Article

How Organizational Culture Shapes Women's Leadership Experiences

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Abstract: This article presents the findings of a grounded theory study that examined the role of organizational culture and organizational fit in the leadership aspirations and experiences of 16 women working in faith-based colleges and universities in the U.S. Specifically, the researchers sought to understand what aspects of organizational culture at the home institutions of these participants influenced their employment experiences, including their considerations and decisions related to aspiring to and/or advancing into leadership. Analysis of the interview data indicated that the participants clustered into four subgroups: (1) participants who did not perceive that gender issues in the culture influenced their work or roles within the institution; (2) participants who reported that they did not perceive gender issues to be an institutional problem; however, they cited examples of problematic systems and cultures; (3) participants who identified gender inequalities at their institution, but indicated that such problems impacted them only minimally, if at all; and (4) participants who offered explicit criticism regarding the gendered dynamics evident in the culture in their institutions and in Christian higher education more broadly. Influences on leadership aspirations or experiences were identified as either being "push" (i.e., propelling the participant away from the organization and thus diminishing aspirations or willingness to move into or remain in leadership) or "pull" (i.e., drawing the participant into further engagement with the organization, thus increasing the desire to become or remain a leader in that context), with particular attention to the context of faith-based higher education. The article concludes with a brief discussion of implications for practice for individuals and postsecondary institutions.

Keywords: organizational culture; institutional leadership; women and leadership; leadership aspirations

1. Introduction

A Harvard Business Review article by Watkins (2013) carries the provocative headline: "What is Organizational Culture? And Why Should We Care?" Watkins opened the article by noting "universal agreement" (par. 1) that organizational culture exists and that "it plays a crucial role in shaping behavior in organizations" (par. 1); however, the author also noted that there has been limited consensus on exactly what organizational culture is. Hofstede et al. (2010) offered a practical description of culture as "[consisting of] the unwritten rules of the social game. It is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others" (p. 6).

Although a degree of ambiguity exists regarding the nature and definition of organizational culture, researchers have identified helpful characteristics of the nature of culture within a defined

context. For example, Schein (2010) offered a clear description of an organization's culture based on his research in the field of business:

> ... [a] pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 18).

The present study is informed by Schein's definition of culture as assumptions, behaviors, and perceptions that guide decisions and behavior within an organization. Additionally, previous researchers (e.g., Ayman and Korabik 2010; O'Neil et al. 2008) have observed that organizational cultures (and even formal staffing structures) tend to be gendered, meaning that assumptions about leaders and the contributors to effective leadership are typically male-normed. Helgesen (2017), for example, has described the "inhibitory environment [in which] women often struggle, particularly in the formative years of their careers, to find and use their voices" (p. 4). Earlier research by Helgesen and Johnson (2010) within the corporate sector had focused on reasons that highly talented women were choosing to leave well-paying jobs; these scholars observed that over the previous two decades, there had been "increasing recognition that the structure of work was designed to reflect the realities of an all-male workforce whose constituents had few, if any, domestic responsibilities beyond supporting their families" (p. 58), contributing to a "mental mismatch between what the marketplace assumes people will value in their work and what women ... most deeply value" (p. 58). The perception of a mismatch is enhanced, according to Helgesen and Johnson (2010), "because organizations still offer reward, recognize achievement, build incentive, and decide promotion using definitions of worth that reflect an all-male industrial leadership culture" (p. 58). Such cultural expectations and structures influence the beliefs, behaviors, and experiences of people within an organization in regard to expectations and evaluation of leadership.

As Hofstede et al. (2010) research on cultures around the world documented, patriarchal systems have influenced (and continue to influence) issues of access and equity in all spheres of life, including the workplace culture and its influence on climate (i.e., the environment as experienced by employees). With particular attention on the influence of organizational culture reflected within participants' institutions, this article presents the findings of a qualitative study that examined the leadership experiences and aspirations of 16 women who had been identified as "emerging leaders" at faith-based colleges and universities in the United States. Colleges and universities often operate on the assumptions of a male-normed workplace culture, requiring women to "navigate their own leadership preferences (e.g., being collaborative) within a world of hierarchical and top-down organizations and structures" (Kezar 2014, p. 126). Specifically related to the workplace environment of postsecondary institutions that are aligned with evangelical Christian faith , the complexities may be informed and amplified by a theological understanding that has been characterized by Gallagher (2004) as reflective of a "hierarchically ordered universe" (p. 219). These male-normed leadership structures and theological commitments that influence dominant views of gender roles in faith-based institutions combine with the multiple cultures that function within a college or university (Bergquist and Pawlak 2008). The result is deep, even if unseen, currents of cultural forces that need to be recognized and named if they are to be addressed or even considered for possible change. Thus, faith-based higher education provided a complex cultural context for this study.

Influences on leadership aspirations or experiences were identified as either being "push" (i.e., propelling the participant away from the organization and thus diminishing aspirations or willingness to move into or remain in leadership) or "pull" (i.e., drawing the participant into further engagement with the organization, thus increasing the desire to become or remain a leader in that context), with particular attention to the context of faith-based higher education. Collectively, the findings of this study are illustrated in a model (see Figure 1 below) that visualizes the variety of relationships that were identified between the institutions where these women were employed and the participants themselves. This research contributes to the development of theory on women in leadership, particularly

regarding women's motivation to accept or vacate positional leadership. The findings, which have implications for leadership development programming and institutional leaders who contribute to shaping organizational culture, centered on the themes of organizational fit, the power of choice, and personal confidence.
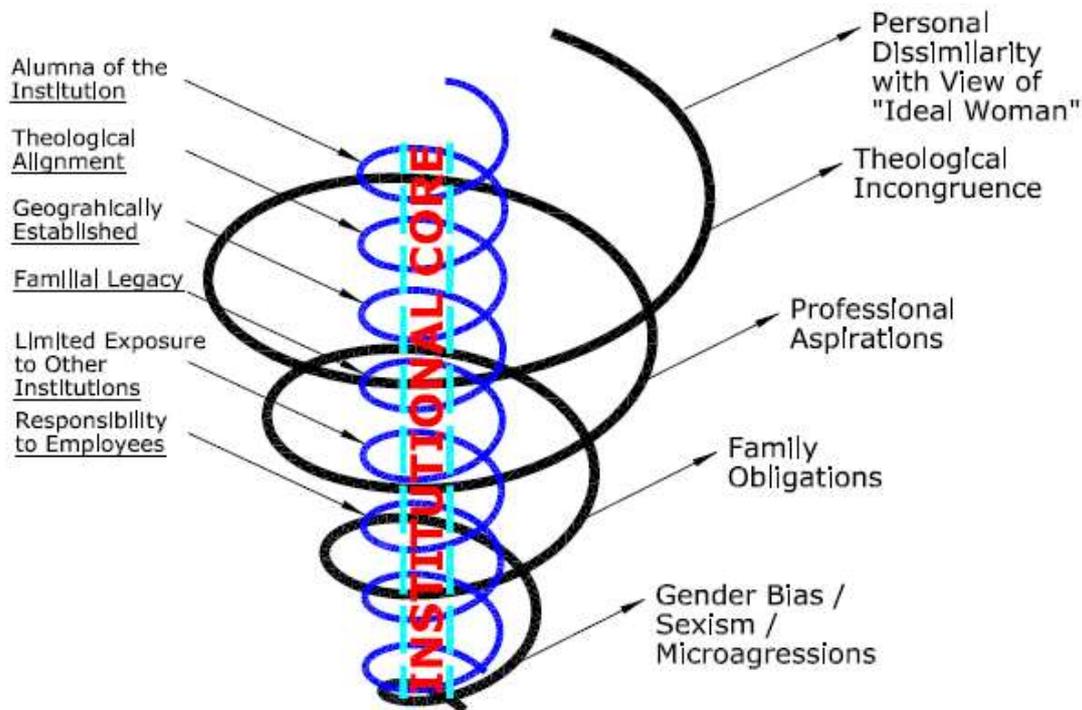

Figure 1. "Push" and "pull" influences related to organizational culture and women's leadership aspirations and experiences in Christian higher education.

2. Literature Review

As a leading scholar of organizational culture, Schein (2010) contributions to the literature have noted the interdisciplinary nature and use of the term, spanning business, sociology, leadership, and other fields. According to Schein, an organization's culture is influenced by historic events, religion, and group decisions, contributing to a type of organizational identity. Further, Schein offered a helpful distinction between: (1) the visible organizational structures and processes; (2) the strategies, goals, and philosophies or espoused justifications of the organization; and (3) the unconscious or taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings that ultimately shape the values and actions of an organization.

For the purpose of this study, we also noted the distinction made by Schein (2010) between the concepts of organizational culture and climate. The latter term was described by Schein as "an artifact of the deeper cultural levels, as is the visible behavior of its members" (p. 26). Schein also observed that culture implies organizational structure and operates as a stabilizing and defining force. This integrated definition of culture, which "somehow implies that rituals, climate, values, and behaviors tie together into a coherent whole" (Schein 2010, p. 15), is used expansively in reference to the institutional culture and climate encountered by participants in this study.

A variety of external, interpersonal, and internal factors that can hinder women's advancement into leadership have been identified by researchers, with many of those factors related to organizational culture. As summarized by Ely and Rhode (2010) in a chapter titled "Defining the Challenges" in the Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice, women aspiring to leadership face a litany of behavioral and attitudinal barriers in many organizational settings. These scholars summarized: "Women leaders

clearly navigate a different societal and organizational terrain from their male counterparts, a terrain deeply rooted in cultural ambivalence" (p. 379). The variety of subtle organizational influences that shape women's experience actually "disrupt the learning cycle at the heart of becoming a leader" (Ibarra et al. 2013, p. 62), negatively influencing the experiences of women considering or moving into leadership roles. In part, the cognitive association of leadership and maleness challenges women's advancement, whether that association is held subconsciously or overtly (Eagly and Karau 2002; Koenig et al. 2011).

To offset the powerful influence of individual and organizational biases, Egan, Shollen, Campbell, Longman, Fisher, Fox-Kirk, and Neilson (Egan et al. 2017) have advocated for the adoption of a more capacious model to explain women's leadership experiences and development. Building upon the "mature" model of Bronfenbrenner (2009) Ecological Theory of Child Development, the theory offered by Egan and colleagues explores the interplay of influences at five levels: chrono, macro, exo, meso, and micro. Using a somewhat similar framework to examine influences that hinder women's leadership advancement, Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) offered descriptions of 27 types of gender-based leadership barriers, organizing them according to "the level of society in which they generally operate: macro (societal), meso (group or organizational), and micro (individual)" (p. 187). Notably, Diehl and Dzubinski observed that the challenges facing women in leadership cannot be targeted in isolation; rather, "the first step is to recognize that women encounter barriers at all three levels, and that macro and micro barriers impact women's ability to see themselves as leaders, as well as others' ability to consider them for leadership roles" (p. 199).

2.1. Organizational Culture and Higher Education

Although the institutional culture of colleges and universities tends to reflect "an amalgam of institutional subcultures" (Lindholm 2003, p. 129) with both vertical and horizontal cross-cutting dynamics (Padilla 2005), the senior-level leadership of most institutions is predominantly male. This fact was documented by Gangone and Lennon (2014), who conducted an analysis of demographic trends of ten sectors of U.S. society, one of which was higher education; findings were reported in the "Benchmarking Women's Leadership in the United States 2013" report (Colorado Women's College 2013). Trends across the ten sectors in terms of the under-representation of women in leadership were fairly consistent; in higher education as of 2010, only 23% of chief executive officers were women, 38% of chief academic officers, and 36% of the academic deans. The American Council on Education (ACE) found the pattern of under-representation of women in postsecondary leadership to be sufficiently troubling that an initiative titled "Moving the Needle: Developing a 21st Century Agenda for Women's Leadership" was launched in 2010, calling together presidents and organizational leaders to strategize how to address this concern (Teague and Bobby 2014). A 2017 ACE report noted slight improvement over time, as reflected in the fact 30.1% of U.S. university presidents at that time were women (Gagliardi et al. 2017).

Further explaining the complexities of higher education institutions, Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) describe six cultures that are present in most academic settings: (1) collegial, (2) managerial, (3) developmental, (4) advocacy, (5) virtual, and (6) tangible. Although women who are considering leadership must navigate these various cultures effectively, it is notable that Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) described the collegial culture as being aligned with the "values and perspectives that are decidedly male-oriented" (p. 33). These scholars further added: "Quite clearly, the traditional collegial culture is a world of the blade, with a strong emphasis on often subtle but nevertheless quite powerful competition and striving for prestige and dominance" (p. 33). These cultural dynamics can create challenges for women who aspire or advance into leadership, including the problem of wage inequities and lack of supportive workplace priorities, policies, and reward structures (Kellerman and Rhode 2014), second generation bias embedded in stereotypes or organizational practices (Ibarra et al. 2013), the need for more targeted mentoring (Keohane 2014) and leadership development programs oriented toward women (Ely et al. 2011).

2.2. Institutional Fit

Related to the dynamics that flow from organizational culture, the concept of organizational fit also must be taken into account when considering the workplace environment for women. In institutions where the structures, systems, environment, traditions and interactions are created and sustained primarily by men, the culture that develops tends to be defined and understood in terms that reflect male norms (Ayman and Korabik 2010; Helgesen and Johnson 2010; O'Neil et al. 2008). Lindholm (2003) identified two ways in which "fit" can either work comfortably for the individual involved or contribute to misalignment or dysfunction. First, the person-organization fit theory relates the interests, values and abilities of an individual to associated features of an organization (Lindholm 2003). Thus, in the person-organization model, fit reflects a high degree of similarity or compatibility between an organization and an individual. In contrast, the person-environment models of organizational fit refer to dimensions of the relationship between individuals and vocations, specific jobs or work teams (Lindholm 2003). Both models can be helpful when considering whether an individual is compatible with the culture of a higher education institution.

Given the variety of cultural influences (macro, micro, etc.) that shape the day-to-day environment of a college or university, individuals may find themselves experiencing numerous complexities in the workplace. Strengthening an alignment with an institution for which there is apparent affinity and learning to navigate an institution's cultural complexities can be challenging for individuals considering whether to remain and invest fully. As described in the section that follows, this challenge may be compounded for women considering leadership in faith-based higher education, particularly in cases where the theological commitments of the institution and its senior-leadership may be somewhat out of sync with that of women who aspire to leadership, particularly in relation to, the role of women in the church and broader society.

2.3. Theological Commitments and Women's Leadership

The faith-based institutions that were represented by the 16 participants in this study were employed at institutions that are members of a Washington DC-based organization, the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU), which serves more than 180 postsecondary institutions around the world. Within the U.S., the CCCU institutions, represent one subset of just over 1000 religiously-affiliated institutions; they are affiliated with more than 30 Christian denominations (ranging from Mennonite and Evangelical Friends to Presbyterian and Southern Baptist). Binding the CCCU membership together is a commitment by institutional leadership to a shared purpose of "Advancing faith and intellect for the common good" (CCCU 2017). The CCCU institutions, education a total enrollment of 460,000 annually and collectively have served over 3.5 million alumni; additionally, 64,000+ faculty and staff are employed by the CCCU membership (CCCU 2017).

Although CCCU institutions share many commonalities, they differ in the nature of each institution's relationship with a sponsoring group of churches or denomination (Glanzer et al. 2013). Regardless of whether or not a CCCU member institution retains a formal denominational relationship, its theology typically is at least somewhat consistent with that of the founders or its sponsoring denomination. Although these colleges and universities are not churches, this partnership relationship may include the expectation that the institution operates according to the denomination's commitments and structures (Glanzer et al. 2013; Joeckel and Chesnes 2009). Thus, the theology of a founding or sponsoring denomination is often important in understanding the culture of many CCCU institutions.

Many, if not most, of the CCCU member institutions self-identify with Evangelical Protestantism. An analysis of this subset of private colleges and universities by Dahlvig and Longman (2016) in relation to women's leadership development identified that "individuals adhering to an evangelical worldview may view leadership—either consciously or subconsciously—through a set of presuppositions that is detrimental to women's advancement into leadership roles" (p. 244). Although it is clear that evangelicalism in the U.S. (let alone worldwide) is not monolithic, some streams of thought within evangelicalism understand there to be God-ordained gender roles in marriage, the church, and (in

fewer cases) society in general. In a major study funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, Gallagher (2004) concluded that "gender persists as a central, salient and effective element of the boundary work that maintains evangelical subculture and identity" (p. 216). Specifically related to the appropriate roles for men and women in the church and in society, Gallagher described the dominant view of evangelicals as being "organized by the principles of hierarchy and subordination" (p. 218). Such conditions have implications for women's leadership aspirations and experiences within the context of denominationally-owned or -sponsored colleges and universities.

3. Research Methodology

Our study used a constructivist grounded theory approach to explore how women leaders at CCCU institutions perceive and experience the gender climate at their institutions; relatedly, the research examined the relationship of the perceived gender climate to the participants' considerations about advancing in leadership. Creswell (2007) described grounded theory as one of five qualitative research methodologies; within each, a variety of research approaches has emerged. Early work by Glaser and Strauss (1967) popularized grounded theory as a qualitative methodologyin which data are gathered through open-ended, emergent, and probing questions to explore the experiences of participants. Charmaz (2006) subsequently advocated a constructivist grounded theory approach, which acknowledges the role of the researchers' and participants' context in the way knowledge is understood and constructed. Given that the cultural context of the participants was a key dimension of this research focus, constructivist grounded theory was used to obtain an understanding of the participants' individual and collective perceptions of leadership vis-à-vis institutional culture.

Data collection involved an initial face-to-face interview of approximately an hour in length with each of the 16 participants; the protocol questions focused on participants' understanding of leadership, various aspects of participants' leadership journey, future aspirations, and sources of encouragement and discouragement on the leadership journey. Follow-up interviews, conducted in person or by telephone a year later, further explored the denominational/theological orientation of each participant and her institution, as well as perceptions of the influence of organizational culture on the participant's leadership experiences. The second set of interviews served as the primary data source for the analysis that follows; the researchers coded each transcript individually, then confirmed the themes that seemed to be emerging through group dialogue and analysis, using constant comparative methods to establish "analytic distinctions" (Charmaz 2006, p. 54). Comparisons were subsequently made across the entire dataset to identify similarities and differences. Contextual information was drawn from a review of participants' application materials to participate in a four-day Women's Leadership Development program, transcriptions from the first set of interviews, and comparison of these themes with the transcriptions of four related focus groups that were arranged at approximately the same the time as the second interviews. The co-authors of this article, who conducted the research, all work at CCCU institutions; from that framework of shared experiences, we sought to enter into the lived experiences of the participants in order to accurately represent their voices in the findings presented below.

3.1. Participants

The participants were 16 women who had been identified by their home institutions as emerging leaders and nominated to participate in a four-day Women's Leadership Development Institute (WLDI) offered through the CCCU. Each of the participants met several criteria for inclusion, as components of the application process for the WLDI: (1) held a doctorate or was nearing completion of a doctorate; (2) was recognized institutionally as an emerging leader with demonstrated leadership skills and the potential for future cabinet-level service; and (3) provided evidence of increasing levels of leadership responsibility within and/or beyond higher education.

At the time of the initial set of interviews, the participants ranged in age from 30–59; 13 of the 16 were married; 11 of the 16 were mothers; and 15 were Caucasian (one self-identified as Hispanic). Eleven of the participants held roles as academic administrators or faculty chairs; two served within

student development; and three held other administrative roles (alumni, business/finance); all but one worked at a CCCU institution at the time of the interviews. Denominational membership of the participants represented a spectrum of Christian denominations including Southern Baptist, Roman Catholic, Nazarene, Assemblies of God, Missionary Church, Presbyterian Church USA, Wesleyan, United Methodist, and Mennonite. Seven of the participants were employed by the institution they had attended as an undergraduate student; four had attended another CCCU institution for their undergraduate education.

3.2. Findings and Discussion

Many of the themes common in the literature related to women and leadership were corroborated by findings in the present study. However, the participants frequently referenced that their work within an evangelical Christian culture, in particular, influenced certain inequities they had experienced. One participant made the point that such experiences were not atypical elsewhere (institutionally and/or in other professional environments); however, she went on to explain, "I think specifically in CCCU schools, that's why we can't seem to make progress. It is the religious, the biblical issues."

Common themes that emerged in our findings, consistent with earlier research findings, included expressed concerns regarding inequality in compensation, tenure, and workload. Other common gender discrepancies present in our findings were more difficult to measure, such as the micro-inequities that seemed to be related to prejudices and precedent, especially when justified by an institution's theological orientation. The patriarchal history of the church, gender-related denominational doctrines, and scriptural interpretations all impact gender-role understanding (Joeckel and Chesnes 2009; Reynolds 2014). One participant explained, "I think the biggest barrier is the 'good old boys' club, it's the informal networking to which women have no access." Another participant explained that some male Christian leaders, in an attempt to avoid the appearance of impropriety, adopt a policy of not socializing or meeting alone with the opposite sex. Such a policy actually restricted women's access to mentoring and informal networking, thus disadvantaging women by limiting professional development opportunities.

The participants frequently emphasized sensing a struggle related to work and family balance, in part due to perceived assumptions that women would (or should) hold the majority share of parenting duties. One participant described her perception of a key reason for women's underrepresentation in leadership at CCCU institutions: "I really think it's the child-rearing question. I think if you are in a Christian institution, it's much more acceptable, encouraged, and maybe even expected that you'll be a little bit more domestic." A few participants reported that they had experienced discrimination as a working mother. One participant stated, "I simply was viewed as an oddity. I should be home taking care of my children. I mean I got openly very, very rude comments and I know it hindered my time at [institution] . . ." An early study by Moreton and Newsom (2004) had reported that cultural expectations related to children and marriage were exacerbated for women working within the context of CCCU institutions. One participant in the present study concluded, "So, I think . . . we're back to evangelical rhetoric . . . Evangelicalism is the barrier. It's the problem . . . the stuff that is happening is so *not* Jesus. It's pathetic."

During the process of data analysis, a pattern gradually emerged that related to a variety of "push" and "pull" factors; awareness of this pattern was helpful in understanding the participants' leadership aspirations and experiences in relation to their organizational culture. As described below and visualized in Figure 1, the participants' interview responses and subsequent leadership paths could be clustered in four distinct groups.

In the first group (Group 1), participants did not perceive that gender issues influenced their work or roles within the institution. In addition to reporting their perceptions that gender equity was the campus norm, these participants provided examples to support the accuracy of their perception. Notably, the participants in this group remain employed within the CCCU, with half having progressed further into broader leadership roles.

Participants in the second group (Group 2) also reported that they did not perceive gender issues to be an institutional problem. However, the participants' responses included examples of seemingly problematic systems and cultures related to balance and family, policies practices, and evangelical culture and patriarchal systems. All of the participants in this category remain at their CCCU institutions, with some choosing to limit their involvement due to family responsibilities and others advancing in various leadership positions.

Participants in the third group identified gender inequalities at their institution, but indicated that such problems impacted them only minimally, if at all. Although these participants articulated that gender issues had not influenced their own careers, the pattern of their career progression following the interviews seemed to contradict these statements. All but one of the participants in Group 3 have moved to positions outside the CCCU; the participant who remains was serving in a non-cabinet level position at the time of the interviews.

Finally, the women in the fourth group had the most explicit criticism for their institutions and of Christian higher education more broadly. The participants in Group 4 reported having had the most painful or challenging experiences, which they attributed to cultural and individual gender bias and gender role expectations that were inconsistent with their own. Of the four participants in this group, two subsequently had been terminated from their positions, one had been demoted, and one sought employment at a university outside of the CCCU. Characteristics of the participants in each of these four subgroups are described in the sections that follow.

Group 1: "I think it's a very fair playing field."

The four women in Group 1 reported that they did not perceive gender issues to be problematic at their institutions; accordingly, they expressed that they had not felt any gender-related negative impact on their employment experience or perceived opportunity to progress in leadership. The participants in this category were employed at institutions that were either non-denominational or aligned with Anabaptist theological traditions that tend to be supportive of women in all levels of leadership (e.g., Mennonite, Brethren in Christ).

Two participants, one a faculty member and one an administrator, expressed enthusiasm regarding the many opportunities afforded them at the nondenominational university at which both worked. The administrator spoke of programs and structures she had created and cited no negative experiences regarding gender and leadership. The faculty member corroborated this perception, stating: "I felt like I was offered a lot of opportunities. I never felt that gender either gave me a disadvantage or an advantage." She expressed having appreciation for the "fair playing field" of her workplace, in which she felt encouraged and supported.

A participant from an institution aligned with a charismatic theological tradition perceived her university to be "proactive" in advancing women to positions of leadership. Specifically, she reported: "I don't think that there has been a limitation or a roof or a barrier at the upper levels." This participant noted that women held administrative and board positions in the institution and that a woman held the role of associate dean in the university's theology department.

Another participant, speaking from her experience at a CCCU institution, stated, "I really have had very little experience that I would say has been discrimination based on my gender, even within mathematics . . . It seems to me a pretty positive environment for women and leadership." A list of previous and current female leaders on that campus was offered as evidence of her institution's openness to promoting women into leadership roles: interim president, provost, deans, and department chairs.

These four women indicated high levels of institutional satisfaction and remain employed and/or have advanced in leadership positions at CCCU institutions. Notably, all four participants in this group reported an interest in leadership progression, with most of them explicitly expressing confidence (and having received encouragement from institutional leaders) regarding their ability to successfully manage increased responsibilities.

The three CCCU institutions represented by the four participants in Group 1 appeared to cultivate a female-friendly environment. The lack of a denominational affiliation in two of the institutions and the Anabaptist tradition of the third seemed to fuel a campus climate that was supportive of women's leadership aspirations.

Group 2: "It's just sort of life in early 21st century United States culture."

Most of the five participants in Group 2 did not perceive gender issues to be an institutional problem; however, examples they provided seemed to indicate that gender was, in fact, an issue to at least some degree. The participants in this category were employed at institutions with varying theological orientations, including Wesleyan Holiness, non-denominational, and two from baptistic traditions.

These five women expressed generally positive experiences at their institutions of employment. One participant noted, "I really don't see a big . . . difference with how women and men are treated here on campus. You'll get all of the support you need as a woman here to grow, and expand, and . . . just really excel professionally." Most of the participants self-reported having high job satisfaction and a commitment to their field and/or to Christian higher education more broadly. Additionally, the significance of these participants' contributions on their home campuses was documented by the supportive reference letters submitted by their supervisors that were influential in the women's selection to participate in the four-day Women's Leadership Development Institute.

Many of the participants in Group 2 did, however, express concerns about the patriarchal tone of evangelicalism more broadly. A faculty participant spoke of the impact of evangelical systems and culture on women and leadership: "I don't know that we nurture women professionally in the same way. I look at the majors that women on our campus go into and how big our education and nursing [programs] are . . . We tend to socialize women into those fields in theologically conservative Christianity." According to this participant, the socialization can be attributed to "a broader cultural set of understandings . . . that derive from the theological pool that we happen to be swimming in." She clarified, "Maybe . . . the ecclesiastical pool . . . [is] church culture. It might be just more generalized church culture stuff." Another participant stated, "It's subtle and I don't know that I can attribute it to organizational culture as much as . . . it's just sort of life in early 21st century United States culture."

Although the participants in Group 2 characterized their employment experiences as positive, they did reference problematic systems related to gender, although typically not personalizing the issues. Still, the responses regarding a lack of family-friendly workplace policies, hiring and promotion practices, cultural expectations, and evangelical/patriarchal systems suggested that gender issues did, in fact, exist on their campuses, although not emphasized as being problematic to the participants.

Although the reasons for the contradiction between the explicit description of their campuses as being supportive of women and their contrasting stories of experience were not clear in the data, two possibilities seem viable. First, the women may have not labeled their experiences as gender inequity given that they had become accustomed to the environment and did not expect anything more from it. Alternatively, the women's comfort with the gender climate may be congruent with their own views of gender roles. If so, these four women may not have chosen to identify current beliefs and practices as being problematic because doing so might identify them with ideologies outside the accepted norm on campus (e.g., as "radical" feminists). Regardless of the reason, the outcome is interesting: The five participants in this category continue to be employed at their CCCU institutions, with some limiting their involvement due to family responsibilities and others advancing in various leadership positions.

Group 3: "There's been a real awakening of the awareness of lack of women in leadership, and a lot of angst about it. Probably more angst than actual solutions, unfortunately."

The three participants in this group identified gender issues as being problematic at their institution; however, they perceived the impact to be minimal or nonexistent for them personally. Women in Group 3 were employed at institutions from three different theological orientations:

Nazarene, Church of God, and non-denominational. The experiences of the participants were similar: All reported having had opportunities to advance in leadership despite what the participants perceived as obvious gender inequities.

One participant was able to create a culture in her area of responsibility that she believed encouraged equality and developed women's leadership potential. Yet this participant indicated that the organizational culture, as a whole, was not as supportive of women as some of the subcultures within the institution. Ultimately, the participant left the institution to accept a senior-level position outside of the CCCU membership. After another administrator had commented on the absence of women in cabinet level-positions in her institution, she expressed concern about the status quo: "I'd put it [my university] pretty much in the mainstream of the Christian institutions, but there's been a real awakening of the awareness of lack of women in leadership and a lot of angst about it. Probably more angst than actual solutions, unfortunately."

The employment outcomes for participants in Group 3 suggest that the participants may have been more influenced by campus gender issues than they perceived to be the case. One participant indicated satisfaction with the support she experienced at her institution. After her contract had not been renewed, the institution's senior leadership had affirmed her talents and created a director-level position for her. However, she was then terminated a year later due to institutional downsizing. In fact, only one participant from Group 3 remains employed at a CCCU institution; she serves in a non-cabinet level position.

Group 4: "The real danger for Christian higher education is that they're using Scripture to back their prejudices."

The four participants in Group 4 identified gender issues as being a significant problem at their institutions and provided clear personal and institutional examples. The women were employed at institutions that embrace a variety of theological perspectives, including differences in how gender roles are understood. These participants, who perceived that the gender climate negatively impacted their employment experience, described the culture at their institutions as "inhospitable" and "hypocritical." The participants in this fourth group attributed their negative experience to cultural and personalized gender bias and gender role expectations inconsistent with their own convictions.

Cultural and individual gender bias within institutions was identified by some participants as the reason for the lack of support for women in leadership. An administrator at a nondenominational college referenced the report of a consultant who had been hired to conduct a gender audit; the report concluded that the institution "definitely" perpetuated gender inequities. Describing gender bias within the leadership of the institution, this participant noted, "There are some people on campus who are definitely not big fans of women in leadership, and there are other people who are very supportive." This participant also perceived that the theologically-conservative views held personally by the president, vice president, and board were potential barriers to the leadership advancement of women. Another administrator critiqued what she perceived a hypocrisy between the rhetoric and actions of leaders at her institution. Although senior leadership spoke about "diversity and progress" regarding women, their actions conveyed a different message: "I don't think that they want women and I don't think that they are willing to actually say that." This participant concluded, "It's worse than it was for women when the spoken policy was one of oppression, because now it's transitioned into an unspoken policy of oppression."

The word "hostility" was offered as a descriptor of the way participants experienced the environment created, at least in part, by the organization's cultural expectations of women. These participants perceived that there was a commonly-held ideal regarding female employees on campus; women who did not fulfill the ideal face challenges regarding institutional fit. Within the context of her theologically conservative institution, one participant who held an administrative role commented that women who garner respect at her university needed to be quiet, competent, smart, likable, and not prone to "rocking the boat." Another participant noted that even the idea of a working

woman could be questioned within her institution. "Women are supposed to manage the home," the participant said. "Women are supposed to support the husband. And women are supposed to raise the kids." Deviating from this ideal caused the participants to sense they did not fit with the culture of the institution.

Confusion regarding the appropriate roles for women in leadership also arose in relation to the purpose of a Christian college and how that purpose intersects with the theological position of the sponsoring denomination in terms of gender roles. One participant framed this question as it had arisen at her institution: "Is this a church? Or, is this a business, or a school?" Such lack of clarity about the relationship of church and college is consistent with other research that has identified a lack of clarity on the part of many Christian higher education institutions regarding whether the institution is an extension of, or separate from, the church (Joeckel and Chesnes 2009; Reynolds 2014).

Perceptions of the relationship between the institution and the church seemed to be further complicated by deeply-embedded cultural influences. At one non-denominational institution that had been strongly influenced by a theologically-conservative founder, disparaging comments about women leaders reportedly had been made by male colleagues. The participant from this institution commented: "I've had someone say to me, 'I've never had to report to a woman before. I just don't think I could do that.'" At the same institution, a female colleague was told that she had "no business being in charge of men at all." The justification for such comments was summarized by one participant: "The real danger for Christian higher education is that they're using Scripture to back their prejudices . . . "

Of the four groups, those in Group 4 had experienced the most difficult experiences, conveyed the most explicit criticism for their institutions, and expressed the greatest level of concern about Christian higher education in general. Only one of the four participants remained at the same institution at the time of the writing of this article, yet she had experienced a demotion due to a campus closure. Of the other participants in Group 4, two had been terminated from their positions; one of those two now works outside of higher education, and the other has moved to a senior-level leadership position at a large public institution.

Perhaps more than the denomination affiliation, the participants in Group 4 indicated that the conservative theological orientation of these institutions was the source of the cultural resistance to women in leadership. However, it is also important to consider the idea of institutional fit. Although the women in Group 4 may have experienced gender prejudice, participants' negative experiences may have been exacerbated by a poor fit between the participant and the culture of the institution. For instance, the idea that an "ideal woman" will have specific characteristics would be a difficult expectation for some women who think otherwise. It is impossible to fully identify all the factors impacting these situations, but the outcome is clear: These women perceived that they were not valued at their institutions.

The findings of the present study, in which the responses of 16 participants were divided into four subgroups, corroborate the findings of previous research by Billing (2011). Billing interviewed 20 women managers in male-normed organizations in Denmark and Sweden, seeking to understand the management experiences of the participants. The participants' stories were found to be represented by four categories of relationship between the participant and organization, or the employee's sense of whether she "fit" within her organization: "(a) congruency, (b) congruency and ambivalence, (c) adjustments and resistance, and (d) conditional assimilation" (p. 306). In the present study, participants' relationships with their campus environment also could be divided into four categories, representing increasing levels of dissatisfaction. The similarity between the two studies indicates that personal congruity with the organization or institution is an important consideration for women employees who are serving in or aspire to leadership roles.

3.3. Grounded Theory Model

To illustrate findings from this study in a visual representation, the researchers developed a model (see Figure 1) regarding the relationships between the culture of higher education institutions and the experiences of aspiring or experienced women leaders.

In the model, the college or university is represented as a solid, cylindrical core with a porous exterior shell. This solid core represents the dominant institutional culture, or the core culture. Although the cultures of higher education institutions are complex, the core culture in the model includes the distinctive and influential components of Christian higher education: the macroculture of Christian theology, denominational subcultures, historic theological underpinnings, and male-normed structures reflective of church governance. To visually represent the possibility of cultural changes within organizations, the porous exterior represents the possible influence of individuals, circumstances, or other change agents.

Helgesen and Johnson (2010) noted that women's career paths tend to take the form of a spiral rather than a straight line of progression. Similarly, in the model, the lives and career paths of women are represented as an upward spiral. The length of the line represents the personal and professional journey of the women leaders, including their experiences related to leadership. Finally, to reflect the variety of responses about future leadership aspirations, the blue spiral reflects individuals who remain aligned with the institution and experience institutional fit; in contrast, the black spiral widens and gradually becomes more distant and removed from the institutional core.

To illustrate the theoretical relationship between a higher education institution and women leaders, the model identifies various factors that influence women's decisions to continue at an institution and, in some cases, to pursue additional leadership opportunities. In such cases, we suggest that women leaders were pulled toward greater engagement with their institutions by a variety of influences. For example, some women were alumnae of the institution and exhibited a deep sense of loyalty even in the face of occasional discouragements; others were very committed to the mission or were bound geographically to that area. In contrast to the pull factors, some of the women were pushed out of the institution by a range of influences (e.g., personal theological incongruence with their college and university). In some cases, participants struggled to reconcile the institutional view of an "ideal" woman with their own identities. The push and pull factors represent aspects of the literature of gendered leadership (Diehl and Dzubinski 2016; Egan et al. 2017; Ibarra et al. 2013; Kellerman and Rhode 2014), as well as circumstances unique to Christian higher education (Dahlvig and Longman 2016; Joeckel and Chesnes 2009; Reynolds 2014).

3.4. Limitations

Our findings provide helpful insight into the role of "fit" with organizational culture, particularly as related to women's leadership experiences in male-normed organizational cultures. These experiences clearly influenced the participants' leadership aspirations and opportunities for professional mobility. However, as with the findings of all qualitative studies, the findings may not be generalizable to other contexts. Additionally, although the research involved two rounds of interviews with each of 16 participants, additional data sources such as visits to the home campuses of these participants would undoubtedly have yielded more nuanced understanding of their workplace contexts.

One specific limitation of this study is the racial and ethnic homogeneity of the participants. Of the 16 participants, 15 self-identified as Caucasian. Although not entirely disproportionate to the overall CCCU employment demographics (the underrepresentation of ethnic diversity among CCCU employees has been a longstanding problem; see McMurtrie (2016), a more diverse participant group would likely have affected the findings due to the intersectionality of race, gender, and culture. This limitation relates to a recommended area for further related research.

Additionally, the participants represented 13 colleges or universities that varied theologically, geographically, and structurally. Although the broader literature indicates that women in higher education leadership face challenges that are similar to those in other work contexts, the specific results

of this study are not necessarily representative of the 180 affiliated institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, let alone the 1000+ religiously-affiliated institutions in the United States. Targeted research into specific theological traditions might reveal considerable variation even within theological subsets of the CCCU. However, the roles of organizational culture and "institutional fit" as related to attracting and retaining high-potential women, particularly in relation to leadership roles, merit continued research attention.

3.5. Theoretical Contributions and Implications for Practice

The literature that develops the theoretical foundation to explain the leadership journeys of women has been expanding in recent years, yet additional research is merited. The present study builds on a theory and model developed by Dahlvig and Longman (2014), titled "Contributors to Women's Leadership Development in Christian Higher Education"; this model identified cultural context as an influence in women's leadership development. Examining the ways in which aspects of culture influenced participants' leadership aspirations and development can contribute to understanding the relationship between institutional culture and the opportunities afforded to women for advancement to and successful longevity in leadership. Further, the findings here offer insight into possible reasons that faith-based higher education continues to operate with so few women in senior leadership.

In spite of this study's narrow scope, the findings offer implications for individuals and postsecondary institutions, centering on the themes of organizational fit, the power of choice, and personal confidence. Specifically, the concept of organizational fit seemed to be a key factor in job satisfaction for the participants in the present study. Those who were closely aligned with the organization's mission and culture self-reported greater satisfaction with the gender climate and opportunities for advancement. Conversely, increasing the points of disconnect with the institution often signaled greater potential for an upcoming departure, either voluntarily or forced. Understanding whether an individual's sense of purpose and mission is congruent with that of the organization (Ibarra et al. 2013) can help job seekers to identify a workplace where they are most likely to find fulfillment in their work and opportunities for advancement. Similarly, theological alignment to at least some degree obviously needs to be a matter of conversation in job searches and the hiring process. Women who sense a duty or calling to remain in the institution as a change agent may want to brainstorm ways to be a "tempered radical" (Meyerson 2001) to influence change. Women who assume positions of broader responsibility and influence within an institution can help to increase campus-wide awareness of the value of diverse viewpoints, which is well-documented in the literature (Eagly and Chin 2010; Williams 2013; Woolley et al. 2010).

Finally, the contributions of female leaders have been affirmed by the findings of numerous studies (e.g., Catalyst 2013; Gerzema and D'Antonio 2013; Helgesen and Johnson 2010; Kezar 2014; Turner 2012) and argue for organizations to proactively pursue the participation of women in organizational leadership. Similarly, women who persist as change agents may be re-energized and reassured of their professional value by reviewing the research literature regarding the value that women bring to organizations.

Beyond the noted implications for individual consideration, the findings of this study offer implications for those who hold organizational leadership responsibilities. First, the clarity of organizational leaders regarding identity, mission, values, and culture, particularly regarding women in leadership, is essential in order for job candidates to assess their congruence with the organization; it is also important for search committees to be transparent and consistent in conveying institutional realities. In addition, leaders responsible for developing internal talent may influence the institution's respect for women's ways of leading by shaping gender-specific programming (Ely et al. 2011; Kassotakis 2017) and executive coaching that includes discussions of the value of diverse perspectives.

Finally, when gender issues are discussed, encouraging open dialogue regarding aspects of the institutional culture would represent a step toward honoring the choices of women to invest their lives in venues that align with their personal convictions and passions. Although mission-related

issues may increase tension in the short term, the findings of the present study suggest that an institution's practices and views related to priorities and convictions should be clearly communicated from the outset.

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