explicitly and implicitly. Five of the presidents shared that they felt hurt by this experience and one shared that she felt powerless.

Theme 2: Mobbing Experiences Shared by Some

The participants were asked if they ever had a mobbing experience in their professional careers; three responded in the affirmative. As a reminder, mobbing is defined as psychical terror or mobbing in working life means hostile and unethical communication which is directed in a systematic way by one or a number of persons mainly toward one individual. There are also cases where such mobbing is mutual until one of the participants becomes the underdog. These actions take place often (almost every day) and over a long period (at least for six months) and, because of this frequency and duration, result in considerable psychic, psychosomatic and social misery (Leymann, 1990).

Sophia, Lucy, and Alice all described situations where they felt mobbed.

Sophia's Experience

Sophia's experience happened when she was a dean. One of the most difficult departments, she said, was the African American Studies department. There was tension between the department faculty and the university trying to pull Sophia into their fighting since she was the Dean. Sophia reflected and shared that the faculty accused her of being a racist, which was the first time that ever happened to her but believed that there are

certain things that you have to go through as a leader. The faculty put fliers in people's mailboxes that she was a racist and they wrote hostile communications to the Board of Trustees and so forth. The president of the university who had hired Sophia was a person of color himself and was very supportive of her. Sophia said,

He was like a rock. So, I'd call him up and say, They called me a racist! And he'd say, [Sophia], you did the right thing. You're not a racist. Make these decisions. And people are going to call you every name. If you're going to be in this business, you've got to have tougher skin.

Sophia shared that he would tell her stories of experiences he had, what people called him, things done to him during his tenure as a leader.

Sophia said that it was a growing experience, but she also shared that it makes you paranoid. She said,

Like, Oh my God, can I make decisions about this department? After they called... you know. I don't know, I just felt like I had a good upbringing. I didn't feel like my actions toward them, or any other department, were at all untoward, or racist, or anything. I knew that in my heart. I'd talk it through with the President, the provost, and others. And they'd support me on it. but it still bothered me.

Lucy's Experience

Lucy shared that mobbing like wounding was another term she was learning. She shared that she felt mobbed when going up for promotion and tenure. Lucy shared,

I do think in looking backwards, I think it was a search committee, or tenure and promotion committee, that was like, "We're going to make sure she doesn't get

promoted or tenured this round. It's too early for her. Who does she think she is coming in from the outside?" And I look back at it, and I would like to think it wasn't intentional. But I've always felt it was intentional. It was very—clearly, they were sending a message. "We run this department. You coming in, as a big dog or whatever you are, you don't run this department. And we have one thing. And it's... You're not going to get tenured and promoted this year. You're two years early. You can wait, just like everybody else." I think that would be an example. I think that I've kind of experienced this kind of ganging up on a person. I would say that, interestingly enough, they were all women who were ganging up on another woman--myself. Which I have always found very fascinating in leadership.

It is interesting that Lucy noted that the individuals who "ganged" up on her were all women. While Lucy was initially unfamiliar with the term mobbing, she did describe this experience with great detail and intensity.

Alice's Experience

Alice shared a particular experience when she had to remove a fraternity from campus. She was vice president of a campus in the South where Greek Life was particularly strong, including the board members who were all members of a fraternity or sorority. Alice shared that she is a member of Greek life herself, which she described as giving her "street cred." However, this "street cred" was not enough to protect her or prevent this experience.

After a number of incidents involving fraternities, Alice had to take action for fear she would lose credibility as a vice president if she did not. With the full support of the

president Alice said, “He [the president] wasn’t wishy-washy, which I appreciate.” She described the pressure as relentless. Alice reflected on what was said about her, “You’re a woman, you don’t understand, you’re black, you don’t care.” She described the environment as being awful to the point where she went to the president after a particular incident. Alice shared,

Where the adult—as they would say in the vernacular, “grown ass men”—were just so awful to me in front of students. I went to the president, and said, “You know what? I did not sign up for this. So, either they apologize to me, or we got to start thinking of something else.”

Ultimately, he agreed with Alice, and he got them to apologize. Alice shared that her predecessor was a white fraternity guy believing that they never would have treated him like that. She said, “It would have been a “Hey, hey, let’s work this out” kind of thing. So, I knew that I was being treated differently because of gender and race for sure.” Alice reflected on the situation and shared that the longer we spend in leadership the more confident you become in what you are willing to and not willing to tolerate.

Theme 2 provided personal stories and accounts of mobbing experiences. Sophia, Lucy, and Alice all shared their experiences and for some it left them with lessons learned. In Alice’s case, the experience she shared nearly caused her to give up her role. It was, as she described, a supportive president who gave her the wherewithal to do what she felt right and persist.

Theme 3: Having it All is About Having Your All

The seven participants shared their perspectives on what having it all meant to them, and I note that there was not a universal sense or definition of what having it all

means.

Having it All: Children

Apart from Claire, the women responded first and foremost with a focus on children. Even Olivia, Lucy, and Alice who do not have children responded with an initial focus on children. This demonstrated that children are part of what these women believed having it all meant.

Alice shared openly that she didn't marry until her early fifty's and has no children. Alice shared that while not an intentional sacrifice, she did sacrifice and regretted not having her own children. Alice shared,

While I got married later in life – so that's part of the sacrifice – two things that I didn't do, that I thought I would. I don't have children. I never imagined that I wouldn't have any. But as I started building my career, I got too busy to have kids. So, it wasn't an intentional sacrifice, but I have sacrificed having my own children. And then relationships – just climbing the ladder, those get sacrificed also.

Having it All: Definitions

Claire most clearly described what it means to have it all with a very clear personal definition. The other women shared narratives about what it meant to them specifically, but Claire addressed the definition of the concept. She described that having it all is a personal construct. Claire said, "I think we should be given more permission to define an individual's definition of having it all, first of all. And the pressures to have what society thinks is all, I think, is very difficult to achieve that definition of all." Claire went on to say, "I am satisfied with my all. Very! Very!" While Claire provided a

definition of what she believed ‘having it all’ was, the stories shared by the other women was consistent. Claire’s definition does apply to all participants based on the narratives they shared.

Alice shared her perspectives on having it all and focused more on balance. Alice shared,

Well, I think we are backing off from having it all, and from work/life balance. And I really like the phrase work/life congruence because I think there’s congruence between what you do and how you want to live your life, then the work balance really isn’t the issue for you anymore.

Having it All: Supportive Husbands

Alice, Claire, Eleanor, Lucy, Olivia, and Sophia attributed their ability to have it all or achieve what they have in part by having supportive husbands. Claire said, “and the way I was able to achieve my *all* is by being very fortunate, and also very careful, in the selection of a partner, in my case, my husband.”

While Alice shared about sacrifices, she did emphasize that while she may have made different choices, she and her husband have work/life congruence. Her husband also works in higher education, so their lives are intertwined, and it works for them. Alice and I spoke candidly about relationships and being in similar places in our lives. She spoke very openly and shared advice to me personally by saying “work will always be there and there’s a million things you can do, so my advice to you, is if it’s a priority to have a relationship and be partnered, well, then you have to make that a priority.”

Sophia shared that to have it all, “your husband or partner needs to be all in or unless you’re single and you have no kids.” Sophia shared that she had that support with

her husband and in particular his support and assistance with their children when they were young, but it still impacted her as she moved up in her professional trajectory. Sophia said, “when you’re at work, you feel you should be home. When you’re home, you feel you should be at work. And I don’t know – it didn’t hold me back but it’s a source of angst”. She described what she believed is a man’s ability to categorize things more than women can.

Similarly, when asked about having it all, Eleanor focused on children and balancing parenting and professional roles. Eleanor did express that she felt you could have it all but shared that she has a very supportive husband who, because of his career, could step in for periods of time managing childcare needs. Eleanor said,

when he was home, that responsibility was his. On the other hand, when he was gone, I was a full-time mom and had to pick up everything. And so, we just still have not figured out to make that easy for women.

Olivia shared that since she and her husband do not have children that made their lives less complicated. Similar to Eleanor, Olivia shared that her husband was very supportive and as an academic understood the professional world she was in. Lucy shared that she and her husband do not have children and she is fortunate to have a spouse who’s traveled and able to follow her as she moved from one academic institution to another.

Having it All: Sacrificing Relationships

Lucy shared what she believed to be the differences between men and women. She said that women are often seen at the university on weekends and men are not there.

They were at the beach, and they were golfing, they were doing something else. And so, do I think there’s this “having it all?” I think perception and I think it

scares some people sometimes and there are things you must give up.

She did share that there were things that she had to give up. Lucy shared an experience that not only demonstrates the sacrifices made but also changed how she approaches matters now, not only with herself but with her staff. She said,

In hindsight, I think you try to have it all, but we don't recognize that we have given up some things. And I know I have given things up. I've given things up with my spouse, I've given up vacations, I've given up time with my family and my parents. And I've said this story – this is not an unknown story – but in my previous job as a provost, my mother became ill and I remember that it was November and they were getting ready to put her in the hospital and I talked to them and I said, “well how bad is she” and they said “well, it's not so bad”. We think you can wait until Thanksgiving to get here and see her. And I waited too late. She died before Thanksgiving.

Unlike Alice, Claire, Eleanor, Lucy, Olivia, and Sophia, Victoria spoke about how her marriage struggled during her professional career. On marriage, Victoria said, “I would tell you that certainly, the ability to move forward and have a marriage, that probably did struggle along the way.” She shared that her ex-husband was also in academia and trying to balance a typical dual career couple was difficult. She did share that when she was a provost, she got a divorce. “So much for having it all” Victoria said. Victoria has three children and described herself as an active mother missing very little with her children.

Theme 3 gave the presidents an opportunity to respond to the concept of having it all. Children was a significant factor in describing what having it all meant. It also

became evident through the women's responses that for many having a supportive husband was a factor in them having it all, noting that having it all is a personal construct with different meanings for everyone.

Theme 4: Advice for Future University Presidents

All of the participants offered advice for women leaders aspiring to the presidency. The primary advice was to grow thick skin, take care of yourself, just go for it, break down barriers, and recognize that opportunities for women have improved.

Grow Thick Skin

Sophia and Claire both discussed the need to grow thick skin. Sophia said, "the most important thing is trying to grow that thick skin. It's hard, and it just needs to be experienced." Claire said,

That noble aspiration is tempered by an immediacy of a fairly intense criticism. And you cannot do the legacy work without being criticized. It just doesn't exist. And you have to ask yourself whether that's the way in which you want to do your work. But if you can withstand it, if you see yourself being able to find joy amidst a pretty personalized environment that is often negative – it's also so positive, but it is often negative – that it can be incredibly rewarding and fulfilling thing. And there are ways to ascertain because you don't want to get into it, and then discover your skin isn't thick enough. That's very unfortunate".

Take Care of Yourself

Victoria stressed the importance of taking care of yourself. Victoria shared that a challenge is trying to balance it all especially when you have children. Victoria shared that prior to becoming university president, she was in another highly intense academic

administrative position and was diagnosed with cancer and her illness became very public. The campus provided a great deal of support. In sharing advice, Victoria said,

So I would say for almost anybody – paying attention to your health, make sure you're not eating junk. It's like what have you learned from your past mistakes? It is something that I think women have to pay attention to, particularly because they have so many things tugging at them.

In terms of wellness, both Sophia and Claire shared the need to lean on others and seek professional help when needed including therapists and coaches. Sophia said, “you've got to lean on a lot of people. I do think it's good to get that kind of professional help before the incidents happen. And to have somebody you can call who's a professional when they are happening”. Sophia advised that women should not be afraid to ask for help. She said,

you're always going to make mistakes and bad decisions. But it's more about not letting it hurt you, and not letting it make you feel like you're a bad person, or you're a flawed person. Taking to heart like that. You know, women just do that by our nature, and we are afraid that people aren't going to like us.

Just Go for it

Lucy and Alice advised that women should just go for it. Alice acknowledged that we need more women presidents. Alice discussed what she believed to be an innate difference between men and women. She said,

Women often are significantly more hesitant than men to go for a role because we doubt ourselves or believe we need to check all the boxes before being considered. Right off the bat, my advice to women would be not to limit what

they believe we are capable of doing. If we have an inkling of wanting to be a university president, they should go for it. We just need more of us in this seat, for sure.

Lucy expressed that we need to listen to others and “go for it.” Lucy said, “If people think you are ready, talk to them. Figure it out. Soul search. I mean, is it really what you want to do? I mean, you do give up some things. You give up your privacy. You’ve got to decide if that is what you are willing to do. You do give it up.”

Lucy also shared that we need to talk with young women, and young women of color about this being a possibility. Those conversations need to start early. Lucy said,

I think, as I talk to people, particularly young women, and young women of color, that this is a possibility. I mean, I don’t even think a lot of them think it’s a possibility. Like, they just want to graduate from college. Okay, graduate from college. That’s wonderful. Well, you know what? Have you thought about the academy? Have you thought about owning your own business? Have you thought about getting a Ph.D.? Have you thought about these things? Because the world is open to you. You have all these great opportunities. And I think, for the most part, most haven’t even thought about it. And I always just tell them, I’m tapping you on the shoulder, and I’m telling you, you got to. You need to think about it, and don’t let someone close the door on you, because you’ve got potential. And so, take advantage. If someone tells you you’ve got potential, they are not just doing it. They’re doing it because they see something in you.

Recognizing Opportunities for Women Have Improved

Olivia shared that she believes there are more opportunities for women today. She believes the best advice she could give was that we need to be humble. She said,

hopefully these young women as they enter the workforce and if they aspire to be a university administrator, there's ability of course, but hard work is worth a lot more than ability. But ability, hard work and having the attitude of wanting to see this place prosper, I want to fix what's wrong, I want to elevate it, and for the right reasons. Not for you. Not for me to get accolades, that comes later.

Break Down Barriers

Eleanor focused on acknowledging that barriers exist and to persevere in spite of them. As the first woman president at her institution her advice to women is that they have to figure out how to break down those barriers. Eleanor reflected on an earlier experience. She said,

as a scientist, I knew that [male-centric] from the time I was in graduate school. I can remember standing at my poster as a graduate student [post-doc] and someone coming up to me and saying, "Is Dr. [Eleanor] going to be back? I have some questions for him." And I said, well that would be me [laughter]."

Claire may have summed up theme 3: Advice for future university presidents best. She said, "I think you have to ask yourself if the juice is worth the squeeze recognizing that you're the lemon." In other words, to be successful, women aspiring for this role should recognize and acknowledge the barriers ahead and make a decision if the goal is worth the journey.

To sum up the second finding, the presidents collectively described their

perception on the price paid for professional success. They shared their experiences on having it all and what that means to them individually. Six of the seven participants shared that they experienced several instances that they would characterize as times they felt wounded and three shared experiences of mobbing. Lastly, they shared advice for women aspiring to the role of university president.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the two findings that emerged from the stories of seven women university presidents were presented: (a) *Women university presidents are faced with and navigate barriers along their professional journey*; (b) *Women university presidents have unique perspectives on the price paid for professional success*. In the first finding, the presidents described the barriers they faced throughout their professional journey including those prior to and the role of the presidency. They shared that “first woman” remains a concept today with several participants serving in “first woman” roles throughout their careers including the presidency. They asserted that gender bias remains a challenge in academia today and shared their personal accounts. The women with children shared challenges and bias’s they experienced. In the second finding, participants described their perspectives on the price paid for professional success. They shared personal accounts of times when balancing it all became a challenge, in particular those women with children. They shared that there is a need to have a spouse or partner that understands and supports them in their roles. They also shared the need to lean on others and seek professional help and guidance. Finally, they shared advice for women aspiring to the role of president.

The conceptual framework of wounding was the lens that was applied to the data

in analyzing the findings. While in some instances, the elements of wounding were implicitly expressed, they were absolutely explicitly expressed in others. The four elements of wounding including isolation, fear, vulnerability, and power(less) revealed themselves in the narratives of the participants. The section on wounding provided insight into specific experiences of the women and how they were impacted.

Chapter five will present an overview of the findings in relation to the literature. Additionally, it will be centered in the conceptual framework of the wounded leader. Implications for practice, future policy recommendations, and future research will be presented. Finally, I will present conclusions for a greater understanding of the phenomenon of breaking through the glass ceiling, centered in the voices of seven women presidents who have lived this experience.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter provides an overview of the findings, a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature review, a connection of the findings to the conceptual framework, implications and recommendations for research, practice, and policy, and a conclusion. This research study was motivated by an interest to better understand the experiences of women university presidents. The demographic profile of America's college and university presidents remains predominately White and male (Gagliardi et al., 2017). In this study, I did not assume that the women's experience is the same as the experience of men. Instead, this study aimed to document the women's experience directly from those who lived it.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the essence of the experience, personally and professionally, of breaking through the glass ceiling and/or experiencing the glass cliff for women who currently hold or have held the role of president in higher education. The two guiding research questions were:

- 3) How do women perceive the impact of the glass ceiling and/or the glass cliff on negotiating the role of university president from ascension to attainment?
- 4) How do women university presidents perceive the meaning of the price they have paid, personally and professionally, for breaking through the glass ceiling?

As presented in Chapter 3, the criteria for participation included individuals who: (a) identify as a woman; (b) are currently serving or have served as presidents of a four-year degree granting accredited college or university. Seven participants were

interviewed via Zoom. The data analysis process involved three rounds of coding, including pattern coding. Measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness.

The next section provides an overview of the findings. The overview presents the findings in relation to the research questions. I discuss the findings in relation to the literature review presented in Chapter 2.

Overview of the Findings

Each finding corresponds with a specific research question. As presented in chapter 4, the first finding *Women university presidents are faced with and navigate barriers along their professional journey*, answered the first research question by providing insight into the specific barriers and biases the participants experienced and the strategies they used to navigate them. The second finding, *Women university presidents have unique perspectives on the price they paid for professional success*, answered the second research question by providing the individual and unique experiences participants shared on the price paid for success including their encounters with wounding, mobbing, their definitions of what having it all means, and finally advice for women aspiring to the role of university president.

Table 7 is provided below that provides the findings and themes presented in chapter 4 and the applicable research question answered by such findings.

Table 7

Reference Table of Findings, Associated Themes, and Research Questions Answered

FINDING	THEME	RESEARCH QUESTION ANSWERED
F1 Women university presidents are faced with and		RQ1 – How do women perceive the impact of the glass ceiling and/or the glass cliff on negotiating the role of university

navigate barriers along their professional journey.

president from ascension to attainment?

T1 Gender barriers are alive and well in academia.
T2 The importance of navigating barriers by getting out of your comfort zone.
T3 The authentic self-versus the character others perceive you to be.

F2 Women university presidents have unique perspectives on the price they paid for professional success.

RQ2 – How do women university presidents perceive the meaning of the price paid personally or professionally for breaking through the glass ceiling?

T1 Wounding is part of the job
T2 Mobbing experiences shared by some
T3 Having it all is about having your all
T4 Advice borne from lessons learned

The findings provided new insight into the experiences of women university presidents. The stories shared by these women in their own words provided insight into the price paid for breaking through the glass ceiling. The similarities in their experiences assisted in forming the findings. This section will provide an overview of the findings in relation to the literature review conveyed in chapter 2.

Finding 1: Women university presidents are faced with and navigate barriers along their professional journey

The first finding provided an answer to the first research question, through three

themes – (a) *Gender barriers are alive and well in academia* (b) *The importance of navigating barriers by getting out of your comfort zone*, and (c) *The authentic self-versus the character others perceive you to be*. This first finding and associated themes are consistent with the research literature. The findings support that a glass ceiling does in fact exist and persists. Four of the seven participants were the first women presidents at their institutions. The phrase glass ceiling was first used in 1984 in an Adweek profile of Gay Bryant, editor at that time of *Working Woman Magazine* (Boyd, 2008). In 1985, the national chairwoman of the National Organization for Women (NOW) used the glass ceiling phrase in an interview with United Press International, to state that without the women's movement, women would have no chance of moving beyond the glass ceiling (Boyd, 2008). This was an acknowledgement then that there was a barrier that inhibited women (and minorities) from breaching or breaking through.

My study conducted nearly forty years later found that women are still faced with this significant challenge of first and foremost breaking through the glass ceiling to attain leadership roles and in the case of this study the presidency. This finding affirms the presence of the glass cliff. Two participants were appointed into the role during times of organizational crisis supporting the notion that women are more likely than men to be appointed to leadership positions that are risky and precarious (Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

This finding and in particular Theme 2: *The importance of navigating barriers by getting out of your comfort zone*, is supported by Eagly and Carli's (2007) use of the metaphor labyrinth to describe what confronts women in their professional careers. They describe the passage through the labyrinth as not direct or straightforward, but requires persistence, awareness of self-progress, and a careful analysis of the puzzles that lie

ahead. In my study, all seven participants shared not only the barriers they faced but how they navigated them. The most recent and most comprehensive national study of college and university presidents is *The American College President Study: 2017*, which reported that the typical college president profile on average is a 62-year-old White male with only 30.1% of college presidents as women (Gagliardi et al., 2017). My study supported the 2017 study in that the glass ceiling is ever present for women in that the first finding revealed numerous times the participants were faced with being the first woman along their career trajectory including the presidency.

This first finding demonstrated that while challenges exist such as gender discrimination, the glass ceiling, and the glass cliff, women leaders persist. While the glass ceiling inhibits women from breaking through it is not indestructible. The women in this study demonstrated that despite the challenges faced, they navigated them and attained the highest-ranking role in an institution of higher learning – the presidency.

Finding 2: Women university presidents have unique perspectives on the price they paid for professional success.

The second finding provided answers to the second research question, *How do women university presidents perceive the meaning of the price they have paid, personally and professionally, for breaking through the glass ceiling?* through four themes – (a) *Wounding is part of the job*, (b) *The experiences of mobbing*, (c) *Having it all is about having your all*, and (d) *Advice borne from lessons learned*.

The literature presented in chapter 2 on wounding asserts that the experience is not only shared by women but by all leaders at one point in their careers (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). The second finding supports that wounding is part of the job

and in this case the presidency. Six of the seven participants shared having had a wounding experience and shared how they experienced the elements of a wound including vulnerability, power(less), fear, and isolation (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004). The participants' experience with wounding was described as a deep emotional response to a particular incident. All six presidents used the term "hurt" in describing how this experience made them feel. This is in stark contrast to Espinal's findings in the study *The Wounded Leader: A qualitative study on how 6 superintendents describe and understand a wounding experience*. Five of six participants in the Espinal study experienced anger in their responses to how they processed their wounding experience (Espinal, 2021). In my study, all six that shared they had been wounded and discussed their experiences did not discuss anger or any feeling or emotion that is consistent with such. In some cases, it has been years since their wounding experience yet in sharing, they demonstrated still a physical response including weeping, body language changes, and the like. As revealed in several of the participants' descriptions of their wounding experiences, vulnerability to public opinion and pressure persists. Franz and Lawson (2017) described this pressure as "the emergence of a stronger, more corporate managerial control of decision-making in many institutions can set the stage for conflict. That tension may lead faculty to look more critically at institutional leadership" (p. 67). The participants' experience with leadership wounding demonstrated the deep imprint these happenings had on their lives including one participant stepping down from her role as president.

The participants' experience with mobbing was consistent with the literature described in chapter 2. Three of the seven participants shared experienced where they

were mobbed. Duffy and Sperry (2014) describe mobbing as involving multiple individuals trying to force a person out of the workplace by tactics such as humiliation, harassment, emotion terror or abuse, and accusations. It is described in the literature as a “ganging up” on another. Davenport (1999) described the phases of mobbing as conflict, aggressive acts, management involvement, branding as difficult or mentally ill, and expulsion. While expulsion is a phase or the goal of those individuals doing the mobbing, the participants in this study persisted. While this was not a study of mobbing in the work place, almost half of this study’s participants (3:7) described events that met the criteria for mobbing; thus, they were the victims of the mobbing efforts, yet endured in their roles.

The participants were asked their perceptions on having it all. Relevant to this question, The American College President Study: 2017 Gagliardi et al. (2017) reported gender differences among respondents focused on personal life, which included: marital status, children, and altering career paths for personal reasons (Gagliardi et al., 2017). Their study identified gender differences related to the personal life of the presidents. The data clearly indicated that women presidents were: (a) less likely to have ever been married, (b) more likely to be divorced, (c) less likely to have children, (d) more likely to have altered their career progress to care for someone, and (e) more likely to have altered their career progression for a spouse or partner (Gagliardi et al., 2017). The presidents in my study all had their own personal meaning of what having it all meant to them. With that said, every president focused on the factors of their personal life that were highlighted in the Gagliardi study without being prompted by those factors. Six of the seven women focused on children including those that didn’t have them. Six of the seven

women attributed their success or ability to manage the role of the presidency in having supportive husbands. While they each had a different sense of what having it all meant to them, nearly all included children, marriage, and a support system focused on their husbands as part of that definition.

Connecting the Findings to the Conceptual Framework

The use of the leadership wound and the anatomy of a wound as the conceptual framework for this study was based on the basic premise that the essence of the experience of breaking through the glass ceiling was tainted with being wounded. Wounding is an inevitable part of leadership; it might have to be considered part of the job (Maslin-Ostrowski & Ackerman, 2002), and as my study elaborated, it is part of breaking through the glass ceiling. In looking through the lens of a wound, facets of vulnerability, isolation, fear, and power were central themes identified both implicitly and explicitly by participants. Even when the terms of wounding were not explicitly used, they were revealed through their stories.

While the participants shared specific wounding experiences, there are elements of wounding that were revealed in other stories shared by the presidents. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski tell us that a leadership wound is a significant conflict, dilemma, or critical event that profoundly affects them emotionally and professionally. The participants provided vivid recollections to the barriers they faced during their career trajectory to the presidency, which were critical incidents that cumulatively wounded them along the way.

They shared experiences with biases and barriers that six of the seven presidents definitively attributed to gender. These barriers persisted and emerged in several areas

including motherhood bias and first woman experience. The wounding themes of isolation, fear, and vulnerability emerged in the context of facing barriers. While we know from the literature that isolation is a given in leadership, in the cases of these women, it was uniquely the first woman experience. As explored in Theme 1, *gender barriers are alive and well in academia* and create an environment of isolation. The separation or exclusion they experienced was not self-made rather it was in fact present by virtue of their gender. The elements of vulnerability and fear were also revealed in Theme 2 – *Navigating barriers by getting out of your comfort zone*. The women acknowledged the existence of barriers which made them vulnerable to the professional world or academic world they were immersed in, yet they thrived by demonstrating great strength. Theme 3 - *The authentic self-versus the character others perceive you to be* revealed elements of vulnerability and fear. There was a conflict between who these women really were versus who others thought them to be. This made them vulnerable to external criticism when their actions, behaviors, and opinions may have been contrary to what others thought they would be. Further, this theme is in alignment with the wounding element of fear. Fear in leadership takes on various guises such as fear of appearing weak, fear of failure, fear of change and of not changing, and fear of being judged and criticized (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). The notion that who these women really are in character versus who others perceive them to be puts them in a precarious position. This creates an element of concern of being misunderstood, judged or criticized. The presidents shared stories of being criticized based on this divergence between the true self and who others believe them to be and creates an environment where their integrity might come into question.

Wounding is part of the job was affirmed by these women presidents. While the themes of wounding were revealed as part of their experiences, they were not all categorized as wounding experiences in full. Six of the seven participants revealed that they had been wounded and shared those experiences. We know that wounding is an experience that has deep emotional effects on the leaders. The participants described their experiences in this way with references to the physical effects they had on them. The elements of wounding were revealed. All six of the presidents used the term hurt numerous times throughout their narratives. Universally, that is the emotion that surfaced more than once when they told their stories of wounding. Rather than hurt, one president used the term powerless to describe how she felt when living through her wounding experience.

The participants were given an opportunity to give advice to women aspiring to the presidency. When sharing advice, the element of vulnerability emerged. According to Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002), vulnerability can be represented not as weakness but as strength. The presidents recognized that barriers exist and their vulnerability to such challenges, yet they persevered demonstrating great persistence and strength in achieving their professional goals. They acknowledged the existence which made them vulnerable to the professional world or academic world they were immersed in, yet they thrived.

Wounding also offers opportunities for personal growth. A leader may avert feelings associated with vulnerability. Still, the leader may discover their true self by opening the wound, where the vulnerability may be seen as a strength instead of a weakness (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004). This came through in the advice that

these experienced leaders gave for women aspiring to the presidency. The women acknowledged through their stories the challenges they faced, which were marked by wounding elements, yet they encouraged women to go for the presidency if that was what they wanted.

The conceptual framework of the wounded leader and the anatomy of a wound was a fitting choice for my study. The research questions were designed to discover through the presidents' stories how they were wounded and how might the challenges they faced along the way to the presidency be tainted with elements of wounding. In applying the conceptual framework of the wounded leader and the anatomy of wounding, the data uncovered material findings that assert that these women experienced events that cumulatively resulted in a wounding experience. Wounding had an impact of these participants when breaking through the glass ceiling and provides insight into the leadership experiences of women becoming university presidents. The conceptual framework selected was ideal in discovering the answers to the research questions.

Recommendations for Research, Practice, and Policy

The findings from this study have implications for research, practice, and policy. The implications are framed within higher education. The findings demonstrate the value of exploring the lived experiences of women university presidents and provides implications to expand upon the research. Additionally, this study recommends critical measures that should be taken for the implementation of policy and practice to better support the women in the organization and to lessen the gender gap and gender biases that exist.

Recommendations for Research

There continues to be a gap in qualitative research on the glass ceiling effect on women in leadership, specifically the university presidency. While quantitative studies have been conducted on the glass ceiling, only 9.1% of research on the subject is grounded in qualitative methods (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009). It is through the narratives or the essence of the lived experiences of women that we will continue to gain a better understanding. This study was designed to lessen the gap in qualitative research, but more is needed in a myriad of areas including business, medicine, engineering, and others where men outnumber women in executive roles. This study has five implications for future research. The first implication has two sub-focus areas identified.

The first recommendation is centered around how a study should be conducted on barriers and challenges when breaking through the glass ceiling with a focus on two sub-areas of study (a) generational differences where age or when one served as president as a factor, and (b) diversity and inclusion where racial and ethnicity is a factor. *The American College President Study: 2017*, which is the most current study, reported that while 30.1 percent of college presidents were women, that was only up 7 points over the prior decade (Gagliardi et al., 2017). While the study affirms that women still experience being the first in so many roles including the presidency, this study did not account for age. Future research might focus on the experiences of women university presidents who served at a time when the numbers of women in the roles was even less than today. Further, the second sub area or implication suggests that a concentration on racial and ethnicity might yield results specific to the experiences of women in this focus. Only 17% of college presidents are racial minorities (Gagliardi et al., 2017). How might the

lived experiences of racial and ethnic minority women presidents be different from White women presidents? Future qualitative study could bridge the gap in the literature.

A second recommendation for research is a qualitative study of women university presidents' experiences with wounding. While participants in this study were specifically asked about their leadership wounding experiences, a recommendation is a future qualitative study focused solely on wounding experiences of women university presidents. The wounding stories shared in this study added to the literature but a focused study on wounding with a similar study group would yield greater understanding of the phenomenon. Leadership wounding points toward issues in the personal realm of vulnerability, isolation, fear, and power. They form a foundation for our understanding of the wound (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. 17). How might the wounding experiences of women university presidents reveal additional aspects of the wound not yet uncovered?

A third recommendation for research is a mixed methods study of women university president experiences with mobbing as compared to their male counterparts. As presented in chapter 2, Leymann presents the five phases of a mobbing including conflict, aggressive acts, management involvement, branding as difficult or mentally ill, and expulsion (Davenport et al., 1996). It is suggested that applying a conceptual framework of the five-phases in the mobbing process to a qualitative study would yield rich qualitative data on the experiences of woman university presidents who have been mobbed as compared to their male counterparts. This emphasis could add to the literature in the area of mobbing specifically on the woman president. Have women university presidents experienced mobbing at a greater rate than their male counterparts and how do

women university presidents perceive the impact of mobbing on them personally and professionally?

A fourth recommendation for research is a qualitative study focused on women leaders with a concentration on the notion of having it all. This study revealed that there are social constructs around defining a sense of having it all. A study that seeks to uncover how the social constructs or gender norms of family, children, and marriage impact a woman leader's ability to have a balanced personal and professional life. How do social constructs of gender norms impact women leaders' ability to determine a self-constructed definition of what having it all means while at the same time achieving a level of satisfaction with both their personal and professional lives?

A fifth and final recommendation for research is to replicate this study expanding beyond university presidents to community colleges and other institutions of higher learning. This study included presidents from graduate degree granting universities. This recommendation for further research might reveal differences in other institutions of higher learning.

Implications for Practice

Three implications for practice are presented requiring that institutions of higher learning acknowledge that gender gaps persist and there is a need to address such disparities.

The study demonstrates that women continue to face barriers and biases today in academia related to gender. The Weber Shandwick 2015 study, "Gender Equality in the Executive Ranks: A Paradox -- The Journey to 2030," identified key factors that contributed to women ascending to C-level positions. This study revealed that "women

executives had been sobered by decades spent in the pipeline watching very few women make it to the executive roles” (Weber Shandwick, 2015, p. 17). The findings in the Weber Shandwick study suggest that organizations have not done a remarkable job, nor placed a concerted effort, in creating a focus on gender equity.

The first implication for practice is to focus on diversification of university boards. The literature presented in Chapter 2 demonstrates that governing boards are not representative of gender diversity. Men outnumbered women on both public and independent governing boards by more than two to one, with only 31.7% of board seats at both public and private universities held by women and 22% of board chairs of public universities are women (Johnson, 2017). Governing boards at universities hold an essential role in the selection of presidential candidates. Diversification of university governing boards at both the local and state level would improve the gender disparity. Local public university boards are selected at higher levels such as by the state’s board of governors/regents or the state’s governor. In order to influence change at the local board level, it is necessary to review state regulations, policies, and in some cases legislation to determine the needed changes to reflect an intentional focus on diversification. It is expected that this practice would increase the chances of a fair playing field for those women seeking the presidency.

The second implication for practice is to develop institutional programs for women by women starting early specifically professional local mentoring programs. These programs should be developed by women for women. While there are national professional organizations for women managed by women, it is suggested that practices at the local or university level must be in place to demonstrate an organizational

commitment to gender equity. The Weber Shandwick, 2015 study reported 19% of men executives who participated in the study reported support for women to advance into leadership positions. Often university mentoring programs are focused on professional staff mentoring students. While this is an important opportunity for students, this should be a staff-to-staff program. In this study, one participant captured the essence of what it means to have mentoring programs for women by women. In Chapter 4, Alice shared that mentorship is important, but she also stated that if eighty percent of college presidents are White men, and eighty percent of them are mentoring other White men, where do women get their mentors? Providing mentorship to women by women who have lived the experiences of barriers and bias, some of which were detailed in this study's findings, and most importantly sharing strategies for navigating those obstacles would better prepare women for leadership roles.

A third implication for practice is the development of local institutional level affinity groups for women. The data presented in the literature review demonstrates that there is a scarcity of women in leadership roles in academia and in particular the presidency. Where are the voices of the women? Affinity groups would provide an opportunity for women to have a sense of belonging through professional connections with other women. In describing challenges women face, Ryan and Haslam (2006) suggested that women are often excluded from informal networks in the workplace for several reasons including that these networks often develop around traditional men activities, such as after-work trips to the pub or golf course. Furthermore, because women are more likely to take on a disproportionate share of childcare responsibilities, they are often unable to become—or to stay—involved in out-of-work activities that build

informal networks be they traditionally masculine enterprises or those that are more inclusive (Ryan & Haslam, 2006). Affinity groups in the workplace for women staff would create those informal networks for women by women.

The three implications for practice provided here are easily implemented at a local level in each university. They do not impact budgets in any negative manner and would not only provide women professional development and networking opportunities but also demonstrate a commitment by the organization to gender equality and equality of opportunity.

Implications for Policy

Three implications presented for policy provide insight on how universities could address gender disparity and other negative workplace actions that hinder women from climbing the professional career ladder and breaking through the glass ceiling. Additionally, the policy implications would provide a healthy environment where individuals would have recourse if subjected to workplace harm. While the implications suggest how a university might address these issues at a local level, there needs to be a concerted effort to implement policy at the state level and beyond.

The first recommendation is for universities to examine policies that support equality of opportunity. Hewlett et al (2013) presented their research on diversity and described both inherent and acquired diversity. Inherent is what you are born with and acquired is what you gain from experience including working with others from different backgrounds. Having elements of both inherent and acquired they coined 2D Diversity. They correlated diversity in leadership with market outcomes revealing that companies with 2D diversity out-innovate and out-perform those companies without 2D diversity at

a staggering rate (Hewlett et al., 2013). While a focus on equity creates an environment more conducive to individual's professional growth and opportunity, the study cited here demonstrates that organizations authentically focused on gender equity and leadership diversity outperform those that do not.

A second recommendation for policy is for universities to consider search committees that reinforce and support equality of opportunity. "Women executives had been sobered by decades spent in the pipeline watching very few women make it to the executive roles" (Weber Shandwick, 2015, p. 17). This is known as gender pipeline fatigue, and it could be lessened by creating search committees that represent gender diversity. This study revealed a significant number of first women experiences with four of the seven participants revealing that they were the first woman selected for university roles up to and including the presidency. Gender diversification of search committees through university policy could provide a greater opportunity for women to be selected in roles that promote gender equality of opportunity.

What might these first two recommendations for policies look like specifically. First and foremost, a campaign or commitment to gender equality in the workplace. A policy that works towards eliminating gender pay gaps. The 2020 data reported by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that women earn 82 cents per every dollar a man earns with the gap widening with age. Universities could conduct compensation analysis of current positions to determine what gaps exist and take swift measures through policy to lessen or even eliminate them.

The third and final recommendation for universities to examine their policies related to mobbing and bullying in the workplace. In this study, six of the seven

participants reported being mobbed. They described the experiences as impacting them both physiological as well as psychological. The literature supports the experiences shared by the participants. Duffy and Sperry (2014) described mobbing as having devastating effects on an individual, the psychological effects are noteworthy, the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The literature tells us that to be mobbed is to suffer extreme psychological and physiological effects yet there is no law in the US that protects its victims. This often is the reason why many decide to leave the organization or are forced to leave.

These three recommendations for policies are presented in an effort to lessen the gender gap in academia specifically. A great deal starts with an institutional commitment at the local level to develop material efforts than unquestionably denounce gender inequity. Policy development can achieve that in a consequential way. Policies are often developed with many stakeholders and approved by the president. Significantly, they are enforceable within the organization.

Conclusion and Personal Reflection

When I began this journey of developing this study, I didn't realize how much it would impact me or surprise me. I had the opportunity to spend time through the interview process with seven remarkable women. Women who not only broke through but shattered the ever-present glass ceiling. They were open and honest about the challenges along the way and how they best navigated them.

I chose to look at this study through the conceptual framework of the wounded leader. The literature tells us that experiencing a leadership wound provides opportunity for one to grow personally and professionally. "Leadership selves are unmade and

remade through crisis; however, we have come to believe that there are no purely individual solutions to leadership wounding. There are strategies, better and worse ways, of managing leadership lives” (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004. p. 324). The experiences shared had commonalities and how they navigated them was without question with strength and support. They provided advice to future women leaders based on their experiences and those lessons learned. Through their stories, they also shared experiences, such as mobbing events, that were useful in understanding how even presidents can be targets of this type of bullying.

I wanted to get to the essence of “the price paid” not only professionally but personally as these women managed to penetrate the glass ceiling – some pushed, and others were pushed but they succeeded. In sharing their stories, they were direct, they were emotional, but most of all they were strong. This is what impressed me and impacted me. They acknowledged that barriers were and remain present and in sharing their experiences along the way they showed me great vulnerability through their words and emotions. I was astounded by the bias and barriers they faced but even more I was awe-struck by their strength. They not only attained a role that only ~30% of women hold, but they also thrived in their roles. The participants recognized that barriers exist, yet they persevered demonstrating great persistence in achieving their professional goals. They acknowledged the existence which made them vulnerable to the professional world or academic world they were immersed in as they served as presidents.

While all of the experiences are not reflective in whole of a specific wounding experience, they might be viewed as kin to a wound. The first woman experiences shared in Finding 1, Theme 1, while not in themselves a leadership wounding experience could

be termed gender-isolation. A career trajectory met with barriers might be considered “micro-wounds” that while independently may not be perceived as a wounding event, they may be seen as experiences that overall impacted the leader – a cumulative effect if you will.

In the end, each paid a price in obtaining their all. Did these women develop an individual sense of all or did gender social constructs impact their definition? There are societal constructs for women related to career, marriage, and children. My study revealed that their individual all was tailored and adjusted but all included the societal constructs in one way or another.

This study adds to the research on the glass ceiling. It does not simply highlight barriers that impede upon the ability of women to break through those obstacles but how to thrive. It is with the strength of the participants in this study, their lessons learned, and the advice that they shared that we might be encouraged that one day no glass ceiling exists that inhibits any one of us from reaching our full potential as leaders.

I end this journey with an ironic twist. As I complete writing my dissertation, I have been appointed interim president of the university where I have worked for more than half my life. I was unanimously appointed by our Board of Trustees to serve as interim upon the heels of our current president announcing his departure. Like Eleanor and Sophia, I too am appointed under the circumstances of what we know is the Glass Cliff phenomenon. It is a time of change for the organization, a time of reflection and forward gazing as the university works to determine what our future looks like. Like Eleanor and Sophia, I will lead at a time when change is evident and at a time when the university community gravitates towards the familiar. When contemplating my study, I

would have never imagined I would be in this position. These women presidents were generous with their time, with their profoundly troubling experiences with gender barriers, and their remarkable advice for navigating them, with each interview, I listened with intrigue, and I was surprised at the raw emotion that they still carried from their experiences but I never dreamed that it would help me create a playbook for myself. I can only thank them for preparing me in some way for what lies ahead. When sharing advice, Claire said so simply, “I think you have to ask yourself if the juice is worth the squeeze recognizing that you’re the lemon”. Soon I become the lemon and it is through this study and the experiences of Alice, Claire, Eleanor, Lucy, Olivia, Victoria, and Sophia that I move forward with knowledge that will help guide me. To them, I owe a world of gratitude.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Women University Presidents Who Broke Through the Glass Ceiling: At What Price?

Name of Interviewer: Stacy Ann Volnick
Name of Interviewee:
Current/Former Position of Interviewee:
Interview type: one-on-one – in person,
skype, or telephone
Place: Date: Start time: End time:

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in this study. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study will be to understand the meaning of the experience, personally and professionally, of breaking through the glass ceiling for women who have held or currently hold the role of university president. The price paid will be generally defined as those sacrifices made including work-life balance, emotional and physical well-being, professional challenges and sacrifices that go to overall well-being of the individual.

This interview should last approximately sixty - ninety minutes. If you agree to participate in this study, you may refuse to answer any questions, and may stop the interview at any point. I will provide a transcribed copy of our interview so that you may review it for accuracy. I will make every effort to keep this interview confidential and as such, your name or the name of the university or college will not be used when reporting this study. I provided a consent form for your review and signature. To review, by signing the consent form you agree to participate in this study and to have the interview audio-recorded. Thank you.

Interview Questions: *(modify for those interviewees that are retired)*

A. Leadership Journey - Before attaining the role of college president

1. I would like to learn about your experiences and journey *before* you assumed the presidency. Would you please tell me about your earlier career, before becoming a college president?
2. There is evidence in the literature that women face various barriers in the workplace. Is this true for you? If so, would you share what barriers you experienced before becoming a college president?
 - a. PROBE: Do you believe any of those have been gender barriers?
 - b. PROBE: Could you explain to me why you believe you didn't experience barriers.
3. How might you describe the journey prior to becoming president overall? Is there one moment that stands out that defines your journey?

B. Selection & the role of college president

I would now like to shift our focus to your experience of getting selected to be president and the role of the presidency.

4. Evidence tells us there is a gender gap in the college presidency. Knowing this, how did you break through this glass ceiling? Tell me about your selection as college president.
PROBE - Were you selected through the conventional search committee means or appointed?
5. Is this your first presidency or have you held other presidencies before?
 - a. As a president, how do you see your role?
 - b. What is a typical day like for you?
6. When you first assumed the role as President, did you think the organization was healthy?
 - a. Were there areas that were more or less healthy than others?
7. What did you think the role would be and how has that turned out? Is there anything about the presidency that surprised you? Is it what you expected?
8. We often hear the saying “we can have it all”. Sometimes women presidents have additional responsibilities such as; marriage children, family, etc. to their male counterparts. Do you feel that is the case with you? Can you help me understand what having it all means to you?
 - a. PROBE - Were there sacrifices or tradeoffs you had to make?

C. Leadership Journey as president – Wounding and Mobbing

I would like to shift our focus to your leadership journey as president and in particular as it relates to the concepts of wounding and mobbing.

9. Literature tells us that to lead is to be wounded. “By wounding, we refer to a time when a leader felt deeply hurt and disconnected, an experience that profoundly affected him or her” (Maslin-Ostrowski, Floyd). It is the kind of experience that causes personal and emotional pain and harm. Looking at the role that you have now, is there an experience that you can share with me where you have felt wounded?
 - a. PROBES – insert probes on vulnerability, isolation, power, and fear where applicable.
10. Thinking about presidency, there is a phenomena that is like bullying but called mobbing. By mobbing I mean hostile and unethical behavior directed towards an individual by one or a number of people over a period of time. There is also an organizational element involved. Because of the frequency and duration, mobbing results in considerable psychic, psychosomatic and social misery. Thinking about your career as president and maybe before, was there a time that you think you were ganged upon, treated unfairly, mobbed? If so, How did you deal with that? Did it affect your health and your life overall?

Reflecting on the role

I would like to shift our focus now on your reflections on the role of president.

11. Looking back at your presidency, knowing what you know today, what advice do you have for women leaders aspiring to the presidency?
12. For those who aspire to the presidency, what do you believe will be their greatest challenge?
13. Thank you so much for this interview. The purpose of this study is to explore the price paid for women who broke through the glass ceiling and to ensure they have a voice. As we wrap up, is there anything else you would like to share?

Closing

Thank you for participating in this interview. As I stated earlier, a copy of the transcribed interview will be provided to you so you may review it for accuracy. I would like to confirm how you would like the transcribed interview provided – via email or regular mail. If I need to contact you further how might you like me to do that. Do you have any questions of me?

Thank you for interviewing and I want to emphasize that your contribution to this study is significant and deeply appreciated. I have your email address as X. do you want me to use that or mail to you? Again, thank you for participating in this study,

Follow up

Send a formal thank you note/letter.

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

RQ1: How do women perceive the impact of the glass ceiling and/or the glass cliff on negotiating the role of University president from ascension to attainment?	
IQ1	I would like to learn about your experiences and journey <i>before</i> you assumed the presidency. Would you please tell me about your earlier career, before becoming a college president?
IQ2	There is evidence in the literature that women face various barriers in the workplace. Is this true for you? If so, would you share what barriers you experienced before becoming a college president? a. PROBE: Do you believe any of those have been gender barriers? b. PROBE: Could you explain to me why you believe you didn't experience barriers.
IQ3	How might you describe the journey prior to becoming president overall? Is there one moment that stands out that defines your journey?
IQ4	Evidence tells us there is a gender gap in the college presidency. Knowing this, how did you break through this glass ceiling? Tell me about your selection as college president. PROBE - Were you selected through the conventional search committee means or appointed?
IQ5	Is this your first presidency or have you held other presidencies before? a. As a president, how do you see your role? b. What is a typical day like for you?
IQ6	When you first assumed the role as President, did you think the organization was healthy? a. Were there areas that were more or less healthy than others?
IQ7	What did you think the role would be and how has that turned out? Is there anything about the presidency that surprised you? Is it what you expected?
RQ2: How do female university presidents perceive the meaning of the price paid, personally or professionally, for breaking through the glass ceiling?	
IQ8	We often hear the saying "we can have it all". Sometimes women presidents have additional responsibilities such as; marriage children, family, etc. to their male counterparts. Do you feel that is the case with you? Can you help

	<p>me understand what having it all means to you?</p> <p>a. PROBE - Were there sacrifices or tradeoffs you had to make?</p>
IQ9	<p>Literature tells us that to lead is to be wounded. “By wounding, we refer to a time when a leader felt deeply hurt and disconnected, an experience that profoundly affected him or her” (Maslin-Ostrowski, Floyd). It is the kind of experience that causes personal and emotional pain and harm. Looking at the role that you have now, is there an experience that you can share with me where you have felt wounded?</p> <p>a. PROBES – insert probes on vulnerability, isolation, power, and fear where applicable.</p>
IQ10	<p>Thinking about presidency, there is a phenomena that is like bullying but called mobbing. By mobbing I mean hostile and unethical behavior directed towards an individual by one or a number of people over a period of time. There is also an organizational element involved. Because of the frequency and duration, mobbing results in considerable psychic, psychosomatic and social misery. Thinking about your career as president and maybe before, was there a time that you think you were ganged upon, treated unfairly, mobbed? If so, How did you deal with that? Did it affect your health and your life overall?</p>
IQ11	<p>Looking back at your presidency, knowing what you know today, what advice do you have for women leaders aspiring to the presidency?</p>
IQ12	<p>For those who aspire to the presidency, what do you believe will be their greatest challenge?</p>
IQ13	<p>Thank you so much for this interview. The purpose of this study is to explore the price paid for women who broke through the glass ceiling and to ensure they have a voice. As we wrap up, is there anything else you would like to share?</p>

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