

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS IN TEXAS:
STORIES FROM A FEMINIST STANDPOINT

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS IN TEXAS:
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DEDICATION

I am honored to dedicate this work to my family. My parents, Floyd and Dana Thompson, have supported my love of learning since the beginning of my time on this Earth. They are forever my supporters. Yes, Pops, I know that for as long as I have been in school, I could have been an M.D. by now (smiles). Momma, your love and dedication to me have taught me perseverance. Just think...this all began with Huey, Dewey, and Louie...and Christina "Katrina." My brother Shawn has cheered me on in every endeavor from the time that I was a small child and continues to do so to this day. Thank you, Bubby - I love you so much! Thank you to my in-laws, Fred and Deb Adams, who have been here for this entire wild dissertation ride and have excused me from numerous family functions so that I could write.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
ABSTRACT	xiv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Background of the Study	2
Why Texas?	9
Purpose of the Study	11
Research Questions	11
Significance of the Study	12
Conceptual Framework	14
Feminist Standpoint Theory in Methods	23
Organization of the Remainder of the Study	23
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	25
Introduction	25
History of Education for Female Students	26
Education for Women in the 1700s	27
Education for Women in the 1800s	29
Education for Women in the 1900s	34

The Education of Female Minorities	36
Females Currently Enrolled in Higher Education.....	37
Female Faculty.....	39
Tenure for Female Faculty	40
Work-Life Balance.....	41
Female Administrators.....	43
Females as College and University Presidents	44
Other Challenges Faced by Females in Higher Education	46
Higher Education in Texas.....	47
Summary of the Literature	49
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	50
A Qualitative Study Approach.....	50
Feminist Standpoint Theory.....	51
Background of the Study	57
Participant and Selection Criteria	58
Confidentiality	58
Data Collection	59
Interviews.....	59
Correspondence.....	61
Documents	61
Data Analysis	64
Coding.....	65
Memoing.....	68

Trustworthiness and Ethical Issues	69
Follow-up Contact	70
Triangulation.....	70
Critical Friend	71
Limitations of the Study.....	71
Researcher’s Perspective	72
Summary of Methods.....	75
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	76
Introduction.....	76
Composite of a Female University President in Texas	77
The Pipeline to the Presidency.....	79
The Lived Experiences of Female University Presidents in Texas	81
Factors Supporting or Hindering the Rise to the Presidency	82
The Mentored President.....	82
The Tenacious President	85
The Spiritual President.....	88
Striking a Work Life Balance: The (un)Balanced President	88
The Importance of Goals: The Goal Oriented President	94
The Nature of the Presidency: The Unintentional President	97
The Importance of Gender: The Gendered President	99
Summary	105
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	108
Introduction.....	108

Conclusions and Implications: What Are the Lived Experiences of Female University Presidents in Texas?	109
What Factors Support or Inhibit the Rise to the Presidency?	109
The Pathway to the Presidency	109
Importance of Reputation	112
Tenacity On the Job	114
Mentors and Mentoring.....	115
Gender Still Matters	117
How Do Female Presidents Live the Balance Between Career and Family?	119
Career and Family Balance.....	119
Spirituality.....	121
What Can Ultimately Be Learned From the Paths of the Participants?.....	122
Recommendations for Future Practice.....	126
Recommendations for Future Research	127
Recommendations for Women	128
My Future Research Agenda	128
Concluding Thoughts and Reflections.....	128
EPILOGUE.....	130
APPENDIX A: SAMPLE OF THEMATIC MEMO.....	133
APPENDIX B: SAMPLE OF THEORETICAL MEMO	134
REFERENCES	135

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Degrees Awarded to Males and Females from 1976-1977 to 2001-2002	37
2. Types and Numbers of Documents Collected	64
3. Sample of Coding Methods	67

ABSTRACT

THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS IN TEXAS:

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by

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The purpose of this qualitative research study was to illustrate the ways in which female university presidents navigate the male-dominated world of higher education. The pathways female university presidents followed in order to reach the upper tiers of higher education administration were explored through interviews with presidents of 4-year institutions in Texas. The primary question guiding this research was: What are the lived experiences of female university presidents in Texas? Themes that emerged from the data include: the importance of mentoring to females in higher education administration, tenacity in achieving the post of president, spirituality, the balance of career and family, the unintentional nature at which the participants arrived at their presidential post, and the fact that gender continues to play a role in the whether and how females rise to the

presidency. This study informs the field of higher education by shedding light on the conditions females negotiate on their way to a university presidency including finding a work life balance and gender and its role at both the institutional and societal levels. The research addresses a topic that has historically had very little focus in the field of higher education administration in the United States and an even smaller focus in Texas.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Male presidents grossly outnumber female presidents at U.S. institutions of higher education. A recent study published by the American Council on Education (ACE) indicates that the “typical college or university president is slowly changing but continues to be primarily White (86 percent) and male (77 percent)” (American Council on Education, 2007, p. 9). The same report states that though percentages of female presidents has more than doubled, from 10% to 23% since 1986, this rate of change has stagnated since the late 1990s (American Council on Education). These facts imply that females wishing to pursue careers in higher education continue to face significant barriers while trying to reach the upper most administrative positions.

The stagnation in female university presidencies comes at a time when female enrollment in higher education is at an all-time high. Women are attending college in higher numbers as well as graduating with more degrees than their male classmates. As of 2004, females made up 57% of all undergraduate higher education enrollments in the United States and 59% of graduate enrollment (Renn, 2008). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that females were awarded 57% of all bachelor’s degrees in the 2006-2007 school year (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Science National Center for Education Statistics, 2009a). However, females comprised a mere 43% of tenured faculty and just over 20% of college and university

presidents (Renn). Moreover, female faculty and administrators are more likely to work in the community college setting than in four-year institutions. When female faculty members are employed in four-year institutions, they are more likely to hold faculty and administrative positions at lower-tier colleges and universities than at major research universities (Renn).

Background of the Study

Student populations at institutions of higher education across America are projected to increase in race, ethnicity, and gender. The NCES reported in 2009 that between the years of 2007-2018, enrollment rates will increase by 9% for men and 16% for women (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Science, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009b). Enrollment rates are projected to rise by 4% for White students, 26% for Black students, 38% for Hispanic students, 29% for Asian and Pacific Islander students, and 32% for American Indian or Alaskan Native students (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Science, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009b). The top leadership in the nation's institutions of higher education, which is predominately male and White (American Council on Education, 2007), does not reflect the current level of diversity within the college student population. Unless significant change is made in the pathway to the presidency, university leadership will be even less representative of the college population in the future.

Why does a gender gap remain in higher education administration at this point in our nation's history? To the current generation of college students, Betty Friedan and the feminist movement of the 1970s are seemingly in the distant past. Friedan claimed that women across America were not satisfied with being wives and mothers and were "afraid

to ask...the silent question—‘Is this all?’” (Friedan, 2001, p. 15). Friedan asserted that women were not satisfied with working only in the domestic sphere (Fox, 2006). Friedan, and others after her, worked diligently to bring to light “the myth of suburban women’s domestic fulfillment she came to call the feminine mystique” (Fox, 2006, p. 1). Friedan and those who agreed with her theories forged a path for females. Many women, particularly White, middle class women, were being taught that they should not aspire to careers, higher education, or political rights - all that the “old-fashioned feminists fought for” (Friedan, 2001, p. 16). Rather, they should be content with finding a husband and having children. Friedan’s work sparked a new wave of feminism. This wave of feminism, known as the second wave, enlightened women to the fact that it was permissible to be unsatisfied with the societal expectation that women were to be wives and mothers. Friedan wrote that women could be wives and mothers and still have careers. Despite the fact that Friedan and others after her made progress toward women’s liberation, there is still work to be done. Even in 2012, the path is unsmooth and oftentimes difficult for women to travel, as evidenced by the difficulty they have breaking into the upper echelons of higher education administration.

Because of second wave feminists, the separation between the public sphere and the domestic sphere is not as distinct as it once was for many women. Rather, many women move between the two spheres, attempting to balance both career and family. This work-life balance is difficult to achieve. Work-life balance is described as equilibrium between professional and domestic responsibilities; it is elusive for many women (Basinger, 2001; Cook, 2009; Howard-Vital & Brunson, 2006). Recent studies suggest that men do not have to handle the type of pressure dealt to women in regard to

work-life balance (Drago, 2007; Manzo, 2001; The Presidential Spectrum, 2007). Despite many social changes that have challenged the notion that women have the sole responsibility for domestic jobs and have reconstructed gender ideologies, females are still considered to be the primary laborers in the home (Johnson & Johnson, 2008; Miller & Hollenshead, 2005). Whitmarsh, Brown, Cooper, Hawkins-Rodgers, and Wentworth (2007) found that many females made job choices based not only on career, but motherhood, as well. They found that women attempted to blend the two spheres while others completed them sequentially. Still other women were discouraged by a partner's perception that women could not be successful in finding equilibrium between the two, and in fact, were discouraged from pursuing certain careers. Michaels (2009) suggests that some females feel they are shoved out of the working world as much as they are nudged into motherhood due to the fact that the "American workplace continues to depend on a model of employee commitment that refuses to accommodate the realities of family life" (p. 318). The ability to balance these two responsibilities of career and home is often overwhelming and may explain, at least in part, why the gender gap remains at the administrative ranks in higher education.

Like females in other fields of employment, females working in higher education positions are expected to manage both career and family. Females in academia have been and continue to face challenges in finding stability between the demands of a career and cultivating a family. Wilson (2004) discovered that some women opt not to work at research universities for fear that they will not have the time to dedicate to both their work and family members. In 2005, former president of Harvard University, Lawrence H. Summers, spoke at a conference on women and stated that the lack of females in science

could be attributed in part to their lack of willingness to mesh the responsibilities of family with the demands of an academic career (Strober, 2005). This is evidence of a dangerous assumption at work in the highest levels of academia, a supposition espousing that women have themselves to blame for the gender gap in higher education careers. Summers seemingly believes women are rightfully responsible for maintaining the family and not enough of them are willing to balance this responsibility with their professional responsibilities.

While it would be easy to villainize Summers and others like him who suggest women have responsibilities at home that detract from work in the academy, they are simply voicing a reflection of norms at both institutional and societal levels. Even at the highest levels, women in academia must negotiate the tension between home and work within a highly patriarchal structure (Ropers-Huilman, 2003). The fact that they must negotiate this balance does not, however, indicate that it is their fault nor that females are inferior to males, as Summers suggested. In short, because the White male's perspective has dominated the structure of higher education for centuries, female presidents must still negotiate the power structures that have long been in place.

The small percentage of women who do ascend to the ranks of university president continue to hurdle additional obstacles at the institutional level that many of their male counterparts do not (June, 2007; Mason, 2009; Wilson, 2004). Among the more challenging obstacles are leadership style and the balance between work and home. Women presidents must be perceived as assertive, but not aggressive in a culture of male leadership (Mason, 2009). Relationship and family status are also hurdles; fewer female presidents are married or have partners. Eighty-nine percent of male presidents in the

ACE report were married as opposed to under two-thirds of female presidents (June, 2007). In addition, 91% of the male presidents had children. Only 68% of the female presidents were parents (American Council on Education, 2007). In the same study, 15% of the female presidents responded that they had adapted their careers to the demands of care for their children or a spouse in comparison to 5% similar responses from the male respondents (June, 2007). This is testament to gender inequity related to balancing work and family.

Another potential impediment to women gaining access to the upper ranks of higher education administration is the typical pathway to the presidency. Most commonly, the pathway to the presidency begins with being a faculty member. Yet, women often have a difficult time getting hired for these preliminary positions. Harvard female senior faculty members responded to President Summers' assertion by stating that the lack of women in science could be better explained by the fact that in the hiring process, committees oftentimes revert to stereotypes and visualize a positive future based on those applicants who are similar to themselves (Wilson, 2004). Because most professors on faculty hiring committees are male, it may be difficult for female candidates to secure a faculty position (Wilson). If they cannot secure work as faculty members, it seems logical that they would not be able to progress through the pipeline to other higher education positions, thus ultimately not arriving at the presidency.

To close the gender gap in higher education administration, there is a need to study the experiences of women who have risen to the upper ranks of university administration. In particular, a study that describes the experiences of female university presidents as they traveled through the ranks to the position of president would be useful

to understanding how gender equity might be achieved. A few such studies have been conducted in various states and regions across the United States. Using the same approach Smith (2004) used to study female college and university presidents in Mississippi, Marthe (2009) interviewed female college and university presidents in New England and found that negative gender bias, a lack of mentoring, and relationships formed at all levels were factors that impacted the transition to leadership roles in higher education. Gatteau (2000) and Jablonski (1996) studied female presidents at selective higher education institutions in the Northeast. Gatteau found that these women traveled similar career paths to the presidency and faced such barriers as a lack of women colleagues, sexist behaviors, and negativity and skepticism from the community and faculty. Jablonski found that “cultural, social, environmental, and organizational influences” (p. 6) contributing to the development of each president in the study seemed to be traditional in that most of the models they had as presidents were male. Still other studies looked at various presidents from across the nation. Madsen (2007) found that the family backgrounds of the participants in her study did influence leadership style and their ultimate sustainability in the role of president. Other studies have looked at minority female college and university presidents. Jackson and Harris (2007) discovered that African American female college and university presidents perceived such barriers as exclusion from informal networks, lack of preparation, and the glass ceiling while working in the role. The glass ceiling is defined as a series of obstacles, barriers, or impediments that keep certain groups, particularly females, from attaining upper level positions and is prevalent in higher education administration for women and minorities (Jackson & O’Callahan, 2009; Mathur & Chadha, 2010). Additionally, Turner (2007)

studied three female college and university presidents—a Mexican American, an American Indian, and an Asian American. Turner concluded that these female presidents of color faced gender, racial, and ethnic stereotyping as well as cultural value conflicts with the mainstream population. Madsen (2008) wrote about the experiences from youth to the presidency of ten females who were presidents or chancellors of entire university systems, Research I universities, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). The participants were from both public and private institutions. In a similar manner, Wolverton, Bower, and Hyle (2009) assembled a collection of stories from nine women who held the role of president at a community college, college, or university. The authors studied the experiences of the women and discussed the importance of the life and work balance, preparation for leadership, and barriers that still exist for females in academia.

The literature on female college and university presidents appears to have expanded in recent years as small numbers of females have taken on the role of president. Women are least likely to hold a presidency at a doctorate-granting institution (American Council on Education, 2007). The American Council on Education (2007) reports that women are most likely to lead an associate level college, a baccalaureate or master's level college. There seems to be little consistency in the groups studied or the regions in which the studies are conducted. There does not appear to be a system for choosing the participants based on the type of institution they govern, when several stories are compiled for books. Though the information is valuable and audiences are given a wide range of presidents from different types of institutions, the data could also be seen as having a lack of consistency. This results in gaps in the literature. These gaps can be

filled by accounting for the experiences of female college and university presidents in other states and regions of the U.S. This dissertation study contributes to filling one gap in the literature by studying female college and university presidents in Texas.

Why Texas?

The experiences of female university presidents in Texas are of importance because Texas provides a unique context in which to study the condition of higher education. Texas is a state experiencing rapid population growth without matching higher education growth. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the population of Texas grew by 18.8% from April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2009, in comparison to 9.1% across the United States. Texas' Comptroller of Public Accounts indicates Texas is one of the fastest-growing states in the nation with 12.7% growth since 2000 (*Window on State Government, Susan Combs, State Comptroller of Public Accounts, 2010*). The Comptroller also suggested that as Texas' population becomes more diverse in the coming years, state leaders will have to provide the appropriate educational system necessary to be competitive in a global economy. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Americans have moved to Texas more than any other state since the beginnings of the 2008 recession and is the second most populated state in the nation with 24.8 million people (Sessions, 2009). Texas is also home to five of the top ten cities in the U.S. with growth of more than 100,000 in 2009 (Campbell, 2010). These statistics are seemingly promising for the state in terms of economic growth, but the numbers for Texas higher education graduation rates do not reflect such positivity. In fact, one report asserted that a little over 30% of Texans aged 25 to 34 had college degrees, where the national average for the same age group was 38% (O'Rourke, 2010). O'Rourke also wrote that in 2008,

49% of first-time full-time Texas students who were pursuing a bachelor's degree were able to graduate within six years putting the state at 35th in the nation and 41st in the country in terms of associate degree completion. With a population growth that is one of the highest in the nation and a college graduation rate that ranks close to the bottom, it is vital that Texas equips itself to navigate the challenges that these bipolar statistics bring. While an increasing population can bring many positive changes to a state, low graduation rates could hinder those changes. Texas began to address this trend several years ago. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) published *Closing the Gaps: The Texas Higher Education Plan* (2000) and showed that enrollments in public and independent colleges and universities are not growing as rapidly as those of the overall population of the state. Thus, there is a shortage of degrees and certificates awarded. The report goes on to address closing gaps in higher education in the areas of participation, success, excellence, and research. In order to close these gaps, Texas should recruit, retain, and ultimately graduate students into a growing population. Furthermore, Texas should have more equitable representation in the upper ranks of higher education administration. This administration should exemplify diversity in the same manner as its student population. This study contributes to this effort by examining the experiences of current female university presidents in Texas in order to discover the paths they took to reach their positions. This study helps to inform the field by providing examples of women who have successfully negotiated a path for other females who aspire to the presidency.

Such examples are especially important at the present time. We are at a prolific point in history, as turnover in higher education presidencies is a reality (June, 2007). The

average age of a university president in 1986 was 52, and in 2006 the average age was 60 (American Council on Education, 2007). This correlates to new leadership in higher education as a result of retirement. As a society we have the unique opportunity to diversify our leadership in higher education, to more closely match higher education enrollment demographics. For all these reasons, it is vital that we study the experiences of female college and university presidents to understand how they address the difficulties and become successful in their roles. In doing so, we are able to aid in discovering a path that will be easier for aspiring female presidents to travel.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to describe the experiences of female university presidents who have negotiated the male-dominated world of higher education. Specifically, this research explored the pathways three female university presidents followed in order to reach the upper tier of higher education administration. This study examined how the presidents balance career and family. Additionally the study revealed societal and institutional structures they overcame in order to reach the presidency. This study informs the field of higher education administration by illuminating the conditions these females negotiated on the journey to a university presidency.

Research Questions

A single over-arching question guided this study: What are the lived experiences of female university presidents in Texas? Secondary questions for the study included the following: (a) What factors support or inhibit the rise of the female university presidents;

(b) How do female presidents live the balance between career and family; and (c) What can be learned from the paths of female presidents in higher education?

Significance of the Study

There is noticeably little research focused on understanding and addressing the gender gap in higher education administration. This study aimed to contribute to the literature through the exploration of the journeys three females have taken to the university presidency in Texas. A descriptive study of the lived experiences of female university presidents has the potential to influence institutional policy on the recruitment and promotion of female leaders in higher education. This can result by expanding the field's understanding of the factors that contribute to or inhibit females rising to the presidency. In order for the upper tiers of higher education administration to more closely match the student population, it is necessary for those who are responsible for recruitment and promotion within the ranks to understand and consider the experiences of the female leaders. Perhaps most importantly, this study helps in uncovering the factors that may support or inhibit the rise of female leaders through the ranks of the university. Documenting these experiences creates a roadmap for future female leaders to guide them on their leadership journey. By using or adapting what experiences were helpful and avoiding those that were not, aspiring female presidents may be able to influence change more efficiently. This outcome is of particular importance in Texas, since the state has had little scholarly research conducted on its female college and university presidents. This study also has the opportunity to enlighten those in power at higher education institutions. Those who are currently filling the roles in the upper ranks are overwhelmingly White males (American Council on Education, 2007). There is an

opportunity to use the results of this study in order to inform hiring practices and institutional decisions. This may give females a greater opportunity to lead in higher education administration.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) report, *Closing the Gaps: The Texas Higher Education Plan* (2000), reveals yet another significance of this study, particular to Texas. In order to raise low graduation rates in a growing population, the THECB recommends four goals related to closing the higher education achievement gap. The first goal is to close the gap in participation, with the ultimate goal of increasing participation in higher education to 5.7% of the state population by 2015. The report then advocates for increasing participation of particular ethnic/race groups, specifying Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites.

Gender issues are not mentioned in the report as an area of need in terms of closing the achievement gap. Based on THECB (2000) report, there is *no* gender gap in Texas enrollment. However, based on the same report, it does not appear that there is any gap in overall White student participation, either. Yet, White college students are mentioned as a part of the report. In fact, the report goes so far as to state that while a primary focus of the THECB is increasing participation in higher education among Black and Hispanic students, the board has also set a goal of increasing the participation rate for White students by 5.7% by 2015. If there is no achievement gap for White students and yet a goal of increasing participation of White students has been set, then a goal should also be set for increasing participation among females. While it may be important to increase achievement levels for White students, the study is silent on female achievement. If the THECB is making the case that higher education access and

achievement are statewide challenges, then the absence of women's roles in leadership could be seen as contributing to this challenge. Moreover, the lack of females in higher education leadership roles could lead to overlooking women in the effort to advance college measures. Females should be represented in the goals for addressing this challenge and, in fact, the report begs the question as to why females are not mentioned if the goal is to close the gap by 2015.

Conceptual Framework

Feminist standpoint theory guided this study. This theory challenges social structures and ideologies that further the oppression of women "by documenting women's lives, experiences, and concerns, illuminating gender-based stereotypes and biases, and unearthing women's subjugated knowledge" (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 4). Feminist standpoint epistemology came about in the 1960s and 1970s as females began to raise awareness of the fact that their voices were being excluded from many areas of society. A partial, but by no means complete list of these areas includes politics, business, science, social sciences, and humanities (Brooks, 2007). Brooks writes that because women realized they were essentially being left out of the dialogue, what they witnessed on a daily basis did not align with the theory that they were taught, they formulated "new models of knowledge building" (p. 56). Thus, was created feminist standpoint epistemology.

For purposes of this research, I drew primarily from the works of Brooks (2007), Sprague (2005), Hesse-Biber (2007a), and Harding (2007). Because these scholars draw from the work of pioneers in the field of feminist theory, I went back to the beginnings of feminist standpoint theory to better understand the origins of the theory.

Sprague looks at the ideas of four of the standpoint theorists “who have had a major impact on feminist social science” (p. 41). Hartsock (1983), a political scientist who pioneered the idea of the standpoint focuses on the construction of power. One issue of power directly involved females and the sexual division of labor. As the literature shows us, women are not only responsible for work outside of the home in many cases, but they too are in charge of domestic duties (Basinger, 2001; Howard-Vital & Brunson, 2006; Mason, 2009; Michaels, 2009). Hartsock goes on to say that because so many of these domestic duties are forms of nurturing, power can be seen as the power to do something, the power to help others. Haraway (1978a, 1978b, 1998 & 2004) discussed the idea of embodied vision. She writes that through our senses, we are able to experience the world around us. Because our vision is limited in scope, as we are situated in a specific location, our knowledge is not complete; rather, it is partial. In order to make this knowledge complete, we are able to collaborate to create knowledge. Another scholar, Smith (1996), proposes that at the institutional level, men are nearly unaware of the things that women do, or the concrete experiences of females, because women have for so long provided supports for them. Whether they are taking care of duties at home or administrative duties in the workplace, females have long been responsible for these jobs and men fail to see the work they do. As a sociologist, Smith argues that by looking at the daily lives of women, we are more fully able to see what actually happens in their lives. A fourth scholar, Collins (1986, 1989, & 2000), took feminist standpoint theory a step further with her emphasis on the Black woman’s standpoint. Her ideas on standpoint theory are somewhat broad at first in that she postulates that any person who reflects on experience is a creator of knowledge. She adds more specificity to her ideas when she

addresses the Black feminist standpoint. Collins proposes that Black women have experienced oppression, and this has brought them close to the dominant group. Thus, not only are Black women marginalized because they are females, they are marginalized because of their race as well. Sprague (2005) explains that with these pioneers in feminist standpoint epistemology and many others, we can agree that knowledge is situated and thus partial. This ultimately means that as females, we must collaborate to get a more comprehensive picture of our concrete experiences.

Sprague (2005) goes on to say that having a standpoint is “not the spontaneous thinking of a person or a category of people” (p. 41). She writes “it is the combination of resources available within a specific context from which an understanding might be constructed” (p. 41). Sprague helped in guiding this research in that as a researcher, I was able to take into consideration all of these available resources—the physical location, interests, and the personal history of the participants in order to build knowledge. I used the stories of the presidents to lend a female voice to the world of higher education administration that is so heavily composed of the voices of the White male. As a research method, feminist standpoint has us put women at the core or center of the research process (Brooks, 2007). “Women’s concrete experiences provide the starting point from which to build knowledge” (p. 56). Brooks tells us that concrete experiences are quite simply “what women do” (p. 56). I used what the participants did, or their concrete experiences, on their journeys to becoming a university president in order to inform this research and in turn build a sense of knowing of what they did throughout their careers and in their day-to-day routines. Feminist standpoint epistemology promotes the view that society must not only see but also “understand the world through the eyes and

experiences of oppressed women” (Brooks, 2007, p. 55). It also urges us to “apply the vision and knowledge of oppressed women to social activism and social change” (Brooks, p. 55). This was of particular importance to the present study because while it is necessary to understand the experiences of female university presidents, it is equally important that the knowledge gleaned from an understanding be used for the greater good. The present research study contributes to an understanding by helping aspiring female university presidents learn about barriers that made the pathway difficult for the participants as well as which assets ultimately made them successful. For this study, I have presented this research as a means by which to impact positive social change for females. Feminist standpoint theories seek to achieve several ways of knowing, two of which will be an applicable framework for my research. One is to aid in the explanation of institutional power, and the other is to “provide a resource for the empowerment of oppressed groups” (Harding, 2007, p. 45). The first way of knowing relates directly to the institutional structures that have for so long been present in higher education. The second way of knowing, providing a resource, applies directly to the goal of contributing to the literature a pathway to follow for aspiring female presidents. I believe that the underrepresentation of females in faculty and administrative positions in higher education stems from gender oppression. For purposes of this study, I have described the experiences of female college or university presidents in Texas with a specific focus on the ways in which the leader navigated challenges through her rise to the presidency and during her term as president. hooks (1984), another feminist scholar, offers the term ‘support’ as a means in which females can aid one another in overcoming the oppressive forces that females are still subject to in 2012. The study also emphasizes the importance

of females searching for and ultimately discovering their voices through using the support structures that hooks describes. In describing the personal stories of female presidents in Texas, I have given examples of females who have succeeded in the upper ranks of higher education administration to inform not only females in Texas, but also females entering postsecondary education across the nation, in hopes that they will find these stories informative. More importantly, however, I have unpacked the issues of male dominance in higher education. It is necessary to discover the ways that female university presidents faced, negotiated, and overcame the said dominance in order to reach their position. This understanding creates a roadmap for other females in higher education to follow. Equally important, I make note of the choices these women have made and continue to make in order to navigate a society and an institution that continues to be male dominated. Feminist standpoint theory allows female voices and choices to be heard as well as the story of female experience with male dominated institutions to be told. These are possible because the female is at the center of the research process. As the presidents taking part in this research process were the center of the study, their concrete experiences now “provide the starting point from which to build knowledge” (Brooks, 2007, p. 56). The concrete experiences consist of what women actually do as a part of everyday life. By viewing the experiences through the eyes of female university presidents, I have taken what was learned from the experiences and applied the feminist standpoint “toward bettering the condition of women and creating social change” (p. 60).

In order to facilitate this change, we must make addressing the oppression of females a priority. Females are the group who are “most victimized by sexist oppression” (hooks, 2000, p. 43). As with other types of oppression, sexism is perpetuated by way of

the institutional and social structures that have for so long been in place. This study speaks to the oppression of women by documenting the experiences of female university presidents, a voice often silenced in the upper ranks of higher education administration. It is my hope that the voices of these women are heard, that policymakers will begin to take action to address the barriers to the rise of females in higher education administration, and aspiring administrators will see a path to the presidency. These advancements can encourage the student population by the prospect of being led by someone who is more representative of those attending the institutions.

Oppression of many types can exist at differing levels. In the case of females in higher education, oppression exists in at least two levels. The first is society and its views of women. Valian (1999a) explains that society has ideas or notions about gender. Valian asserts society constructs gender schemas, which “refer to our intuitive hypotheses about the behaviors, traits, and preferences of men and women” (p. 11). In much the same manner, gender roles are our expectations of how men and women are supposed to behave. Because of these ideas and intuitions regarding gender, society creates gender schemas that can become self-fulfilling. Doughty and Leddick (2007) found that despite gains that have been made in the women’s movement, in addition to our society’s attempt at gender enlightenment, most literature still suggests that men and women view one another in traditional roles. As a society, we see females as being subservient to males and many times less capable than their male counterparts. In general, society sees females as needy and expects women to subdue any sort of assertive behavior (Doughty & Leddick). When society creates these schemas, they in turn allow them to bleed into the work atmosphere. Nancheria (2010) showed that even after considering years of

experience, industry type, and global region, females were more likely than males to begin a post-MBA position at a lower level and lower pay. The study upon which Nancheria's article was based also gave possible reasons that employers listed for a disconnect between males and females. Notable reasons were that females might have differing career aspirations or they might leave work temporarily in order to care for children. These findings held true even when both genders had matching career aspirations, and when both did not have children. As a part of the "white, western, middle-class society, the gender schema for men includes being capable of independent, autonomous action...assertive, instrumental, and task oriented" (p. 13). Conversely, the gender schema for females differs in that they are to be "nurturant, expressive, communal, and concerned" (p. 13) about other human beings. Many women work in jobs that require emotional labor. In these cases, females must control their own feelings and emotions in order to affect the emotions of others whether or not the feelings are genuine (Omolade, 2002). Valian shares that higher education is one of the careers in which the upper ranks are overrepresented by males and the lower ranks by women. Due to the fact that a female does not fit the gender expectation of the profession, those around her view her as not quite fit for the profession. Yet again females face the challenge of balance. If they are already perceived as unfit for a professional position, women must carefully strike a balance between being either too female or too male. This may certainly have implications for females who have made it to higher education leadership roles, especially those females who occupy the presidency.

The second level of oppression is institutional or at the college and/or university. At the higher education institutional level, views of the female gender can be similar to

that of societal views but may also present another dimension of challenges for women. One such challenge may relate to the fact that women earn lower salaries, gain tenure at a slower rate, and work at less prestigious institutions of higher learning (Valian, 1999b). This challenge is not specific to faculty members, but again, it appears that if women are facing these issues in the ranks of faculty, they face stiffer challenges as they rise to other higher education roles. Literature shows that many become discouraged early on in their academic careers. Some departments maintain a toxic aura that stifles “women’s enthusiasm for their work and steer them away from research careers” (Wilson, 2004, p. A9). Gender roles, or behavioral expectations for women and men, also prevail at the institutional level. It was said about one president that if she were a male, she would be viewed as an aggressive leader. However, because she was a woman, she was seen as direct, intense and blunt (Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2009). Another female president whom Wolverton, Bower, and Hyle studied stated that regardless of whether or not a female is more nurturing, there is a perception that women care more. As discussed previously, female college and university presidents must also find the delicate balance between work and home life. Females working at 4-year universities many times find stress from the pressure to research which is most important during tenure-track years. However, the tenure-track years often correlate with having small children (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly, 2007). Many females have made the decision to work at community colleges rather than large universities because the community college environment seems more conducive to balancing life and work (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly). Another study suggests that a simple awareness that the academic environment is not as supportive as it could be for many women will begin the change

process (Howard-Vital & Brunson, 2006). The researchers go on to recommend that presidents should examine the environment to view how ideas such as institutional practices and policies, values, and reward structures could be improved upon in order to better support females.

Society and the higher education community are losing the unique opportunity to diversify educational leadership if they continue to be unsupportive of female leaders by perpetuating both societal and institutional oppression (Howard-Vital & Brunson, 2006). It may be logical, therefore, that if a goal of Texas or any other state is to equitably increase participation across genders in colleges and universities, the state would want and need more female presidents to act as role models for the students they represent. Females in higher education leadership positions serve as role models for the students they represent. Limiting or excluding females in leadership positions at higher education levels perpetuates gender oppression by both the oppressors themselves and the victims who are socialized to believe that the status quo is permissible (hooks, 2000). Female role models, for the large numbers of female students currently enrolled in higher education, provide the advantage of allowing women to see someone who is like them. Females taking part in higher education would have the opportunity to see a female perspective rather than the traditional White male perspective. They would also be able to model or modify the experiences of the female college or university presidents should they aspire to leadership roles in higher education. Perhaps most importantly, the female college-going population would be able to witness the unique skill sets and strengths that a female president would bring to a university. Miller (1986) shared with society the qualities that women contribute. She included the attributes of emotionality, developing

those around her, cooperation with others, and creativity. Seemingly, these traits would be beneficial for any college or university.

Feminist Standpoint Theory in Methods

Feminist standpoint theory has been the guide for this study. This theory challenges the social structures and ideologies that oppress women. It also documents “women’s lives, experiences, and concerns...unearthing women’s subjugated knowledge” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 4). This study examines the lived experiences of female university presidents in Texas, thus using the female lens through which to analyze these experiences. The experience of each participant is placed at the core of the research process. The study uses the physical location, interests, personal history, and the concrete experiences of the participants to help build knowledge. Feminist standpoint theory allows for the articulation of the partial perspectives of both the researcher and the participants. As a result of this, the individual stories are then connected with one another to create an expanded view of the lived experiences of female university presidents in Texas. In this way, their collective experiences help to bring forth an awareness of how women experience upper level university administration.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The study continues with an extensive review of the literature in Chapter two. Such themes that are discussed and expanded upon include a history of education for females and female minorities in America. Chapter three is comprised of an extensive discussion of the research methods for this study. Chapter four includes a discussion of the results of the data from the research study and Chapter five looks at the implications

of the results. Chapter five also discusses contributions to the field as well recommendations for future practice and further research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review illustrates the path women have traveled toward education, specifically that of higher education. This chapter is a roadmap beginning with the early history of education for women and leading to the present state of higher education for females in the United States. The map paints a picture not only of the path traveled, but also of the hurdles that females faced in the past and continue to encounter in the present. A clear picture of the past and the present will inform the routes that may be taken in the future.

An important consideration in this literature review is the perspective from which it is written. While education for women in the United States has changed from century to century, it has not been a monolithic experience for all women. Race and class have played and continue to play a role in the educational opportunities available to women. I am of mixed race but have identified for the majority of my adult life as White. Both because I identify as a White female and because the available literature is largely based on a White, middle class perspective, this literature review comes from that point of view. This should not be construed to mean that the experiences of minority females are less valuable or that I will not address them in any way. In fact, I believe it is important to include multiple perspectives in research in order to stop the cycle of silencing the voice

of the minority within the minority. To that end, I have attempted to read broadly about the experiences of women in education and found that within the small amount of literature that addresses the experiences of female minorities, the majority looks at the experiences of African American women, followed by Hispanic women. Asian American women and Native American women have seemingly rarely been studied in regard to their educational experiences.

History of Education for Female Students

No matter the race or ethnicity of women, education in general for females has been grossly inadequate and inequitable when compared to the education of males. Education of women has been limited by prevailing notions that educating women was unnecessary. The theories of Charles Darwin suggested women should be limited in their education due to both “physical and intellectual limitations” to their gender (Nidiffer, 2002, p.8). Historically, women have been seen by society as producers of the human race. The primary role they were expected to fulfill was as producer of offspring (Nidiffer, 2002). Moreover, women had fathers and husbands to take care of them, making education unnecessary, or at best secondary to marriage and childbearing. Though women have made significant strides in education, specifically in higher education, there is much more work to be done if women are to be part of an equitable plane in higher education. Women’s higher education has traditionally been a web of contradictions and challenges based on gender (Bank, 2003).

Females have made progress in advancing their education, especially in the last few decades (Jeynes, 2007). This progress has been centuries in the making, as early in the history of the U.S., education of women was blockaded by longstanding Anglo-Saxon

tradition. According to the religious leaders of the time, there was a divine order that dictated appropriate roles for men and women (Nidiffer, 2002). Religious practice promoted the belief that women were to operate within the domestic sphere and that men had the sole right to take part in the political, social, and economic realms. Educating women was wrong because colleges, at the time, were for the use of educating ministers, statesmen, politicians, and farmers (Nidiffer). It was popular thought that women could not possibly hold these positions so it seemed useless that they be educated. In fact, women were taught to read only in some instances so that they could read the Bible and have salvation (McClelland, 1992). During the pre-Revolutionary era, there was a separation of reading and writing depending on class and gender and only a select few upper-class women such as Abigail Adams, Anne Bradstreet, and Mercy Otis Warren learned to read as well as write (Hobbs, 1995). Women began taking advantage of educational opportunities that were heightened during the time of the Revolutionary War and some political leaders of the time, such as Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, and Thomas Jefferson were proponents of education for women (Jeynes). Nonetheless, educational opportunities for women were extremely limited. Men, on the other hand, were privy to more education from the start. Higher education for men in the United States dates to the opening of Harvard College in 1636 (Renn, 2008). Females were not to take part in postsecondary education on a large scale until almost two centuries later (Renn).

Education for Women in the 1700s

Education, though not always higher education, for women became widespread in the 1700s. For the most part, schooling was informal and included learning about being a

homemaker, wife, and mother (McClelland, 1992). Education for females during the 1700s was focused on training women in general household duties in order for them to find suitable husbands. During colonial times much as it is now, women's education was dependent on race, gender, and class (McClelland). In New England, girls and boys were allowed to go to "dame schools" that offered a curriculum equal to kindergarten standards in the United States today (Hobbs, 1995; National Women's History Museum, 2007). In such a curriculum, girls learned such skills as knitting and sewing. After the dame school, boys were given the option of attending town schools, but only those females whose families could afford to send them to "venture" schools were able to continue pursuing their education. For most women, the dame schools were the end of further education and were even seen as "unnecessary, even dangerous" (Hobbs, 1995, p. 9). In the South, many plantations were located so far from one another that private tutors were brought in to teach the boys. Sometimes girls were able to sit and listen to these tutoring sessions (McClelland). At times, a governess was hired to teach the girls cooking and needlework. On many plantations it was forbidden to teach slaves how to read or write, though owners did teach their slaves how to read the Bible. The Quaker culture of the time not only promoted education of slaves, but of both males and females, as they were more tolerant of education for all people (McClelland). Even so, much of girls' education was related to developing domestic skills (National Women's History Museum).

The National Women's History Museum (2007) describes the adventure schools that became more popular towards the end of the 1700s as America moved towards industry. These schools taught single subjects and were usually only open for a few

months at a time. Even the venture schools offered little in the way of academic content, but they did teach “music, dancing, embroidery, French, and other subjects that were designed to make girls more marriageable” (McClelland, 1992, p. 56). A pivotal event occurred in 1787 with the establishment of The Young Ladies Academy, the first all girls’ school in the United States. This school served as a model for many of the academies and seminaries that were established in the 1800s. Colonial America was a place in which select women, usually White and middle-class, were taught to read, but rarely taught to write, but as Republican Mothers, many felt responsible for the schooling of their children (Hobbs, 1995). Hobbs also writes that as the century progressed, the mothers of the Republic took part in the “new religious revivals” (p. 5) of the 1790s, which aided in the idea of the True Womanhood. The True Womanhood reiterated the female’s role in literacy and family service. Many women were responsible for teaching their families to read, but all in all, women were excluded from higher education through statutes established at higher education institutions (Thelin, 2004). One story of a Miss Lucinda Foote in 1784 illustrates this fact. She was granted admission to Yale due to her extensive knowledge of the classics and the Bible. However, she was given only a piece of paper to mark this admission and nothing else (Thelin). Though she earned admission, she never attended classes at Yale. In fact, there are no records of a woman of the colonial period receiving a degree (Thelin). Women began attending college and earning more degrees in the 1880s.

Education for Women in the 1800s

After the Revolution, “common schooling for girls expanded rapidly” (Hobbs, 1995, p. 12) and some schools became coeducational as female academies, seminaries,

and women's colleges were formed. In the decades following the Civil War, girls began attending secondary schools in record numbers and this was a time "of great promise for young middle-class white women" in the United States (Rury, 1991, p. 4). Though progress was shown in the years after the Civil War, the period also perpetuated the "true" woman who was "a predominantly middle-class white woman bound to the home in the service not only of the family and the state, but of the church" (McClelland, 1992, p. 58). She guarded her home as only a female could. Even as this view of the "true" woman continued to be promoted, there was also the "new" woman who was more likely to get away from the home and move elsewhere (McClelland). The "new" woman was part of a group who began to advocate for higher standards in education for women. Between 1800 and 1860, there were at least 14 institutions that enrolled females for advanced or college work (Thelin, 2004). During the last quarter of the century, several of the "Seven Sisters" colleges were established (Hobbs, 1995). The Female Seminary Movement was started in the early 1800s by such women as Mary Lyon, Emma Willard, and Catharine Beecher. In 1814, Willard opened the Middlebury Female Seminary and just eight years later the Troy Female Seminary was founded in New York and is recognized as being the first institution of higher education to offer a curriculum as rigorous as that of male seminaries (Hobbs, 1995; Jeynes, 2007). Beecher founded Wheaton Female Seminary and Hartford Female Seminary with a focus of teaching as more than just a profession but as a ministry (Jeynes). It seemed that the solution to the shortage was to hire more females to teach, but this meant that women would be working out of the domestic sphere. In the end, more women were hired to teach because they were willing to work for one-third the pay that men were receiving for the same job.

Females promoted female education in other ways besides becoming teachers. Sarah Josepha Hale became the editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, a women's magazine, in 1836. Hale used the magazine as a platform for educating women and posted openings for women's schools across the nation (National Women's History Museum, 2007). Vassar College was one that she supported. She gave the college free publicity and convinced the establishment to begin hiring female teachers. At the 1848 Women's Rights Conference in Seneca Falls, females called for coeducation in schools. By 1860, most states had set up these systems (National Women's History Museum). The late 1800s saw the rise of the private institution to which only the wealthy could send their children. Ironically, many institutions were established in the traditionally conservative South as an alternative to sending women to university in the more liberal North. The thinking was that it was far better to establish colleges close to home that operated under Southern religious and regional values than enroll Southern women in Northern colleges (Thelin, 2004).

Some of the earliest women's colleges including Knox University in Illinois, Wesleyan Female Seminary in Macon, Georgia, and Masonic University in Selma, Alabama were opened in the 1840s and 1850s and seemingly the Midwest was the most accommodating to women's colleges with Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ohio each having three (Thelin, 2004). In the South, higher education had a focus on academics, but also prepared females for more traditional roles such as wife, mother, and hostess (Thelin). There is some debate regarding which establishment, either Mount Holyoke or Wesleyan College, was the first women's college (Renn, 2008). Regardless, Mount Holyoke is cited as being the "most thorough and academically advanced women's college" (Thelin, 2004,

p. 55) at the time. There were 155 women's colleges in the U.S. by 1880. In 1837, Oberlin College began admitting women, as did Antioch College in 1852 (Nidiffer, 2002). Vassar College was founded in 1861. Its coursework for females was equal to that offered for men's courses, but students were from America's wealthiest families. Thus, females who could not afford to attend were not able to receive the same education as their wealthy female counterparts. By the middle of the 1880s, many people agreed that education was not necessary for women. At the time, it was thought that the body was a closed system, thus as one part of the body was functioning, it was depriving other parts of energy (Nidiffer). In other words, if the female brain was being educated, it was taking valuable sustenance away from the parts of the body meant for child bearing.

In what is coined as the Progressive Era, or the age of the New Woman, was the time of coeducation. Hobbs (1995) writes that it was slow to begin in the South, but the Midwest led the way with schools like Antioch College of Ohio (1852), the University of Iowa (1865), and Michigan (1870). Within institutions that did admit women, men did not make it easy for women to exist there. Misogynistic cartoons and stories published in campus literature made fun of females. Women were excluded from campus clubs and societies and were often completely ignored by faculty in the form of refusal to answer questions or allow participation in discussions (Nidiffer, 2002). As the Civil War began and raged on, more colleges began to admit females due to the shortage of males able to enter (Renn, 2008). The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 subsidized the establishment of institutions of higher education (Micheletti, 2002). The act made tuition lower than it had been in the past and by this point in history, many state institutions were coeducational, giving opportunity to women (Hobbs, 1995). The Land Grant Act did not require that

land grant institutions educate women. But notably, neither did it prohibit them from doing so. Land Grant institutions needed revenue from paying students and public schools needed teachers. Women paid to attend college and thus fulfilled the need of revenue. Female teachers were many times paid one-third the salary of male teachers thus, if hired, women were cheaper labor (Nidiffer). As more institutions became coeducational, sometimes the public support was celebrated, but the practice of coeducation received mixed reviews (Thelin, 2004). Females were faced with tracking into certain fields of study and discouragement of others. Moreover, they were prohibited from taking part in many of the male dominated social organizations and activities (Thelin).

The 1870s saw the publication of *Sex in Education; or a Fair Chance for the Girls* (1873) by Dr. Edward H. Clarke. Dr. Clark was a Harvard Medical School faculty member who argued that women's brains were not as developed as men's and therefore, could not tolerate as much mental stimulation (higher education). He asserted that women, therefore, should not be taught in the same manner as men (Nidiffer, 2002), effectively arguing that women should not be admitted to colleges and universities that served males. This publication was seen as a triumph for proponents of male-only education. Until the 1870s, the majority of women who went to college were enrolled in one of three types of institutions: normal schools; all-female universities; and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU), which were coeducational from their beginnings (Renn, 2008). Again, women were excluded from many of the extracurricular activities afforded to men. However, as Thelin (2004) writes, this had two positive effects on the higher education of women. First, they established their own organizations to defy the

dominant male culture in higher education. They also created opportunities for themselves to participate in journalism, athletic groups, music, and literary groups when women's colleges were created within the coeducational structure. By the late 1800s, women seemed to be making significant gains in higher education (Thelin).

Education for Women in the 1900s

By 1900, “females outnumbered males by almost one-third in public secondary schools and women were almost one in five college students” (Rury, 1991, p. 11). This period gave rise to more coeducational institutions of higher education. Interestingly, while women struggled to gain access to all-male institutions, the 1944 G.I. Bill, which provided college education for World War II veterans, resulted in many women's universities becoming coeducational. Just as men's colleges became coeducational in times of war to keep enrollment numbers high, many female colleges accepted men to accommodate the high numbers of veterans who were using the G.I. Bill to take part in higher education (Micheletti, 2002). Between 1880 and 1920, women's colleges became a prosperous feature of American higher education. The “Seven Sisters”—Wellesley, Radcliffe, Mount Holyoke, Smith, Vassar, Barnard, and Bryn Mawr, in addition to the coordinate colleges of Pembroke at Brown, Jackson at Tufts, and Sophie Newcomb at Tulane granted opportunities for females. Thelin writes (2004) that these institutions shared two advantages: good facilities due to large endowments and young women from wealthy families.

Affirmative action later aided in females having more access to higher education. Since the inception of affirmative action in the 1960s, women, in particular White women, have benefitted from its policies (Baez, 2002). Education is one area in which a

range of mandatory and voluntary activities has been instated by affirmative action policies. The said policies are in the form of a written action plan intended to help in the “correcting of any imbalances by gender and ethnicity” (Somers, 2002a, p. 212) and in regards to higher education, these policies have had an impact on admissions. Affirmative action policy has aided both gender and ethnic minorities, but remains a controversial subject in education policy.

Title IX of the Education Acts of 1972 also increased higher education access for females. Title IX required that public institutions and all other institutions that receive federal funding admit women (Renn, 2008). Admissions and scholarship for women were two key issues that Title IX addressed. Title IX coupled with the Fourteenth Amendment have given protection to women in the area of admission to higher education. Two of the most famous cases included two public, all-male military academies, the Citadel and the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) to which females were eventually granted admissions. Scholarship requirements were also addressed through Title IX and it was ruled through *Sharif by Salahuddin v. New York State Department of Education* (1989) that dissemination of scholarships no longer would be determined solely on standardized test scores (Somers, 2002b). The high school students who filed suit argued that even though females scored approximately 60 points lower on the SAT, they maintained higher grades in high school and college than their male counterparts. This argument was viewed as valid by the New York district court and SAT scores were no longer used as the only criteria for admissions.

The Education of Female Minorities

It is important to note that in describing the history of women's access to higher education, the road has not been the same for all females. Women of color have had less access to higher education than have White women. Whereas White women faced exclusion based on gender, women of color faced a dual challenge. Some institutions refused to admit women of color based on gender, while others openly cited race as the cause for denying admission. Legal, racial segregation kept women of color out of the few institutions that admitted female students. In the 1900s, many Black colleges were not on par with universities who admitted Whites in that they offered little in the way of college level curriculum (Thelin, 2004). Thelin points out that in a 1937 issue of *Life* magazine, dedicated entirely to the American college, not a single mention was made of a Black college nor was a photograph of a Black college student included. Many private and public institutions were closed to students of color until landmark case verdicts such as *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) were enforced. Native Americans were given the opportunity to attend institutions of higher education as an act of philanthropy. Native American students were allowed to attend colonial colleges and later the Indian schools of Dartmouth, Harvard, and William and Mary. Wealthy donors saw this as a chance to convert them to Christianity, but ultimately, many of the Native American students "succumbed either to measles, consumption, or alcoholism" (Thelin, 2004, p. 30) because they were caught between two worlds. After the "Trail of Tears" to Indian Territory in the 1830s, the Cherokee National Council erected public schools in every district in their Nation (Mihsuah, 1995). By 1851, male and female seminaries were also opened. However, not all Cherokee students wanted a

“White education” and, in fact, some students who attended these schools were called “White Cherokees” by those who believed that the schools were elitist (Miheuah, 1995, p. 105). Researchers give limited information on Native American students, and fewer still tell of female Native American students. This further reiterates the fact that there is little research on the history of women of color in higher education and that the effects of discrimination have proven long-lasting. To the present day, fewer African American and Latina women attend college than do their White counterparts. There are even fewer still of other minority groups such as Native American women and Asian women.

Females Currently Enrolled in Higher Education

In 2007, females made up approximately 57.2% of total enrollment at degree-granting institutions across the United States as reported by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2008). Another report from the NCES (U.S Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, & Higher Education, General Information Survey (HEGIS), 2003) reported the numbers of females and males who obtained degrees from the 1976-1977 school year to the 2001-2002 school year:

Table 1

Degrees Awarded to Males and Females from 1976-1977 to 2001-2002

Type of degree awarded	Number of Degrees Awarded (Female)	Percentage of Degrees Awarded	Number of Degrees Awarded (Male)	Percentage of Degrees Awarded
Associate’s	357, 024	60%	238, 109	40%
Bachelor’s	742, 084	57%	549, 816	43%
Master’s	282, 998	59%	199, 120	41%

According to the study, across the nation, females are not only enrolling in higher numbers than males at institutions of higher learning, they are also being awarded more degrees. Based on this study, with the exception of doctoral degrees, females out earn males in degrees awarded.

A 2005 report from the NCES (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Science, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005), illustrated by 2003, women outpaced their male counterparts as 51% of females had entered and/or completed postsecondary education, as opposed to 41% of their male counterparts. In fact, the report that disaggregated information according to race/ ethnicity and gender showed that almost all race/ethnicities and both males and females increased participation rates. The only exception was Hispanic males who showed a decrease in participation rates. A recent study from the NCES (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009c) showed females earned 62% of all associate's degrees conferred in 2006-2007 as well as 57% of all bachelor's degrees. The same study showed that in 2006-2007, women earned 61% of all master's degrees and approximately 50% of all doctoral degrees. As of September 14, 2010, the Council of Graduate Schools (Bell, 2010) reported that for the first time, females earned more doctoral degrees than men at 50.4% of all doctoral degrees earned. Although this may seem as if women inched by their male cohorts in the number of doctorates earned in 2008-2009, there was actually a 6.3% increase from the previous year as opposed to a 1.0% increase for men (Bell).

Though these statistics can paint the condition of female education in an extremely positive, forward-moving light, there is much more to be seen upon further inspection. Sax (2007) made reference to one such positive illustration in a 2006 article

from *The New York Times*. It read, “At Colleges, Women are Leaving Men in the Dust.” Sax described the true picture of females who take part in higher education as one that is far more dismal than the title of the article suggests. She discussed the fact that though women may have reached parity with men in recent years, in regard to enrollment, they are still entering and completing higher education with large gaps in confidence, higher levels of stress, and more financial concerns. Sax goes on to say some of the stressors that college women face include spending more time than male counterparts studying, as well as taking care of household and family duties. This is a trend that has permeated to the ranks of female faculty and administrators as well. Jeynes (2007) contends “the fact that people are even discussing a college gender gap that now favors females shows just how far women’s education has advanced in the past few centuries” (p. 123). Perhaps there is truth in what Jeynes writes, but there is more than a need of mere discussion. The obstacles that are faced not only by college-going females but also by those women who are faculty members are evidence of the need for targeted action.

Female Faculty

Some females who graduate from institutions of higher education decide to pursue careers in higher education. For those aspiring to any position in higher education administration, the traditional starting point in the pipeline of academia is as a faculty member (Burton, 2009; Hamilton, 2004; Wessel & Keim, 1994). However, the literature points to the fact that female faculty members face many roadblocks on the path to higher education administration. In all areas “women are better represented in lower ranks than in higher or managerial ones; more often found in less-secure, contingent positions and

less-prestigious institutions; concentrated in traditionally female subject areas; and, receiving lower salaries” (Acker & Webber, 2006, p. 2).

Tenure for Female Faculty

In the professoriate, there is a disparity in women faculty across all ranks, especially in the ranks of tenured faculty. Thus, one of the challenges that women face in academia is gaining tenure. There is a protocol for achieving tenure and it begins with becoming a faculty member at an institution of higher learning. Typically, the faculty member is assessed by some formal means following a probationary period. If the person is successful, he or she has several more years before a full tenure review takes place (Acker & Webber, 2006). Literature shows, however, that tenure rates are lower for women than for men (Grose, 2005). This is even more evident in certain disciplines. In the field of science and engineering, data shows that 90 percent of full professors are male, “75 percent of full professors at research universities are men; and 64 percent of full-time faculty members in the U.S. are men” (Conklin & Robbins-McNeish, 2006, p. 26). Women are also balancing biological clocks with the tenure clock (Acker & Armenti, 2004). Some others have explained the disparity by suggesting that women are perceived to be less serious and less dedicated than their male counterparts (Soto, 2002). In 1997, over 25% of tenured faculty were females and only one-fifth ranked as full professors (Cooper, 2002). Cooper explained the lower tenure rates in yet another way. He states that there are two major reasons for the numbers presented above. There are sex differences in access to tenured positions as well as sex differences in the outcomes of tenure and promotion decisions. Not only are females less likely to have access to the positions, many times they may fall behind due to extra job demands such as assignments

to university committees, heavier teaching loads, and advising demands. Cooper pointed out that many times women in academe also have less access to powerful mentors and their networks. With all of these factors combined, women have a collective disadvantage in regards to gaining tenure. This is inequitable as females “bring new perspectives and new approaches to research, scholarship, and teaching” (Carriuolo, 2003, p. 18). The disparity in female tenure ultimately impacts the population of students represented. Conklin and Robbins-McNeish (2006) write that the “most accurate predictor of subsequent success for women undergrads is the percentage of women faculty at their colleges” (p. 27). They go on to say that students see the difficulties of women and minority groups who hold isolated leadership positions on campuses and the students “see a competitive, narrow structure and don’t want to join it” (p. 29). Not only is it a challenge for females to gain tenure, the various reasons that make it an obstacle, in the first place, present a new set of problems.

Work-Life Balance

Women are also struggling to find a work-life balance of a demanding career and a family. It is important to note that this struggle for balance is not seen just in female faculty members but with females in all areas of higher education. Again, this is an area in which women are at a distinct disadvantage in relation to their male coworkers. Howard-Vital and Brunson (2006) reported in their study that 38% of their female respondents who were either tenured, tenure-track, or administrators in academia, reported that they maintained the household (laundry, cleaning, cooking, etc.).

Cook (2009) writes that university expectations have not changed much in half a century. She states that in the 1950s, a male professor who worked full-time for a

university had a wife to take care of the home, and moved elsewhere if needed when other university jobs came open. The norms and expectations have changed little, but the said expectations are not conducive for a female who wants to have a career in academia and raise a family (Basigner, 2001; Howard-Vital & Brunson, 2006). Basinger (2001) explains that many times females have more family demands to organize than males. Women with children may find additional challenges at work, namely missing out on valuable, sometimes necessary, networking opportunities due to child care commitments (Mason, 2009). Mason also notes that women who do leave academia to have children, often find it difficult to reenter the university. She points out that women who are able to find balance while working and raising a family, are more likely than men to be called upon to care for ailing parents later in their careers. Sadly, some women chose to leave the working world altogether as they find themselves unable to juggle career and family (Michaels, 2009). Equally disheartening is that for many of those who are deciding to pursue a career full-time having children becomes problematic. They may forgo having children to focus on their careers or decide not to have children at all because they believe that it may harm their career. Howard-Vital and Brunson (2006) discovered that 42% of the female respondents in their study did not have children.

Not only are females in higher education faced with postponing or deciding not to have children, they are also faced with working in “less prestigious institutions” (Acker & Webber, 2006, p. 2). Studies suggest that women have found more success in balancing a career and family while working at the community college rather than at 4-year colleges or larger universities (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly, 2007). Based on this study, community colleges seem to offer a balance of teaching and having a family.

This is not to say that female faculty at community colleges do not face challenges such as worry about tenure and inequities at home and at work, but it appears that they are better able to strike a balance not usually found in other academic environments (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly). While the fact that some females have discovered equilibrium at the community college level is a positive step, we must question what 4-year colleges and universities are missing because women are not working at these institutions in sufficient numbers.

Female Administrators

The ranks of faculty are the “heart and soul of any academic institution” and leading the faculty is the chief academic officer or CAO- “bearing the title of provost, vice president for academic affairs, or dean, among others” (Walton & McDade, 2001, p. 85). McTighe (2009) writes, however, that it is difficult to determine any progress made or regression that has occurred in the hiring of academic deans due to the challenge of collecting data on these women. Little has been written about the CAO, and even smaller still is the amount of literature on women who hold this position (Walton & McDade). The gender gap seen thus far changes little as a select few women rise to these upper administrative positions in higher education. Again, the majority of progress that women have made has been at the community college level, liberal arts colleges, and institutions at lower levels of the academic hierarchy (Lively, 2000). Historically, the area of student affairs has been more female-friendly than other sections of administration. Sadly, other high-level academic positions, including presidency have not been as accessible to women. In addition to limited access to these jobs women also face another set of circumstances in regard to assessment of their leadership.

Strongly held cultural beliefs about leaders and leadership are rampant in colleges and universities, often expressed as metaphors used to depict leaders. Hero, great man, quarterback, superman, or father figure do not elicit images of women, nor do they readily generate analogous expressions that describe women leaders.

Maintaining such limited definitions and images of leaders leaves women with a narrow band of acceptable behaviors as leaders. (Amey & Eddy, 2002, p. 484)

Females in administrative leadership positions often report feelings of being marginalized and not feeling authentic. They have an even greater internal battle when faced with adhering to professional norms to receive a promotion or remaining genuine and perhaps displaying a female construction of leadership (Amey & Eddy). In addition to the leadership challenge, women in the administrative ranks also face the task of playing the networking game. Walton and McDade (2001) reported that though the female CAOs that they studied attempted to increase their visibility in the world of higher education, very few had taken part in the prestigious development programs “that provide visibility and comparisons with larger numbers of men” (p. 95). Mentoring is, therefore, recommended, and there are implications that mentorship is a factor aiding women who aspire to the presidency (Brown, 2005).

Females as College and University Presidents

A report from American Council on Education in 2007 stated that of the 2,148 campus presidents who responded to a survey, 23% were female. Though this is more female representation than in the past, the report did not have promising results for closing the gender gap. In fact, it concluded that, the demographic description of the average college or university president was slowly changing. Significantly, however, it

has remained White (86%) and male (77%) (American Council on Education, 2007). Women are, however, making strides in higher education. More females are earning positions in higher education administration than ever before. Still these forward movements seem unhurried when compared to the numbers of females enrolled in colleges and universities. The total number of women enrolled in college in the Fall of 2002 was 9,145,600. In the Fall of 2003, there were 166,415 full professors in the United States. Only 39,366 or approximately 4% of these were women (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2005). An even more recent study illustrated the fact that the percentage of presidents who were female more than doubled from 10% in 1986 to 23% in 2006 (American Council on Education, 2007). However, progress in this area has slowed significantly. The study also produced statistics that align with studies showing the added stressors of a work-life balance for females. At the time of the aforementioned study, only 63% of women presidents were currently married as opposed to 89% of males. Twenty-four percent of the females were either divorced or never married. Only 7% of males were assigned to this category. When looking at these facts and figures we are forced to see that though women have made strides towards equality in higher education, there still remains a gap in access to higher education positions. Quite simply, they are still not on par with their male counterparts.

Studies on female firsts as presidents and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of colleges and universities are being conducted more frequently. Turner (2007) conducted biographical sketches on three women of color who had risen to the presidency as the first females at their respective institutions. Her study reiterated the fact that the women had indeed faced many of the same challenges including finding a work life balance and

facing a chilly climate in academe. Wootton (2006) conducted a similar study of female administrators in higher education in Oklahoma. The study included female presidents, provosts, and vice presidents. She found that leadership perspective, leadership performance, motivation factors, and barriers in academe were common challenges that all of the women faced. Many other studies have been done on what is beneficial for females seeking the presidency and what are seen as hindrances (Brown, 2005; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Stout-Stewart, 2005). Collectively these studies suggest that female college and university presidents travel similar paths to attain higher education positions. Career patterns commonly seen, begin with the college president, male or female, as a student, progressing to faculty member, then department chair or dean, academic vice president, and then president (Wessel & Keim, 1994). Female university presidents walk a similar path beginning with faculty positions. They progress to a department chair, dean, and then provost, before taking on the role of president (Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2009).

Other Challenges Faced by Females in Higher Education

As stated previously, females in higher education face many challenges, including a chilly climate (Twombly & Rosser, 2002) in academe. The idea of a chilly climate for women in higher education has been, and is, a pervasive force. The term “chilly climate” describes “working conditions and collegiality among peers that devalue women” (p. 465). This climate is encouraged through the use of male-dominated language as well as a lack of recognition of women’s accomplishments. This is especially prevalent for female college or university presidents. Despite having attained these leadership positions, they many times must negotiate the fact that they are “looked down upon”

should they: (a) wish to take maternity leave; (b) have gender oriented research interests; or (c) exhibit leadership styles differing from men (Twombly & Rosser). Some women also face the “snow woman effect.” Mason (2009) defines this as the “layers of missed opportunities, family obligations, and small and large slights” (p. 2) that snowball over the course of a female administrator’s career and thus slow her progress in navigating the pipeline in comparison to males.

In addition to negotiating an unsupportive work environment, many female college presidents must also negotiate competing professional and personal responsibilities. Some female college presidents have found ways in which to balance the family and work. Research suggests that mentoring has been a critical factor, and is in fact an invaluable tool for recruiting and preparing women for the college presidency (Brown, 2005). As mentors current female presidents can serve as role models for aspiring female presidents and show the ways in which to achieve a work life balance (Brown). Mentorship also affords the opportunity to discuss the accomplishments of female university presidents and the impact that they have on the school and community (Lane, 2005). In short, research points to the fact that many female college and university presidents have found success in achieving balance in their professional and private lives. However, the problem of the added stressors of simply being a female in a higher education position has by no means been alleviated.

Higher Education in Texas

A report published in 2000 by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) stated that enrollments in public and independent colleges and universities are not growing at the rate of the overall population of the state. This has resulted in a

shortage of degrees and certificates awarded. As a result, the THECB recommends four goals to close the achievement gap. The first is to close the gap in participation, with the ultimate goal of increasing participation to 5.7% of the population by 2015. The report next describes increasing participation by ethnicity, specifically Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites.

When looking at the THECB report, the focus and goal are to close the achievement gap in higher education enrollment. Gender in enrollment rates is never mentioned as an area in which the gap must be closed. There is *not* a gender gap in higher education enrollment rates in the United States (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Science, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). The THECB report echoes national trends in that there is *not* a gender gap in Texas enrollment either. However, it does not appear that there is any type of gap in overall White participation, yet enrollment of White students is discussed in this report. If Whites are a group that should be mentioned in the study even in the absence of an enrollment gap, so too should females. Failing to mention females suggests they are not a focus of a statewide challenge to increase higher education enrollment. If it is indeed a fact that females across the nation are enrolling and graduating with more degrees than males, we are forced to ask why females are not mentioned in the study, especially if this study proclaims the need to improve higher education efforts within the next several years. We return to the fact that oppression for females in higher education occurs at two levels, both through societal and institutional structures. As the leadership in higher education should closely match enrollment, Texas should focus on having more females in leadership roles at the university, specifically in the role of president.

Summary of the Literature

Females have faced many challenges in their quest for access to higher education. Women have taken great steps in order to disprove the claim that education for females should be minimal due to the “physical and intellectual limitations” to their gender (Nidiffer, 2002, p.8). Just as this perception has changed somewhat over the course of hundreds of years, so too has it taken time to arrive at the current status of females in higher education. One cannot deny that females have progressed in the world of higher education in their enrollment and attainment of all higher education degrees from associates to doctorates (Bell, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics & Higher Education, General Information Survey (HEGIS), 2003). However, women participating at all levels of higher education daily face trials that prevent them from being on a leveled playing field with their male counterparts. They are still over-represented at the lower rungs of faculty rank, and have difficulty attaining tenure, in addition to finding a work-life balance (Acker & Webber, 2006; Basinger, 2001; Mason, 2009). Those who do gain access to higher education administration positions many times are left to deal with the “chilly climate” of academia (Twombly & Rosser, 2002). Women of color face even more obstacles than White females (Collins, 1986; Jackon & Harris, 2007). Regardless of her race, however, it is evident that a female in higher education has many challenges to overcome even at the present day and age. This echoes the importance of this research study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

A Qualitative Study Approach

Women are still outnumbered by men as university presidents in 2012. In fact, since the last *The American College President* (American Council on Education, 2007) study, progress for women in this arena has slowed. The existing social structures and patterns that have long been in place in our society, and have been directly transferred to the world of higher education where they work to oppress women, are a reality that females at all levels of higher education must negotiate. I sought to understand how participants work through the dominant White male culture of the university environment to reach the role of president. By analyzing the journeys of female university presidents in Texas, it was possible to inform the scholarly discourse related to what aspiring female college and university presidents must do in order to negotiate male dominated institutions and society.

The focus of this study was to explore and analyze the lived experiences of female university presidents in Texas, for the purpose of discovering the paths they traveled to reach their status as president. Using qualitative methods for this study was appropriate as qualitative research “is a broad approach to the study of social phenomena” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 2). Qualitative researchers attempt to understand their participants through multiple methods. Not only do researchers talk to the participants, but they also take other aspects into account such as documents that relate to the participants.

Participants for this study were female university presidents. I gathered data related to the experiences of the participants and analyzed what their experiences mean individually and collectively for other females in similar positions. Drawing from feminist standpoint theory, my personal perspective as a researcher was used to craft the conclusions of this study. Feminist theories in qualitative research are crafted “across issues and disciplines” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 7) and place females at the center of the research process.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

This section will serve to describe the theoretical framework that guided this study. Feminist research serves the purpose of surfacing and challenging social structures and ideologies that aid in the oppression of women. Research conducted from a feminist standpoint does this “by documenting women’s lives, experiences, and concerns, illuminating gender-based stereotypes and biases, and unearthing women’s subjugated knowledge” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 4). Feminist standpoint theorists seek the involvement of females within explicit contexts and give special emphasis to the dynamics of multiple identities including gender, race, and class (Naples, 2007). Harding (2007) writes that feminist standpoint theories developed in the 1970s and 1980s. From these early studies there are four goals for feminist standpoint theories which include: 1) a more accurate explanation of relations between institutional power and sexist knowledge claims; 2) accounting for research success in the social sciences that were guided by feminist politics; 3) parameters for feminist research in the future; and 4) “a resource for the empowerment of oppressed groups” (p. 45). Brooks (2007) says “feminist standpoint epistemology is a unique philosophy of knowledge building that

challenges us to (1) see and understand the world through the eyes and experiences of oppressed women and (2) apply the vision and knowledge of oppressed women to social activism and social change” (p. 55) An overarching goal of this research was to document the experiences of female university presidents in order to expose oppressive structures and ideologies, and identify how women negotiate these conditions to achieve success within higher education administration. The results of this study inform the field about the barriers that exist for women aspiring to the university presidency and offer plausible models for ascending through the ranks.

The origins of feminist standpoint theory are rooted in the realization by college women that their voices were essentially being silenced in many areas of life (Brooks, 2007). As this epiphany took place in the 1960s and 1970s, women began to heighten the awareness of others that their experiences were being omitted from society’s dialogue (Brooks, 2007) that had for so long spoken of the White male perspective. Women challenged the fact that what they experienced every day was not the same as theories they were taught at university. Thus, they formulated “new models of knowledge building” (p. 56) and then materialized feminist standpoint theory. Sprague (2005) says the standpoint of an individual is “not the spontaneous thinking of a person or a category of people” but rather “it is the combination of resources available within a specific context from which an understanding might be constructed” (p. 41). Women are at the core of the research process in feminist standpoint theory (Brooks, 2007) and “women’s concrete experiences provide the starting point from which to build knowledge” (p.56). These concrete experiences are quite simply “what women do” (p. 56) in the day-to-day routines of life. The concrete experiences have aided women in cultivating knowledge

and “unique sets of skills” (p. 57). In order for the concrete experiences of women to be fully viewed, society not only has to see, but “understand the world through the eyes and experiences of oppressed women” (Brooks, 2007, p. 55), as well. Feminist standpoint epistemology proposes that the vision and knowledge of women should be applied to social activism and change (Brooks). Feminist standpoint theories seek to achieve several ways of knowing, two of which were an applicable framework in this study. One way of knowing is to aid in the explanation of institutional power. The other is to “provide a resource for the empowerment of oppressed groups” (Harding, 2007, p. 45). Scholars also write that females have a double consciousness. They have a “heightened awareness not only of their own lives but of the lives of the dominant group (men) as well” (Brooks, 2007, p. 63). Though the daily routines and work of women may go unnoticed by men, women are able to view their own experiences within the dominant group of males, thus, women see both sides.

A feminist standpoint is “a way of understanding the world, a point of view of social reality that begins with, and is developed directly from, women’s experiences” (Brooks, 2007, p. 60). Brooks writes that once this is done, the subsequent step is to apply this knowledge to bettering the condition of females. Sprague (2005) writes about four of the standpoint theorists “who have had a major impact on feminist social science” (p. 41), Nancy Hartsock (1983), Donna Haraway (1978a, 1978b, 1988, & 2004), Dorothy Smith (1996), and Patricia Hill Collins (1986, 1989 & 2000). As feminist standpoint theories emerged, these scholars wrote in order to better the condition of females. One challenge that working females have faced for quite some time is achieving a work-life balance. Women many times have more responsibility for household labor than their

male spouses, in addition to child care or, caring for other family members (Basigner, 2001; Howard-Vital & Brunson, 2006). Hartsock (1983) writes that power relationships can be attributed to a sexual division of labor. Due to the fact that so many domestic duties that women are many times in charge of revolve around nurturing others, power is found in helping others. Though this power can be found in helping those around her, the fact remains that a female still has duties that her male partner does not. Similarly, Smith (1996) argues that this imbalance of duty takes place at the institutional level, as well. Males are many times unaware of the concrete experiences of females due to the fact women have for so long provided various supports for men. Females have historically been responsible for domestic duties and administrative tasks in the workplace, and men are accustomed to this. Smith says that by studying the daily lives of women we are able to see what really takes place.

Feminist standpoint theory does not argue for one female experience; rather, “each woman’s standpoint presents a unique lived experience and perspective and should be valued as such” (Brooks, 2007, p. 72). Haraway (1978a, 1978b, 1988, & 2004) agrees with this. She writes that as we experience the world around us, our knowledge is incomplete due to the fact that we are situated in a specific location. In order to complete our knowledge, we are able to collaborate to create a more comprehensive understanding. In other words, we use the multiple standpoints of many females in order to understand female experiences and thus create new knowledge. Feminist standpoint theories also contend that the “standpoint of the most oppressed group of women will generate the most truthful research findings” (Brooks, 2007, p. 70). Collins (1986, 1989 & 2000) focuses not only on the female standpoint, but on the Black female’s standpoint. She

writes that any person who reflects on experience is a creator of knowledge. The Black woman's experience, however, is different from that of a White woman. Black women have experiences with oppression, and these experiences have brought them closer to the dominant group. Smith (1996) says that Black women are not only ostracized because they are females, but they are also ostracized because of their race.

Critics of feminist standpoint research methods say that looking at issues from a standpoint is not accurate and makes the research far too subjective. Other critics believe that feminist standpoint theory essentializes the female experience. However, this is not the case at all. In fact as Naples (2007) points out, this is a misunderstanding of the theory, and it is not about the viewpoint of the female. Rather, feminist standpoint is about documenting a particular phenomenon that has occurred for a group of females, in a certain location. It is not researching and giving information about an experience merely because a participant is a female. Proponents of feminist standpoint research such as Nielson (1991), Haraway (1991), Jaggar (1997 & 2004), and Longino (1999) also argue for feminist standpoint theory. In fact, Nielson states that, as researchers, we all bring our particular worldviews with us to our research. Rather than seeing these views as a detriment to the research, we can look at them as the compass guiding us through the research project (Brooks & Hesse-Bibber, 2007). Haraway echoes this sentiment by writing that the particulars of our biography and positionality are in truth, lenses through which to focus our worldview. It is important to note that the use of feminist standpoint for this research was twofold. It was used not only to tell the stories of the female university president as she shares her worldviews, but also as the lens through which I focused my role as the researcher.

Feminist theorists in this area of research argue that epistemology stems from the standpoint of females who are themselves diverse in terms of location in the systems of society that organize race and class, among other relationships that perpetuate social domination (Sprague, 2005). This was particularly important to this research in that the participants were situated in a unique position as female leaders at the university. This uniqueness lends itself to the use of qualitative research in that rather than discarding “human emotion and subjectivities, unique lived experiences, and worldviews as contaminants or barriers to the quest for knowledge, we might embrace these elements to gain new insights and understandings, or in other words, new knowledge” (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 14). Feminist standpoint theorists expand upon the idea of new knowledge and how it can be found through a combined effort between participants and the researcher. Haraway (1978a, 1978b, 1998, & 2004) writes that feminist standpoint can lead to an “embodied vision” in which any one view becomes situated in a specific social and physical location. Thus, the knowledge is situated or partial. The theory is used to bring awareness to issues that are relevant to women. It does not, however, attempt to make the voice of one or a few females the resounding voice of all women. To elicit a holistic description from the views of many, feminist standpoint theory emphasizes “dialogue, analysis, and reflexivity” (Naples, 2007, p. 586) between and among researcher and participants. In doing so, feminist standpoint theory has proven to be an effective means with which to reevaluate social and institutional structures. As a researcher, I was able to engage my participants in a dialogue that gave me insight into their journeys as female university presidents. Upon analyzing the data, I was able to reflect upon it in order to make meaning and send the results to the participants so that

they could do the same. Follow up interactions with the participants allowed reflexivity in that I was able to reflect not only on their experiences, but I was also able to reflect on my biography, as well. I took “a critical look inward and reflect[ed] on [my] own lived reality and experiences” (Hesse-Biber, 2007a, p. 127). This is central to the practice of feminist research and feminist standpoint theory.

Background of the Study

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) lists 148 institutions of higher education in Texas. These institutions are divided into two groups, 104 public institutions and 44 independent institutions. The public institution group is comprised of public universities, community colleges, health related institutions, technical colleges, and state colleges. The independent institutions, often referred to as private institutions, are made up of universities, junior colleges, health related institutions, and chiropractic schools. Of the 148 institutions of higher education that are listed, 36 have females as their president, chancellor, or Chief Executive Officer. There are 36 institutions listed by the THECB, but only 35 names appear as one female oversees two institutions.

Most female presidents in Texas hold positions at community colleges or junior colleges, rather than 4-year universities. In fact, women continue to be the least likely to be presidents of doctorate-granting institutions. Though the percentage of females at doctorate-granting institutions increased from 4% in 1986 to 13% in 1998, there has been little growth in this area since then (American Council on Education, 2007). In 1986, the American Council on Education conducted its first presidential study and found the profile of a university president was generally a White male, aged somewhere in his 50s (Cook, 2012). Now, some twenty-five years later, the profile of a university president has

changed very little. Nationwide, “26 percent of institutional leaders is female” (p. 4) with associate colleges having the largest number of female presidents (Cook, 2012). This study focused on female presidents at 4-year universities in Texas, a minority within a minority. Studying females who currently lead 4-year universities helps to inform the field as to the ways in which more women might reach this status.

Participant and Selection Criteria

The potential pool of participants for this study was relatively small. In fact, according to the THECB, there were only nine active female presidents at the time I started collecting data. However, I was able to increase the number of potential participants by including one additional female who had resigned her position. I made significant efforts to communicate with all 10 of these individuals.

In order to gain access to potential participants, I initiated communication by contacting the administrative assistant of each president to provide information about the study and request a time to speak with the president either in person, by phone, or through electronic mail. In most cases, I worked with the administrative assistants, to ensure the presidents had all necessary documents and information to assist them in deciding whether to participate. I intended to secure 3 to 6 participants from the potential pool and was able to secure 4. However, one participant withdrew from the study after data collection and analysis due to concern that she might be identified as a participant. As a result, all of the data associated with her participation were removed.

Confidentiality

Maintaining the confidentiality of the participants was essential. Due to the fact that there were a small number of participants, I did not report data individually, but

rather I reported themes that emerged from interviewing all of the participants. The study views the themes in a holistic manner and reports them as such, rather than looking at each participant on an individual basis. In order to add depth to the experiences shared by the study participants, I looked at public documents regarding any female president in Texas of a 4-year university who held the office or is currently holding the office of president since 2008.

Data Collection

Data were obtained through interviews, document analysis, and electronic correspondence. Each participant was individually interviewed. Once the interviews were complete, I communicated with each participant through email to gain additional data. I also requested documents from the participants and conducted a systematic search for documents related to each participant.

Interviews

Data were collected primarily through one semi-structured interview with each of the participants. It is of importance to note the role of interview in relation to standpoint theory. The participants I interviewed were not merely a source of information for me, as the researcher, but were also constructing knowledge and meaning for me, as well (Sprague, 2005). Standpoint theorists advocate the use of semi-structured, open-ended interviews so that individual stories may be told (DeVault & Gross, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2007a; Sprague, 2005). The purpose of the interviews was to determine the journeys made by the presidents in order to gather their experiences, which is central to feminist standpoint theory (Brooks, 2007; DeVault & Gross, 2007; Sprague, 2005). Riessman

(1987) writes that interviewers should “listen with a minimum of interruptions...letting our subjects’ voices speak for themselves” (p. 191).

Interviews were arranged with the participant beforehand. I requested that the interviews take place in the offices of the participant so that the interviews could be face-to-face and I could see the participant in her usual work environment. Face-to-face interviews give researchers the distinct advantage of being able to observe social cues such as voice and intonation, in addition to body language, which can add valuable information to the verbal portion of a participant’s response to interview questions (Opdenakker, 2006). Due to the busy schedules of the presidents, face-to face interviewing was not always possible, so one interview took place by phone. An advantage of using a telephone interview in qualitative research is the ease of access to the participants (Opdenakker). Lechuga (2012) states that conducting interviews by phone is a way to research those who are “difficult to reach in person” (p. 265). Another advantage of telephone interviews is that participants may be even more forthcoming with information because they are not sitting face-to-face with the researcher (Glogowska, Young, & Lockyer, 2011; Lechuga, 2012). One participant was only able to take part in the study through electronic correspondence. Scholars have made note of the benefits of conducting interviews through email (Bampton & Cowton, 2002; James, 2007; James & Busher, 2007; Meho, 2006). One such benefit of this type of interview is that it allows participants to reflect on their conceptions of self as well as “new ways of thinking about their identity” (James, 2007, p. 971) and provided “greater authenticity in their accounts” (p. 108).

The purpose of the interviews was to explore the journeys that were made by the presidents in order to reach their position. Topics covered during the interview sessions included background information, determining when and how the presidency became a goal, barriers and support during the rise to the presidency, support persons or mentors who assisted along the journey, and finding a balance between career and family. Explicit questions asked during the course of the interviews included but were not limited to the following: (a) What positions have you held throughout your career; (b) How did you come to be a university president; (c) What would you have done differently, if anything, along this journey; (c) Who, if anyone, mentored you and what was that experience; (d) How do you explain the gender gap in the upper ranks of higher education administration and how has it changed throughout the course of your career; (e) How does this gender gap factored into work?

Correspondence

Following the interviews, I communicated electronically with each of the participants. The purpose of these follow up communications was to clarify ambiguous information and to collect additional data based on the contents of the interviews. Initiating electronic correspondence provided the participants with a convenient and ongoing means to contribute additional information as it occurred to them over the course of the study.

Documents

Knowing that additional sources of data would contribute to a better understanding of the participants and their experiences, I collected documents related to the participants' rise and tenure as university president (Table 1). Additional sources of

data were documents such as university and community newspapers, both electronic and print, university and community websites, national websites, social networking sites, and scholarly publications. Digitally recorded speeches, with audio and video, were also viewed, in addition to presidential welcome letters, and university ceremonial materials obtained from the universities. I also looked at the curriculum vitae of the participants. Based on these documents, I was able to study scholarly articles and books written by the participants as well as view the websites of local and national organizations of which the participants were members. Throughout the research process, I gathered 64 documents regarding the participants. I also located documents made available by the United States Department of Education not only to gain more insight and added context about the life of the participants. I compiled a set of documents for each of the participants in order to learn more about them before I conducted their interviews. I was able to use the university websites of each of the participants to look at their presidential welcome and view their goals and mission for their respective universities. One university website included documents from ceremonial proceedings in which the participant was honored. Local websites and news stories were also helpful in gaining more context into the busy lives the participants lead. I also contacted the university archive librarian, the university communications department, or the participants' chief of staff or assistant in order to gain any other information that might be pertinent to this study. I studied the documents after the interviews and during data analysis to ensure that my interpretation of the interview data was correct. Marshall and Rossman (2006) discuss the importance of other sources of data. By reviewing documents, one is able to build knowledge and context of the participants through "an unobtrusive method" which is "rich in portraying the values and

beliefs of the participants in the study” (p. 107). Gathering and using these documents for purposes of this study not only built more context for me, but also did not disrupt the research setting in any way (p. 108). I was able to use the websites for each of the presidents’ respective universities in order to learn more information about the climate of their campus, as well as general address statements given to the student population. I also found helpful the curriculum vitae of the participants. The participants were also engaged in speaking events in and around their communities. At times, community news stories were published that were supportive in adding context to the lived experiences of the participants. The full composite are expounded upon in Chapter 4.

In order to gain a better perspective about how representative the participants are of female university presidents in Texas, I also gathered 80 documents related to other female university presidents currently in office or who had been in office since 2008. These documents were used to create a composite illustration of the characteristics of female university presidents in Texas. I studied the same types of documents as I did for the study participants. These included documents from university and local websites and newspapers, social networking sites, scholarly publications, speeches, and curriculum vitae when they were available.

Table 2

Types and Numbers of Documents Collected

Document Type	Number of Documents Collected and Reviewed		Total
	Participants	Other Female Presidents in Texas	
Vita	3	5	8
Literature from University Websites, University Newspapers, Local and/or National Websites and Newspapers	48	31	79
Social Networking Sites	3	9	12
Speeches	1	16	17
Scholarly Publications	9	19	28
Total	64	80	144

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed. I employed the use of memos throughout the data collection process (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). It was important that I reflected on the textual data gleaned not just from the interviews, but from the set of documents compiled for each president and from the memos, as well. The reflection and thinking behind these memos was pertinent to the research (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) and aided in data analysis by yielding information about what was witnessed in the moment of the interviews. Rossman and Rallis recommend different types of memos that aided in this particular research. Thematic memos were used in this study (See Appendix A). These memos packaged different data sources that espoused a particular topic, and thus aided me in determining themes and subsequent information to support the themes that

emerged from the participant data. I also used theoretical memos, which tie particular themes to theory (See Appendix B). In other words, these memos assisted me in determining links between themes that emerged and feminist standpoint theory, the lens through which this study was conducted.

Coding

I conducted the interviews one at a time. Due to the president's schedules I had time to transcribe, read and analyze the transcripts of each participant's interview before moving on to the next interview. The data was transcribed so that the text could then be analyzed according to themes that emerged from the interview data. I looked at each transcription on an individual basis. As read through the transcripts I was able to underline key words or concepts that resonated with the questions I posed. I did this for each interview. Once I had conducted all of the interviews, I was able to look at all of the interview data as a whole and see which key words and concepts were present across the interviews. I also looked at the set of documents compiled for each participant to see if the information they contained mirrored what I was finding in the interview data.

Since all data were converted to text, all textual data were coded according to theme for further analysis. Coding is the "formal representation of analytic thinking" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 160). Coding is also "a process by which a researcher goes through her data and attaches a code...that represents something that she sees happening in the data" (Buch & Staller, 2007, p.213). More specifically, I employed the process of literal coding in which I used the participants' own words to generate themes (Hesse-Biber, 2007b). I assigned codes to the key words and concepts that were common across the data. Assigning codes in order to generate eventual themes in the data

happened concurrently with the thematic memos allowing me to see similar themes across the data. The process of coding and writing theoretical memos also occurred at the same time so that I was able to make connections between the interview data and feminist standpoint theory. The codes supported the eventual themes that will be expounded upon in the following chapter. Some of the actual words that I used from the interviews are in the form of the participants' quotes that follow in this chapter. Literal coding takes the words of the interview data and helps the researcher develop a "conceptual code" (Hesse-Biber, 2007b, p. 333) in order to generate themes in the data. From the data, I was able to generate themes and categories of data and apply a coding system to them. Codes can take many different forms, including abbreviations, symbols, colored dots, or numbers, but the system was ultimately up to my discretion (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I found that using different colored highlighters helped me differentiate the themes. Using a thematic analysis, I was able to identify "how similar processes or worldviews recur repeatedly in the data" (Buch & Staller, 2007, p. 213), based on the actual words of the participants. I used brief words or phrases to code the themes that I saw in the interview transcripts. An excerpt of the coding scheme appears in the following table.

Table 3

Sample of Coding Methods

Keywords and/or Phrases	Code	Conceptual Code	Theme
<p>“...why don’t you go to college?”</p> <p>“...and I told her I wasn’t college material..”</p> <p>“What if I find a way to pay for your first semester at...?”</p> <p>“I was very fortunate to have the support and guidance from [the university’s] founding president...”</p> <p>“It’s helpful if you have a family that is supportive and respectful of the demands...”</p>	Turquoise	<p>-Support from family, friends and coworkers</p> <p>- Actively seeking mentorship opportunities</p>	Mentoring /mentorship
<p>“I was driven and committed.”</p> <p>“...all those mountains, you ignore them because you’re going for the goal and you just work through it.”</p> <p>“It’s not my nature...to look back or to live in the past.”</p> <p>-Worked for 29 years in higher education</p> <p>“I figured out all of a sudden...I can actually even make...more of an impact potentially...”</p> <p>“I think I moved too many times...”</p>	Purple	<p>-Not disheartened during the journey</p> <p>-Admitted that changes could have been made along the way</p>	Tenacity
<p>“...until I prayed about it and then feel a peace. If I don’t have peace, I don’t move forward...”</p> <p>“...He will put you on the path of your purpose...”</p> <p>“It’s not my nature...to look back or to live in the past.”</p> <p>“So maybe....they were put...in front of me because...that was supposed to be.”</p> <p>“I don’t know if I would have done things differently if I’d be in the same place.”</p>	Green	<p>-Belief in a higher power or deity</p> <p>- Things happen for a reason</p>	Spirituality

(Table 3 continued)

Keywords and/or Phrases	Code	Conceptual Code	Theme
<p>“...we would sit down and do our homework together.”</p> <p>“You can’t separate who you are from what you do...”</p> <p>“...because you should expect to be out seven nights a week.”</p> <p>“And...I’d love to be able to teach..and work with students more...”</p> <p>-Wants to expand involvement in community service</p>	Royal Blue	<p>-Difficult in most professions</p> <p>-Hard to discern personal and professional goals</p> <p>-Balance is difficult to achieve if you are a female</p>	Balance (or the lack thereof)
<p>“No. It was never a goal...I was approached...”</p> <p>“ I would say originally it was not...I really had...a goal long term to be VP of Finance...”</p> <p>“When he announced his plans to retire about 6 years ago, he asked if I was interested and I said ‘yes’.”</p>	Orange	<p>-Did not follow the traditional pipeline</p> <p>-Some aspects of the pipeline are evident, but mainly a non traditional path</p>	Unintentional nature of the presidency
<p>“And I had two kids and I was by myself...”</p> <p>“...if there was another woman president...we’d go shopping together...”</p> <p>“Early on, my gender and my age were barriers as well as my size as I am on the petite side.”</p> <p>“...the women in those areas are much, much less percentage wise.”</p>	Red	<p>-Barriers do relate to gender</p> <p>-The gender gap has narrowed but there is still work to be done</p> <p>-Gender does influence the work of a female university president</p>	Gender

Memoing

Memos that were written throughout the data gathering were also for data analysis (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). I was able to use the memos that I took during and after interacting with the participants to analyze their experiences as presidents. I used both theoretical and thematic memos, which aided me in making connections to both theory and themes that surfaced from the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). One such memo that I

took after the first interview I conducted read that the participant is “very spiritual, prays and when she finds peace then she moves forward.” This was eventually used as evidence of the theme of spirituality in the university presidency or a belief in a higher power. Another memo regarding another participant read “extremely busy, looks at any extra time as a luxury and not a given in the job.” This was later used to support the theme of balance, or the lack thereof, in the university presidency. One participant spoke of her physical size as being a barrier in her rise to the office of president. As I memoed through her interview data, I noted that this was “interesting” as I had never perceived a petite stature as a barrier. It later occurred to me that this is something that I have taken for granted as a tall female researcher in higher education. These were a sampling of the memos that I used in order to generate a true picture of what the interview data illustrated. The memos were glimpses of what I uncovered in the interview transcripts and supported what I eventually found as themes in the interview transcripts. I took note of themes that were evident after conducting each interview, and assigned the data codes specific to the individual interview participant.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Issues

“For a study to be trustworthy, it must be more than reliable and valid; it must be ethical” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 63). Rossman and Rallis assert that the trustworthiness and ethical nature in which a study is conducted cannot be separated from one another. In order for this study to be trustworthy and ethical, I employed several methods including member checks, data triangulation, and critical friend.

Follow-up Contact

As I transcribed and analyzed the data, I conducted member checks with the participants. I had follow up contact with all three of the participants through email. Email was the preferred method of follow up for all of the participants due to their busy schedules. I wanted to gather their perspectives on the analysis of the data. They indicated they were pleased with the results of the study. One participant discussed that she had read the results of the study and agreed that her thoughts had been correctly interpreted. She also mentioned that she was thankful for the opportunity to have been able to be reflective through this process. Another participant discussed that she thought the study was interesting and appreciated the structure of the work. Her approval was important in that feminist standpoint theory argues that participants must be portrayed in a way that they feel is authentic. In order for the lived experiences of females to be recorded and interpreted, it is essential that their stories are told in a manner that is real and accurate to the participants. Based on my follow up contact with the participants, I was confident that I had accurately described their stories.

Triangulation

In addition to sharing the findings with participants and looking for alternative understandings, I employed triangulation to ensure trustworthiness and the ethics of this research. Triangulation adds strength to the “study by combining methods” (Patton, 2002, p. 247). I used two types of triangulation for this study. I employed the use of triangulating the data by looking at multiple sources and not just interview data. University websites, community news stories and curriculum vitae were used in order to

gain more information about the lived experiences of the participants. Second I used member checks. All participants received my analysis of the interview data.

Critical Friend

To further enhance trustworthiness, a fellow practitioner served as a critical friend so as to check for consistency (Patton, 2002). A critical friend is one who is used as a source of triangulation for the data. The critical friend received copies of all interview transcripts. Once data was gathered, transcribed, and analyzed, the use of a critical friend was employed to read the analyzed data, as well. This was done in order to ensure that data has not been misinterpreted. This friend indicated that the data seemed to be accurately represented. He agreed that the data supported the themes I found.

Limitations of the Study

While each participant was gracious in answering the questions I posed, I did wonder if the participants were of the opinion that they needed to guard their answers due to the tenuous nature of the position as evidenced by the resignations of three female university presidents during recent years. The resignation of Elsa Murano, the first woman and first Hispanic to lead Texas A&M University, was very public and made headlines in 2009 because it came unexpectedly after only a brief tenure. It would be difficult to imagine the participants were not aware that Murano had suddenly resigned from her post. Additionally, two other female university presidents in Texas did the same. Gretchen M. Bataille, first female president of the University of North Texas suddenly resigned in February 2010 which led to speculation that she was being pressure to leave (Mangan, 2010). May 2010 saw a similar abrupt resignation from Texas Lutheran University president Ann Svennungsen (Goldberg, 2010). Perhaps the fact that those who

resigned were females was purely coincidental. However, considering the small number of female presidents in Texas, it seems that the participants would be well aware that these resignations had occurred recently. It seems plausible that in light of the resignations, those who participated in this research may have wanted to guard their answers during the interviews.

Further still, I wondered if the recent history of sudden resignations was also a reason that some of the potential participants declined my request to take part in this research. I did not, however, find that a limited number of participants was a detriment to my research. Rather I understood it as an indication of the climate in which all female university presidents are living. Females in higher education are well aware of the hurdles that they must face. They know that traditionally women are found in the lower ranks of the university system in many times unsecure positions with low pay (Acker & Webber, 2006). They also know that they risk job security with balancing the tenure clock with the biological clock (Acker & Armenti, 2004). Work-life balance has also been established as a challenge (Howard-Vital & Brunson, 2006). Many females in higher education administration also face the chilly climate (Twombly & Rosser, 2002). It seems reasonable that a sitting female university president may not want to have any of her actions called into question, and that includes anything she might say during a research study interview.

Researcher's Perspective

As a researcher, I brought a feminist perspective with which to gauge this research. I have worked and studied in the higher education system since the fall of 1997 and feel that it is a large part of who I am as a female and a researcher. I have worked as

a graduate research assistant in an undergraduate program at a 4-year university, and an adjunct professor in an undergraduate program at a small private university, and thus, have limited context as to what it is to be a female in academia. As both an undergraduate and a graduate student, I was made to feel “less than” because I was a female. I continued to face challenges as a female in the corporate world of adult education. My passion for working with adults was the impetus for seeking this degree. Though I currently work in public education in a K-12 setting, I would like to join the ranks of a university in the future. I decided this several years ago and became intrigued when I realized that many of my professors were male. At the time, almost all of the deans and vice presidents were male, as well. I began post-secondary studies at a university governed by a male, and will end my studies in higher education at a university who currently has its first female president. I feel fortunate to attend at a time in which a female is accepted as leader of a 4-year university.

I used feminist standpoint theory as a means not only of conducting research with the participants, but also as a lens through which to focus my views. I was in a particularly unique position as a female researcher. I was both an insider and an outsider as a researcher. The reflexivity for which this dual role provided allowed me to “take on a myriad of different standpoints [while] negotiating them simultaneously” (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007). I was an insider in that I am female and have worked in some capacity in the world of higher education. I was an outsider in that I know not what it is like to be a female president of a university. When I looked even deeper into the information that was gleaned from the interviews themselves, I found even more ways in which I was an outsider in regard to age, race, ethnicity, and nationality.

This leads me to comment on the role of authority and power when related to the researcher and the researched. It was incumbent upon me to present the “concrete experiences” or “what women do” in order to aid in the repairing of the “historical trend of women’s misrepresentation and exclusion from the dominant knowledge canons” (Brooks, 2007, p. 56). In order to do this, however, I had to be extremely cognizant of my role as the researcher. There can be three ways in which feminist researchers can have power (Wolf, 1996). First, the researcher has more power than the participants in the ways in which the research is conducted and how their relationships are constructed within it. As a researcher, I ensured that the participants were aware and had signed an informed consent document, which outlined the purpose and process of the study. Though our time together was short, I was able to establish rapport with the participants by having the interviews at their respective campus and office so as to maintain or raise comfort levels in speaking with me, or I accommodated the interview situation that was most convenient to them. Second, the researcher holds power in the ways in which the research is interpreted and presented. Some might argue that in regards to race or ethnicity, I might have had power since I identify as a White female, and some of the participants were of racial or ethnic minority. However, if one looks at the positionality of being a university president as a part of university social structure, I would argue that the participants yielded power over the researcher. Feminist researchers have attempted to diminish power relationships by practicing reflexivity in the process and thus being aware of their own biographies and what biases they bring to their research (Sprague, 2005). I worked to be transparent, open, and honest about whom I am as a person because

this inevitably influenced who I was as a researcher. This transparency is not only important to my participants but to my readers, as well.

Summary of Methods

The use of a qualitative study coupled with feminist standpoint theory allowed this study to illuminate the pathways taken by female university presidents in Texas. I selected my participants based on THECB list of institutions. I chose to contact potential participants who were leading 4-year universities in Texas. Once I identified the participants, I was able to interview them based on what was most convenient for their busy schedules, either in person, by phone, or through email. Email was the method chosen by the participants for follow-up. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and analyzed. I used documents found on university websites, national websites, social networking sites, community newspapers, and speeches, in addition to curriculum vitae in order to triangulate my interview data. The use of a critical friend was also helpful with triangulation. Using feminist standpoint theory, I brought my own perspectives as a researcher that in conjunction with the data will help craft the results that appear in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This research examined the lived experiences of female university presidents in Texas, in order to describe the ways in which they negotiate the male-dominated realm of higher education. More specifically, the study looked at the pathways that the female university presidents followed in order to arrive at the upper ranks of higher education administration. This research also explored participants' attempts at balancing career and family, as well as the societal and institutional structures that have been, or are currently in place, that may have impacted the participants' rise to the presidency.

The following chapter describes the results of this study. The data were gathered through an individual interview with each participant and review of documents related to the participants' career and experience as university president. Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, measures have been taken to maintain a high level of confidentiality for participants. An individual profile of each participant is not given as the number of female presidents of Texas universities is small, and an individual profile would potentially reveal the identity of the participants. Rather, data are presented through a holistic composite of what a female university president in Texas might look like based on public documents as well as a composite of the actual participants. These composites provide a description of the participants without revealing individually identifying

characteristics. The remainder of the chapter will be a presentation of the findings. The major themes that emerged from the data will offer a framework for further discussion.

Composite of a Female University President in Texas

In order to understand the participants in this study better, and how representative they are of the typical female university president in Texas, I developed a composite of the typical female university president in Texas. Based on information retrieved from public documents such as curriculum vitae, university and local news articles, both electronic and print, scholarly publications written by the female presidents, local, university, and national websites, social networking sites and speeches given by the presidents who were in office in 2008 or who are currently serving as president, I determined what the average female university president in Texas looked like in terms of age, marital or relationship status, race or ethnicity, and university and community involvement, to name a few of the composite characteristics.

The following is a description of a typical university president in Texas. This composite illustration is by no means exhaustive, as every president maintains traits that are individual to her and her alone. The typical female university president in Texas is in her mid-50s to 70s. She has a partner or has had one at some point in her life and very well may have grown children. She is dedicated to promoting and growing diversity in her student population. She is also steadfast in wanting her institution to be a place of continuous growth and learning, especially from a research standpoint. A female university president in Texas may very well be advocating that the institution follow in the path to becoming a Tier 1 university. She may have been a president at another university at some point in her career. She also most likely spent most, if not all of her

career in higher education in some form. The female university president in Texas also likely to be White. However, there are increasingly more women of color assuming this role, especially Hispanic women. A female university president in Texas is a leader in both her university and community and volunteers her time to help others. She serves not only her university, but her community, as well. She is decorated with numerous awards from local and national organizations, accolades and may even possess honorary doctorates. The female university president in Texas has been recognized nationally and serves on local, state and national boards. She also most likely holds a doctorate. She is very likely to be the first female president in the history of her institution. She also dedicates her time to local, state and national boards. She could have held her position for a little more than a year to roughly twenty years.

The composite of the typical female university president described above took into account presidents who have held the office at any point since 2008. For this research, it was also important that I craft a composite of the participants in order to study how they compare to the larger pool of female university presidents in Texas. To build this participant composite, I analyzed the documents collected related to each participant. The presidential participants were a diverse group in that they come from various professional backgrounds including K-16 education, business, and finance. They served from the local to national levels in these various fields. Demographically, the participants range in age from the early fifties to the seventies. Two of the participants identify as White females and one as a female of color. I did not ask specifically about sexual orientation. All of the presidents hold doctoral degrees.

The presidents do somewhat mirror the characteristics of the composite of the Texas female university president that was formerly created. The participants in this study fell into the age range of the 50s to the 70s. They identified as either White or Hispanic. All three participants were the first female in the history of their respective universities to hold the position of president, and had worked, or were currently working, on projects that were notable for their schools. The presidential composite did show that a female university president in Texas could have held the position for a number of years, twenty or more. The three participants were relatively new to their positions ranging from one and one half years to five years at the time of the interviews. Two of the participants mentioned grown children and all three mentioned having or having had a partner at some point. They certainly echoed the fact that many awards and accolades had been bestowed upon them, and they were dedicated to their school and community. The three participants for this research hold doctoral degrees as the majority of those presidents used to create the presidential composite do.

The Pipeline to the Presidency

The area in which the participants differed the most from our presidential composite was in the area of the pipeline traveled in order to reach the presidency. The literature points to a common pipeline through which those aspiring to the presidency typically travel to reach the post. Cook (2012) from The American Council on Education reports that the majority of university presidents have spent the greater part of their professional life in higher education and at some point in their career have served as full-time faculty members. The position of faculty member is generally the starting point for most who have the goal of becoming a university president (Burton, 2009; Hamilton,

2004; Wessel & Keim, 1994). Common career progression for males and females begins as a student who progresses to faculty member. They will in many cases become a department chair or dean, then an academic vice president, and finally the university president (Wessel & Keim, 1994). Typically, female university presidents follow a similar path beginning with a faculty position. They are then able to progress to a department chair, dean, and then provost, and eventually the president (Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2009). The Chief Academic Officer (CAO) remains the most common position held immediately prior to the presidency (Cook, 2012).

Though the pathway the presidential composite females traveled is not entirely clear, due to the limited availability of public data, my research indicates many of the women had traveled a similar pipeline that the literature tells us is typical- faculty member, department chair, dean, provost, and eventually president (Wessel & Keim, 1994; Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2009). Two of the participants from this study did spend the majority of their careers in higher education, but the pathway was not necessarily typical. They served in areas of the university that were traditionally seen as “male” areas of higher education. One of these two did not spend any time as a faculty member. The third participant entered the world of higher education when she began her current post as president of her university. Though she had experience in the world of public education, she was not a faculty member a dean or a provost before accepting her post as president. The literature on the presidential pipeline hints to us that because there is a pipeline or an accepted path in which to follow to reach a university presidency, one most probably sets out his or her career with the intention of attaining the ultimate goal-

the presidency. Clearly, the participants in this research did not follow the pipeline explicitly, and they did not have the goal of being a university president.

All of the participants expressed that securing a university presidency was not originally a goal. There were striking similarities in the paths that the presidents traveled, and there were also marked differences. They relied on the help and support of mentors and seemingly refused to allow obstacles to stop them from reaching their positions. Through varying circumstances, from being in the right place at the right time to considering the role once they became a part of the world of higher education, the women reportedly took on the role of president and did not shy away from the opportunity.

The Lived Experiences of Female University Presidents in Texas

Though each of the participants shared a unique story of her lived experience as a university president, there were many similarities among the stories. The use of feminist standpoint theory as the conceptual framework for this research allowed me to record the experiences of women, which in turn illuminated the “gender-based stereotypes and biases” that the participants faced (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 4). Feminist standpoint theory also allowed me to see the world through their eyes, and attempt to apply this knowledge to a plan for institutional change (Brooks, 2007). This research began with the concrete experiences of the participants, what they do and have done in their everyday lives, in order to build new knowledge (Brooks, 2007).

The participants expounded upon supports and barriers to the university presidency. They described what helped them and what hindered them throughout their journey. Upon analyzing the data, the following were discovered as themes: mentoring, tenacity, and spirituality. Throughout the interviews I also inquired about striking a work-

life balance which yielded themes throughout the participant interview data. Specific interview questions were posed to solicit information about the work-life balance, in order to discover ways in which the presidents negotiated life and careers simultaneously. The theme that strongly emerged was that of an almost expected imbalance between work and family. The participants also expressed that the presidential post was not one to which they aspired, thus emerged the theme of being unintentional presidents. Finally, and perhaps most striking, was the theme of gender in the role of the female president. Though the participants expressed that the gender gap has closed somewhat in recent years, the experiences of the participants suggest that there is still much work to be done of females are to have parity with their male counterparts.

Factors Supporting or Hindering the Rise to the Presidency

The Mentored President

Recent research on aspiring university presidents suggests that mentoring aids women who aspire to the presidency (Brown, 2005). The presidents discussed the support systems they built as they made their way through the pipeline of higher education. Those systems were made up of mentors, family, friends, or some combination of the three. This was in contrast to what Marthe (2009) found in a similar study of college and university presidents in New England. A lack of mentoring and relationships that were created at various levels were aspects that impacted a transition to other leadership roles in higher education administration. These support systems spoke to the underlying idea, that though many times these women were the trailblazer in their role, or even somewhat of the Lone Ranger in their respective field, they still were willing to accept help from others.

One participant mentioned several times support she had from her former president.

I was very fortunate to have the support and guidance from [the university's] founding president who is a master of human nature as well as managerial and strategic planning expertise. He has the ability to not only see potential in those around him but develop it, as well.

She also went on to say that she also “had support from fellow administrators for the most part and faculty and staff.”

Another of the presidents stated that the most significant mentor in her career path was a speech pathologist she worked with when she first began her career as an aid for mentally retarded children. In fact, her mentor encouraged her to go to college when she was 30 years old despite the fact that she felt that she was “not college material.” It was interesting to note “not being college material” was information from the oldest of the participants. This line of thought was similar to what many in the early days of education for women thought- women were to be the producers of the human race and little else (Micheletti, 2002). The mentor went so far as to pay for her first semester at a community college in her area, and this was the start of her career in education, which eventually led her to higher education. She wanted something more for her children, and was not content with being only a maternal figure and nothing else (Freidan, 2001).

One of the participants was brought into an internship by a Vice President of Finance at a university out of state, and she “had people that kept encouraging [her] to...pursue the leadership role as the president or CEO.” She also had a Chancellor of the same out-of-state university who got her involved in a leadership program as well as an

individual from a search firm who “took an interest in [her] and helped [her] from the standpoint of thinking through...steps at different points.” The fact that she took part in an internship program such as this one was in contrast to the literature in that many times females do not take part in development programs that would compare them with their male counterparts (Walton & McDade, 2001). This fact would be in accordance with feminist research in that she is not only negotiating challenges, she is negotiating challenges due to the fact that she is a female. This participant had a double consciousness in that she was aware not only of her life, she was aware of the life of the dominant group in her workplace, the men, as well (Brooks, 2007). She was quick to point out that her mentors had been both men and women and that it was imperative for those aspiring to roles in higher education to “actively reach out to others” in order to learn more about leadership in these areas.

Mentoring was certainly important to the participants. Some described mentors they had while being a university president and others discussed mentors they found valuable to them at other points in their careers. Some spoke of mentors in both. Mentors for the presidents assisted them in learning what was necessary for their particular position and provided guidance if needed. The presidents had both male and female mentors. The participants were appreciative of all mentors regardless of gender. Also evident was the fact that it is of the utmost importance, for female presidents, to seek the help of mentors, rather than waiting to be found by those willing to mentor. One said “...it’s imperative that if you’re interested in leadership positions that you actively reach out to others and try and do that, because they are all very busy professionals.”

The Tenacious President

The theme of tenacity and persistence was highly evident in the journeys of the participants. Each participant gave evidence of the multiple barriers she overcame on her rise to the presidency. They were able to describe the sense of determination they employed to hurdle the obstacles, as well. Information gleaned from the set of documents compiled from each president also reiterated the sense of determination that each participant had. The vitae were the most telling in this regard. One of the presidents had a total of 29 years in higher education administration, which included multiple administrative positions before becoming president. Despite facing obstacles not only because she is female, but also due to her young age and size she persevered in order to reach her post. The fact that she is a female and facing these obstacles is in direct relationship to what feminist scholars argue: men are accustomed to women taking care of certain duties in the workplace (Smith, 1996). Because she was female, and was in a higher education leadership position, this could have been seen as unorthodox. As a result, men in the workplace would not relate to the concrete experiences of women. The same is true of another of the participants. Though she was almost conditioned to being the lone female because of her field of study (Tietz, 2007), she was able to clear the barriers in order to “make more of an impact potentially.” She seemed to be able to persevere to reach the presidency, as a result of the fact that she had previously done the same in order to reach the top of her field of study. Another participant realized early on that there were few educational opportunities for her as a young girl, but once she was encouraged by a mentor she took every opportunity to succeed. “So all those mountains, you ignore them because you are going for the goal and you just work through it.” This

realization was something that college going women in the 1960s and 1970s began to note. There was a clear disconnect between what was being offered in regards to opportunities for females and their actual experiences (Brooks, 2007). According to feminist standpoint theory, as this participant hurdled her mountains, she allowed her story to become a part of the society's dialogue that was missing (Brooks, 2007).

The data did highlight tweaks or changes that would have made the pathways to the presidency easier or more efficient. Perhaps the fact that they recognize that changes could have been made is a further reiteration of their persistence. The participants were open to the fact that they could have done things differently. Whether changes in their journey would have been positive or otherwise, they were able to think about the steps they took, persevering through the journey, even if it was not a planned path, ultimately attaining the role of university president. Each participant was able to reflect on decisions that they made throughout the journey in order to continue to improve themselves both professionally and personally. One shared that she would have “savored the successes more and tried to learn more from the failures and missteps along the way.” She also mentioned that she “would have been slower to speak in some circumstances and quicker to act in others.” She added, however, “it is not in [her] nature...to look back or to live in the past.”

Another participant shared that she would not have gotten married at such a young age and would have gone to college directly after high school. She declared that this was expected back in the 1950s, but going to college earlier would have given her “at least 20 years more in education.” The expectation of getting married at a young age perpetuated the fact that power relationships can be attributed to the sexual division of

labor (Hartsock, 1983) It was accepted that she stay at home and raise a family while her spouse worked.

But that's what I'd do differently. I would...have gone to college earlier...but it's...all great the way that it's turned out, because...even looking in retrospect, I wouldn't be able to help, not at least at this level, young women who are struggling. Because I can say, "I have been where you are, and yes you can do it." And, if I had gone straight through to college without any issues, without any challenges, they'd say, "Well, what do you know about it?"

Additionally, one of the presidents said that she questioned the moves that she made throughout her career. She stated that the moves she made were probably good for her professionally but did prove difficult personally because not only was she transitioning to a new role in each of the three moves, she was also adjusting to a new state each time, as well. Similarly, one of the other participants thought that there was a reason that opportunities had been placed before her. She said, "maybe...it was put in front of me because the experience was going to be important in the long run."

Interestingly, she mentioned the fact that making these types of decisions throughout a career can be difficult for females. "...sometimes I think it's tough for women to...think through and go. Should I make that move or maybe not, because there are so many other pulls on our time and effort many times." This echoes that fact that females many times base their decisions not only on career, but on family, as well (Whitmarsh, Brown, Cooper, Hawkins-Rodgers & Wentworth, 2007). This, too, is evidence of the fact that women are assumed to be the ones who also have the bulk of domestic responsibilities and their lives revolve around this fact (Hartsock, 1983).

Once the presidents secured their positions at their respective universities, they had to have “staying power” in order to remain at the post. With strong will, they were able to overcome and address barriers that existed, some due to their gender and some because of other factors. They took the challenge of the job addressed hurdles accordingly.

The Spiritual President

Another theme that materialized from the data was some type of belief in fate, destiny, or a higher power. Though this theme did not saturate the interview transcripts or the other textual data, it was a theme that seemed to weave itself into the experiences of the three participants. They spoke of something, either a deity or destiny that led them to the positions they held throughout their careers. In retrospect, this belief gave them confidence that they made the right decisions in order to arrive at their posts as presidents despite the fact that they had not attained the position because it was an original goal. This finding resounds with previous research conducted by Altaf and Awan (2011). One of the presidents referenced God numerous times and gave credit to Him as guiding her along the correct path. “If I have peace...I would say thank you Lord for opening that door and I walk through it.” The remaining two participants discussed a belief that something had led them to their current position, there was a reason that they had made the decisions they had.

Striking a Work-Life Balance: The (un)Balanced President

Balance and finding a sort of equilibrium was something about which the participants were very candid. The theme emerged that the women accepted the fact that balance was something that was difficult to achieve. This echoes what was found in

Wolverton, Bower, and Hyle's (2009) study of female presidents. Perhaps this is evidence of a sexual division of labor that is still rampant in 2012 (Hartsock, 1983). It is unclear as to whether or not finding the said balance was successful for all of the participants. There was much overlap between professional and personal goals and professional and personal life. Again, the vitae of the participants were testament to the work that they did both within the university community, as well as outside of it. Social networking sites illustrated that even the "social" aspect of the participant's lives was greatly centered around the university community. The commitment with which they conducted their professional lives seemed to dictate what they were able to accommodate in their personal lives. In order to have even a slight balance between work and a personal life, the participants had to be extremely conscious of the existence of two worlds.

Studies have historically shown that females have a difficult time achieving balance between work and family (Basinger, 2001; Cook, 2009; Howard-Vital & Brunson, 2006). Two of the participants had grown children at the time of the interviews; one did not have children. The participants reiterated the on-call nature of the university presidency. The majority of the participants saw the position as one that had little down time if any. A coping mechanism one pointed out was going into the post with the attitude that it was a job that did not have down time. If this is done, she felt that brief periods of time off were a welcomed luxury and not something that could be planned for.

They also stated that balance between work and family is a challenge in any career and is not isolated in the realm of higher education administration. One participant mentioned that female friends in other professions balanced the same obstacles as she

did. Sometimes higher education was more conducive to that balance and other times it was not. However, this is still evidence of the fact that women must handle more than do their male partners (Howard-Vital & Brunson, 2006; Michaels, 2009) and the fact that women have a double consciousness (Brooks, 2007). Further discussion with the participants supported the notion that it is seemingly easier to find a balance between work and family if children are grown. Again, two of the participants had grown children and one did not have children. This finding aligns with literature that shows fewer female presidents are married or have children, in comparison to male presidents (American Council on Education, 2007; June, 2007). One of the participants did mention that she now wants to spend time with grandchildren and also mentioned caring for ailing adults at this time in her life.

The presidents highlighted the importance of reaching some sort of equilibrium between work and family. The vitae of the participants were evidence of the busy lives that the females lead. The vitae were replete with community service, local, state, and national board positions, and publications. Other documents were proof of time spent at community and university events and appearances. One participant expressed that many times she was not even sure if she had managed ways of finding the necessary balance after her years in higher education. “It was particularly challenging when my children were small and there was always a myriad of things to do when I was not at the office, which was where I spent most of my time.” Again, so many times females have more family demands than do males (Basinger, 2001). Even after her children were grown, her “focus has shifted to taking care of aging family members as well as attending to the needs of grown children and small grandchildren.” This supports literature suggesting

that women have more challenges than men when balancing career and family (Mason, 2009; Michaels, 2009). She did, however, offer advice in confronting this challenge:

It also has helped me to realize that I will never be “super woman” with a perfect home with everything running smoothly and no dust on the furniture and floors.

You have to prioritize, go with the flow and keep things in perspective.

She seemed to accept the fact that there would be an imbalance. One of the participants stated that a mentor she had early on shared with her that the job of university president is one that,

you have to realize that it [is] a 24/7 job...the first thing you should realize going into it is that if you get a night at home, that is a plus, because you should expect to be out seven nights a week.

This is evidence that she began the position with the expectation of imbalance between work and family life. She believed that if you take this general attitude, then when you do have a bit of a break, you are excited about it. She also was of the opinion that because she did not have children, perhaps her balancing of career and family was a bit easier.

“I’m very lucky as I don’t have any kids and that’s not the right statement...I would have been blessed to have, but it’s not...what...life had made out for me.” She mentions that the balance is not just for women in higher education, and shares that friends she has in the business world with children struggle to balance everything in their lives, as well.

This participant also thought that higher education “has a little more flexibility” in some areas as far as scheduling, but then due to “events and things that you don’t have in other areas” scheduling can still be difficult. What she recommends is to “have honest discussions about how you try to work through those...and what your support systems

are in making sure that you can do that.” She does mention, however, that in trying to find the balance between career and family, “sometimes you wonder if you get any of your own time at all.” She felt “you have to have that time to refresh and think. If you don’t...it impacts you in the long run.” The research has shown that many times women tire of struggling to find this balance and eventually leave the working world (Michaels, 2009).

Yet another of the female presidents said that finding the balance between career and family was difficult no matter gender or job. She also questioned whether or not she has been able to find this balance completely during her almost 30 years in higher education. This speaks to the fact that she, like the other participants, had a definite melding of both the professional and personal realms. In addition, she highlights the importance of taking time to refresh and have some time to herself.

Finding a balance was difficult and I don’t think I have achieved it yet. It was particularly challenging when my children were small and there was always a myriad of things to do when I was not at the office, which was where I spent most of my time. Now, the focus has shifted to taking care of aging family members as well as attending to the needs of grown children and small grandchildren.

Sometimes, as hard as it is, you must just step away for a little while. It may be a few hours or a few days but you need to “recharge” your batteries and clear your head. It is important to have some activities that force you to not concentrate on University business.

Her opinion was that it is helpful if both the family and the employer understand the demands they both have on a person.

Balancing career and family responsibilities is a challenge for anyone – regardless of gender or position. Working in an environment that is “family-friendly” helps to achieve a good balance. It is helpful if you have a family that is supportive and respectful of the demands of your career. Of course, there must be compromises along the way. There are times when sacrifices must be made. It is unavoidable. I cannot always spend as much time as I would like with my family and I count on them to understand. I strive to make the time I do have with my family quality time doing things we enjoy.

One of the other participants stated that finding a balance at this point in her career was not a challenge. “...right now it’s nothing because it’s simple.” Her children are grown so she does not have young children to attend to once she is home from her job, suggesting that, at this point in her life, there is not an issue of finding a balance because for the most part, she is operating within one sphere, that of work.. She did not allude to finding balance earlier on when her children were younger as being a challenge at that time either. Rather it came down to scheduling and multitasking which alludes to the idea that perhaps there never was a balance between work and life.

But, when my children were growing up and I was going to school, I wasn’t married yet and I just had my kids and working and going to school, I was sitting down doing homework, and we would sit down and do our homework together. When...I would have to come home and cook or whatever well then, and a lot of times I would study a lot more, obviously, than they did, they would go to bed and I would just stay up. And, because I was driven and committed, it was okay...when I look back and my kids say Mom how did we do it, how did you do

it? And you just do it. You just do it. And, because you have a goal and because... you are passionate about what you are doing...you don't see it.

It was notable that the participants either did not feel that finding balance was a challenge, due to the fact of the accepted or expected imbalance, or that it had little to do with their gender. The literature, however, is replete with evidence that finding a balance between work and family is more difficult for females (Basinger, 2001; Howard-Vital & Brunson, 2006; Mason, 2009; Mayer & Tikka, 2008) and that there is a strong sexual division of labor (Harsock, 1983). It appears that though the participants were willing to admit that a gender gap does remain in this day and age, they were not able to say that finding a balance was difficult for them strictly because they are female. Rather they exhibited a form of gender blindness that keeps them from seeing that achieving this balance is perhaps more of a challenge because they are women.

The Importance of Goals: The Goal Oriented President

The presidents discussed their future aspirations and goals, as well. It was difficult to discern professional and personal goals. This relates to the theme of imbalance. Not only was family and career balance a challenge to achieve, but so too was an equilibrium in the achievement of different types of goals. Again, this could be due in part to the “interplay of work and nonwork factors on women’s career development” (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005, p. 109). Goals, both professional and personal, were oftentimes one in the same for the participants. The participants were asked explicitly during the interviews to discuss their personal and professional goals. Each participant seemed to conflate the two categories of goals. One of the presidents spoke of adding teaching at their universities as a personal goal so that they could work directly with students. Some might see teaching

at a university as a professional goal. Another participant added that personally, she would like to expand her community service, something that she is already doing as part of her professional duties.

The participants mentioned wanting to further their university in various ways including continuation of academic and leadership programs. One of the participants said that she would like to have the opportunity to teach students again as she began her career in higher education as a professor. She also wants to continue to “[update] some of our planning and [move] forward” for the university. She did share that her current post is a place at which she would not mind ending her career. Though others might aspire to move to several other presidencies before retiring, she conveyed that she was at a point that she could stay for “nine or ten years and then retire.” Another bit of advice that she received from one of her mentors was “you should never go into a leadership position, especially the presidency, without having a very good thought about what your end time should be and what your end game should be.” The overall lack of discernible difference between the two types of goals posed in the question further reiterated the seemingly never ending nature of the position. The participants either stated explicitly or alluded to the fact that they were pleased at their current posts as president and did not mention working elsewhere.

As another of the participants was sharing her future goals, it was evident that there was much overlap between her personal and professional aspirations. When this was pointed out to her, she responded, “They have to be...because you cannot fake it. You cannot separate who you are from what you do. I mean, if you can do that, then you need to wonder if that’s the passion, if that’s the purpose in your life.” She expressed a

strong desire to move her university to the status of a “full-fledged, world-class” university. She shared two enormous projects that she and her staff were working on in order to bring this aspiration to fruition. Currently, they are working on a teacher preparation program in which teacher candidates have an 18-month residency requirement. They are also working on an irrigation technology center to address the issues of drought in Texas, in addition to a project dealing with cyber security. Whether it is through these programs or others that her students take part, she wants their time to be well-spent. “So for me professionally, really growing this university so that when our graduates cross that stage, that paper means something” is important to her. In fact, when she expressed the statement above, her voice quavered and her eyes grew teary as she shared, “it really gets to me, because I didn’t go to college until I was 30, and I was a single mom with two kids.” She said that when she “[looks] at [her] students and see what they sacrifice, because the average age is 32...they don’t have time to fool around in school...because they want to raise the economic situation for themselves, their children...and in doing that, they raise it for the entire community.”

Another of the women was more able to discern her goals into two categories, both professional and personal, than the other participants. She wrote that professionally she would like to pursue teaching or consulting or possibly even both. Personally, she was interested in expanding her current involvement in volunteerism and community service.

The presidents clearly had difficulty finding a true balance between the worlds of professional and personal lives. This is not to say that this fact was something that inhibited them in either their careers or personal lives, but merely a reality that speaks

from the data. Even goals they spoke of as being personal, seemed to have roots in what they did professionally. In both worlds, professional and personal, the participants seemed to rely on a sort of intangible force to guide them in arriving at many of their life decisions.

The Nature of the Presidency: The Unintentional President

The presidents did not follow what would be considered the traditional pipeline to the presidency (Burton, 2009; Wessel & Keim, 1994), which typically includes beginning as a professor, moving into higher education administration roles, and culminating with the role of president. None of the participants stated that the role of a university president was a goal in their career plan. They were unintentional in that the presidency was not a consideration until they were working in other capacities in higher education or elsewhere. The participants were approached about interviewing for the post. Though they did not first intend to hold the post, they seemingly accepted the challenge with vigor. One mentioned she never dreamt that she would be the president of a university and, in fact, was asked during an interview what would make her more qualified to be a university president than other potential candidates. She replied “I don’t know that I’m more qualified than someone else. There might be someone else much more qualified than I, but this is what I can bring, and this is what I know, and that’s all.” She laughed as she asked, “Did I ever dream that I would be a university president? Are you kidding? I would have said you guys are nuts, you know?”

Her experience in the world of higher education administration differed from the other participants in that she did not begin her career in higher education. She came from a field outside of higher education. In contrast, another of the presidents stated that she

“grew up” in higher education and took advantage of the opportunity to become a university president when her mentor, and former president of the university, announced his plans to retire approximately six years ago. Still another president also agreed with the sentiment that originally the presidency was not a goal, but rather as she advanced in the ranks of higher education administration, she realized that she “[could] make more of an impact, you know, potentially” if she were to continue in higher education administration.

Securing a post as a university president is no small feat. Thus, it seems that planning and following a roadmap and joining the pipeline (Burton, 2009; Hamilton, 2004; Wessel & Keim, 1994) to reach the post would be appropriate, so it is ironic that none of the participants originally set out to be the president of a university. Also interesting is the fact that one of the three had never directly worked in a university setting in her past careers. However, the reputation that she had established throughout her career and while working at the national level clearly spoke well of her. She was asked to interview when the position came open. Despite any barriers that the participants may have faced, whether personal or professional, they were able to make the absolute most out of previous work situations and arrive at the university presidency. Again, the fact that they had proven themselves as competent and proficient in previous positions, whether in higher education jobs or otherwise, the women were highly regarded, and ultimately reached the presidency.

The participants reached the post as university president without it having been an original career goal. All three were asked if they would be interested in applying and interviewing for the position. This speaks well of the work that they had done in prior

positions, whether those were positions in higher education or other fields. More importantly, this speaks to the fact that the pathway to the presidency was not a traditional one for the participants, due to the fact they were recruited based on their reputations. As the next theme reveals, the arriving at the university presidency was only one part of the journey. Remaining in the presidency and cultivating their position for the good of their constituents was yet another. The presidents were able to hold the post with the tenacity that they possessed.

The Importance of Gender: The Gendered President

The most prominent theme of all that surfaced from this research was that gender does matter in a number of different ways. Using the multiple standpoints of the participants to build our knowledge of how their gender matters allows a more complete understanding of the experiences of the female university presidents (Haraway, 2004). Whether during the journey to the post of president, or upon arrival, it was clear the participants faced hurdles that were a direct result of their gender. The participants noted that many times their gender was a hindrance. This was similar to what Gatteau (2000) and Jablonski (1996) discovered in their studies of female university presidents in the Northeast. Females in these studies discussed the fact that they faced sexist behaviors in the work place. They even had the feeling that they had to hurdle skepticism and negativity from the faculty and community.

The fact that the participants in this research study were women in a traditionally male-dominated world was a challenge in that they were viewed differently from their male counterparts. Two of the participants agreed wholeheartedly that they did face hurdles in their pathway. “Early on, my gender and age as well as my size, as I am on the

petite side,” were impediments. She began her first administrative position in higher education in her “mid-20s in the Business Services Department” at her university. She suggested being female and physically small were “strike[s]” against her because those around her might question her authority in a leadership position since a petite woman does not connote the strong, authoritative style a tall male might (Ingalls, 2006). It is much the same with her age. Nielson (1991) would argue the participant brought her particular worldview with her as she reflected on her experiences as a female in higher education administration which, in turn, guided the more complete knowledge that was subsequently created..

Another president explained a somewhat different barrier. Though she did not feel “there [were...] many barriers” she did want to explain her particular story. She came from an accounting background and as she pointed out many “presidents come from a provost/dean background.” Because she supervised “areas that are considered...not traditionally women oriented, such as facilities, police department, construction...” while she was in the role of Vice President, she saw even fewer women in similar roles (Tietz, 2007). She stated that due to her experience in a traditionally male role as a Vice President, perhaps she “didn’t really perceive it [gender] as much a barrier to the presidency.” It seemed that her perception was that she was almost conditioned to her gender being a barrier so when she reached the presidency, the challenge of being a female in a higher education administration role was commonplace to her. This is a strong example of the double consciousness that feminist standpoint theory espouses. She was extremely aware of her own life as a female, but she was also very cognizant of the lives of the males who surrounded her in her workplace (Brooks, 2007).

Another participant stated unequivocally that she did not feel like she faced any roadblocks on her journey. “Do you know I have never felt like there were any barriers? Never,” she said. Throughout the interview, she did mention several obstacles such as growing up poor and being a single parent that others might perceive as troublesome, but she never mentions these or anything else explicitly as barriers to her rise to the presidency. However, being a single mother is certainly about gender. As a provider for her family, she was given the heavy task of providing for her children, and helping her first husband. She even mentioned she helped him write his college papers, on which he received good marks, at a time when she had never even considered attending college. This goes back to the change in thinking by females in the 1960s and 1970s, and the materialization of feminist standpoint theory positing the female voice was being silenced in society’s dialogue (Brooks, 2007). The idea that she did not acknowledge that barriers existed for her was in stark contrast to the study conducted by Wolverton, Bower, and Hyle (2009) in which it was reiterated that there certainly still remain barriers for females in higher education administration.

The presidents, who were all over the age of 50, had perceived changes in the gender gap since they began their careers. They were asked to see how they might give explanation to the gap in general. One admitted “there continues to be a gap in many different areas” not only for women, but for ethnic minorities, as well. Collins (1986, 1989, and 2000) writes minority women, specifically Black women, experience oppression and these resulting experiences had brought them closer to the dominant group, White males. One might look at this as a “triple consciousness” rather than the double consciousness that appears with White females, due to the fact that minority

female university presidents are a minority within a minority. In addition, this is similar to what Jackson and Harris (2007) found in their study of minority female college and university presidents. The participants in the Jackson and Harris study found that they were excluded from informal networks and did not feel prepared for their roles.

And, I do believe a part of that is that sometimes that we feel less inclined as women to reach out...it's like we have to do everything ourselves. We have to be in control...and not show that weakness and yet if you look at men in the workplace, they will reach out and...work with folks as mentors and do these things and they don't...see that as...admitting that you can't handle everything.

One of the other females pointed out she is the only woman president in her university system. Several universities make up this particular system, and she believed much of the gap could be explained by the role of the Chancellor since many times, "the Chancellors are the ones who hire the presidents." She also discussed the fact that as women are getting more degrees than men not only in the state of Texas but across the country as well, she believes that we will see a change in the gap due to the number of females in higher education in general.

Yet another attributed the gender gap in higher education to the course of history. I believe the gender gap in higher ed administration came largely from the lack of highly educated women and society's perception and acceptance of the working woman. In the years prior to WWII, few women worked outside of the home and even fewer considered college as an option. When women moved into the workforce during WWII, the persona of the working wife/mother/woman was born. As more and more women made higher education a priority, the number of

women in higher education administration also increased. Societal shifts and perception changes also had positive effects on lessening the gender gap. The introduction of non-traditional programs (evening, weekend, and online classes) also provided women greater opportunities to complete their education and paved the way for more women in higher education administration. While the gender gap has decreased during my lifetime, it still exists. The gender gap is still seen in the top echelon of higher education.

Though all of the participants noted changes in the gender gap that had taken place, it remained evident that gender matters and plays a role in higher education administration and sometimes, previous positions, as well.

It has been my experience that the extent to which gender affects the workplace has much to do with how much influence management (administration) allows gender to have. If an institution's administration is gender-blind in hiring, promotion, and operational decisions, then gender becomes almost a non-issue.

One of the presidents was quick to answer that the gender gap that exists does not play into her work when asked she stated

Not mine. At all. At all. They're my buddies...and I work very well with men, and I work very well with women...if there was another woman president, that would be great. We'd probably... in addition to talking about what's going on at the university, we'd go shopping together, you know, or something.

This denial that gender plays into work was somewhat ironic in that the example of shopping is typically seen as a female gendered activity. If gender did not play into work, then it seems that men would be shopping as well. As pointed out before, however,

it seemed that she interpreted the question to mean does she let gender impact her work. She stated that she worked well with all.

One participant opined because the gender gap does remain, and it does play into her work in higher education, it is very important to grow people in leadership programs. She attributed these earlier in the interview to some of her successes as her mentors urged her to take part in them.

Well, you know, I think that, again part of that is for us to be more actively... developing leadership types of programs...I'm going to say that in formal and informal ways...we're trying some that here at [name of university]. I'm looking at how we...know more about where higher education's going, thinking about that a little bit, because that's how you prompt whether they're, you're interested in coming into an administrative role and then if they are, if they come forward and ask about that...then that gives you an opportunity to do...mentoring or put them into an internship. I really think-the internship opportunity for me was huge. And...it might not be but one out of every ten is somebody that becomes interested and moves on but at least that starts that movement towards getting more folks in the pipeline to build some of that.

One of the participants mentioned that there were aspects of her journey she would have changed, but, in the end, she chose not "to look back or to live in the past," which signifies a confidence that the results of the choices she made were as they were meant to be. Another also shared that perhaps opportunities or obstacles were "put in front of me because...that experience was going to be important in the long run" showing

that no matter the outcome, she believed that there was a reason that certain occurrences took place in her life.

The fact that barriers to the university presidency still remain in the world of higher education was the most evident theme that emerged from the interview data. The participants described various obstacles that they had to overcome, and they differed between participants depending on her particular work and life situation. However, it seemed that overwhelmingly, the majority of barriers did revolve around the fact that they were females. The participants agreed that progress has been made in recent years, but there is still work that can be done to improve the situation for females who aspire to the university presidency.

Summary

Chapter four presented a description of a potential female university president in Texas, in addition to a holistic description of the three participants in order to ensure anonymity. An individual profile of each president was not given so as to maintain the anonymity of the small sample. The remainder of the chapter was an exhibition of the findings organized by specific research questions. Themes were then taken from the research questions in order to find what was most evident from the data.

Participants were asked general demographic data at different points throughout the interviews. Any demographic data that was used for reporting purposes was very general or reported holistically so as to limit identification of any of the participants. Mentoring was a significant piece of the journeys of the participants. The participants had both male and female mentors throughout their careers and believed that they learned much from those who helped them regardless of gender. The data also showed that the

participants advocated actively seeking mentors or accepting them in their career paths. Also discussed were the barriers that each president perceived during her rise to the presidency. There were some similarities in barriers the participants faced, but there were also differences. Focus on a particular goal was another idea found. The participants refused to let obstacles remain in their path and were determined to find a means around them. Woven throughout the interview data was the idea of spirituality. All of the participants discussed belief in some sort of fate or destiny taking a part in their career paths.

Also discussed during the data gathering was the balance of work and family life for the participants. The on-call nature of the presidential role was an idea that emerged quickly. The participants also voiced that finding the balance between the two can be a challenge but they do not feel that this difficulty is unique to the world of higher education. The data also illustrated the fact that with grown children or no children at all, striking a balance could be much easier than with smaller children. The participants were asked about their future goals, both professional and personal. It was extremely hard to discern the two types of goals. In actuality, it seemed that the two types of goals meshed to such an extent that the presidents were one with their roles. This finding further reiterated the ongoing nature of the job.

The data showed overwhelmingly that the presidents did not originally aspire to the presidency. The first theme that arose from this conversation was that the participants were adept at seizing opportunities that have been placed before them. Also emerging was the subject of reputation, and the importance it plays in securing a presidency, especially since none of the participants actively sought out the role. The interviews

addressed what the participants thought about the change in the gender gap over time and how it plays into the work of the participants respectively. It was clear that the participants sensed that the gap had changed somewhat over the course of their careers. More outstanding from the data was that the gap still remains, and it is something that the majority of participants deal with in their current positions. This was a pivotal question in this study and recommendations for changes offered by both the participants and the researcher are offered in chapter five.

The major themes that emerged from the research questions and the specific interview questions provided a framework for the discussion of the research findings. Themes were discussed after the presentation of participant answer data. The females all had support systems and thus were *The Mentored President*. They were able to reach their post ultimately due to their being *The Tenacious President*. Some might say that the participants had successful journeys, both professional and personal due to being *The Spiritual President*. It was unclear as to whether or not the participants were *The (Un)balanced President*. *The Goal Oriented President* showed that the participants had a difficult time discerning personal and professional goals from one another. *The Unintentional President* was apparent in that none of the participants aspired to the presidency. Despite gains for females and a slight closing of the gender gap, however, the participants still remain *The Gendered President*. The final chapter will explain the implications of what was discovered from this study, what is contributed to the field, and suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of female university presidents in Texas in order to illustrate the ways in which they were able to navigate the male saturated world of higher education administration. This research also studied the pathways that the participants charted so that they ultimately became part of the upper echelons of higher education. In addition, the study emphasized the potential impact that career and family balance as well as the structures, both in society and the institution of higher education, may have had on the participants' rise to the university presidency. Scholarly research studies from the field of higher education administration, specifically those concerning female university presidents, served to guide this study as did feminist standpoint theory. These research studies and feminist standpoint theory served as guides for design of research questions. The overarching-question that guided this research was: What are the lived experiences of female university presidents in Texas? The following secondary questions assisted in the creation of specific interview questions: (a) What factors support or inhibit the rise of the female university presidents; (b) How do female university presidents live the balance between career and family; (c) What can be learned from the paths that have been created for female presidents in higher

education? The specific interview questions were presented to the participants and themes emerged from the participant responses.

The previous chapter discussed the results of the research. This chapter will further clarify the research findings, offer conclusions, describe implications, and make recommendations for future practices in higher education administration as well as future research. The researcher will then offer concluding thoughts.

Conclusions and Implications: What Are the Lived Experiences of Female University Presidents in Texas?

Several conclusions can be drawn from the discussions provided previously. The conclusions that emerged from the data collected will be discussed in the following section and will be analyzed from a feminist standpoint.

What Factors Support or Inhibit the Rise to the Presidency?

The Pathway to the Presidency

It seems that, in the instance of this study, there may be no clear pathway to the presidency. Rather, the journey to the university presidency is one that is unique to the individual. There may be aspects of multiple journeys that are similar, but each journey is distinctive according to the person making the journey. It is guided by mentors, decisions on the part of the individual, and sometimes destiny. In particular in this case was the fact that none of the participants aspired to the office, yet they were able to reach it. Perhaps this particular study is quite the anomaly. Looking closely at the literature in the field, it seems there is a trajectory one must follow in order to be successful and ultimately end at the presidency (Wessel & Keim, 1994; Wilson, 2004; Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2009). The participants in this study illustrated that the path to the presidency is one that can be

varied and unique. This could be seen as an advantage in that perhaps females are able to reach the office without the ties that bind males in the traditional trajectory. Though systematic barriers do exist, women may have the unique opportunity to use creative thinking and varied means to reach the post.

The three participants expressed that the role of university president was not one they initially thought of as a part of their career path. In fact, they were unintentional in that the position of university president was not contemplated until they were already far along in their careers, either in another capacity in higher education or a field outside of higher education. Again, though they may not have aspired to the role originally, they were able to ascend the ranks because they wanted to, despite hurdles they encountered. They had the drive and determination to continue excelling in their careers. They were approached by others who worked closely with them, or by those who were familiar with their work history, about interviewing for the job of university president. Opportunities many times come about when women are high achievers, and this was certainly true of these participants (Madsen, 2008). Based on their past performance, the participants had established well-respected reputations among those around them. Even though the presidents did not initially set the role as a goal, once presented with the position, they took on the aspects of the job with persistence and drive. This unintentional nature of reaching the presidency in regards to these three participants brings to light two important ideas. First, scholarly research tells us that there is a pipeline for reaching the presidency. There is a traditional trajectory through which the majority of college and university presidents reach the post (Burton, 2009; Hamilton, 2004; Wessel & Keim, 1994). Though some of the participants did work in higher education, others did not. Thus, the path these

particular presidents traveled is quite different from the path that has traditionally appeared in the research. In most cases, this traditional pathway starts with a faculty position, but many females have a hard time earning these preliminary positions. This could be in part because when hiring, committees often rely on what they know and what is familiar to them (Wilson, 2004). Obviously, committees know males in higher education positions because they outnumber females across the country. This coupled with the fact that most professors on hiring committees are male results in a dangerous combination that ultimately keeps women from attaining the first traditional position in the trajectory, that of faculty member (Wilson). It seems logical that if females have a hurdle in the beginning, they would have a greater degree of difficulty attaining other higher education positions. In the end, they would be likely to arrive at the presidency through the traditional route. Instead of pushing toward the goal of the presidency, their highly respected reputations relentlessly pulled them forward. Unfortunately, as strong a statement as this research makes in regards to this nontraditional path, the odds are still stacked against females. Without significant changes in recruiting and hiring practices, and the expected profile of a university president, women will continue to realize success at this level primarily as the result of a confluence of perfect circumstances. If they do not have a plan or pathway to reach higher education administration positions, especially that of the university president, it seems likely that they are leaving their careers to chance. They could reach the presidency as the participants in this study did, or they very well might not reach the position.

This leads one to question if the traditional pathway that the current literature speaks of is one that was created and perpetuated by men. If men are not having to deal

with the kinds of pressures women are (Drago, 2007; Manzo, 2001), it stands to reason they would have an easier time of planning their path to the presidency and ultimately reaching it. Michaels (2009) discussed the fact that the American workforce as a whole is not one that is accommodating to family life. Consequently, many times females are opting out of careers throughout the workforce so that they can focus on family obligations (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Again, even in 2012, the workforce in general and in higher education is tailored for the White male. Females are left to negotiate the pressures of work and home in a patriarchal structure (Ropers-Huilman, 2003). For centuries, the structure of the higher education system has been dominated by the White male's perspective; thus, females must continue to work around these power structures that have for so long been in place.

Importance of Reputation

Another implication from the results of this study was the importance of reputation. The women in this study were sought out for the role of president and wholeheartedly accepted the challenge. They had not originally aspired to the role. Nonetheless, because of past work history from local to national levels, the participants were somehow able to prove to those involved in hiring that they would be competent in the role of president. This speaks to the role of reputation for females in higher education administration. This is not to say that reputation is more or less important for a female or a male, but it does speak to the importance of the basic characteristics of what those hiring might consider a competent candidate. Something or somethings that the participants had done in the past made them noticeable or outstanding enough to be approached for the role. They were offered a challenge and accepted it. This suggests that

the participants believed that their reputations aided them in securing the role.

One of the three had never directly worked in a university setting. The other two had worked in other areas of higher education. All three had established for themselves a reputation that spoke well enough of them to be considered and ultimately hired for the role of university president. These females had proven themselves throughout their work history, enough so that they were able to secure the position. We are left with the question, however, what happens to females who have not yet established themselves in the realm of higher education or other areas as these participants did? Research tells us that gender roles are prevalent at the societal and institutional levels. Wolverton, Bower, and Hyle (2009) discussed this in their study. One president commented that if she were a male, it would be said that she was aggressive but, because she was female she was seen as blunt, among other traits. Wolverton, Bower, and Hyle included another participant who opined that whether or not a female is more nurturing, the perception that women care more than men still exists. This has implications for females attempting to reach the university presidency. Going back to the pipeline theory, if they are not able to break into the path to start the journey, then how will they ever reach their ultimate goal of the university presidency? For those who are able to begin the journey, how will they reach the presidency if typical stereotypes of females as leaders are perpetuated? Perhaps there is not a clear answer at the current time, but as the participants in this research illustrated, no matter the path a female chooses or inadvertently falls into, she must blaze the path with a resoluteness and persistence. In a culture of traditionally male leadership, a female president must be seen as assertive, but not aggressive (Mason, 2009). Even in 2012, men and women tend to see one another in traditional male/female roles (Doughty & Leddick,

2007). This societal view coupled with the practice of hiring committees defaulting to what is familiar to them when choosing presidential candidates (Wilson, 2004) has created and will continue to perpetuate a situation disenfranchising women attempting to gain access to the upper ranks of higher education. Valian (1999a) says we create gender schemas and gender roles and that many of these schemas can actually become self-fulfilling. This may be even more important to women who seek the presidency, as opposed to men, due to the fact that the leadership style of females is called into question far more frequently than men. This said leadership style could certainly be seen as an integral component of one's reputation. If society has influenced those around a female president to see a traditional female as needy, and also expects her to suppress any assertive behavior (Doughty & Leddick), then those around her could be surprised if she chooses to lead in a subdued manner. This was the case of one president who stated that had she been a male in the same position, she would have been seen as aggressive. Due to the fact that she was a female, however, she was viewed as intense, blunt, and direct (Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2009). This reputation seemed to precede her. It is doubtful that this would have been the case had she been a male. At worst, had this particular reputation preceded a male in the same position, it is quite unlikely that these qualities would have been seen as a detriment. They most probably would have been accepted as assets.

Tenacity On the Job

Each of the participants was also tenacious; they were persistent and determined. They all offered proof of numerous barriers that they overcame in the rise to the presidency and upon arrival. Age, physical size, and living as a single mother were a few

of the obstacles that the participants faced. Some of these obstacles are unique to the presidents in this research, but studies show that women face some of these roadblocks and more (Cooper, 2002; Mason, 2009; Twombly & Rosser, 2002). Women in higher education are faced with the chilly climate (Twombly & Rosser, 2002) in academe in which there are “working conditions and collegiality among peers that devalue women” (p. 465). The chilly climate is perpetuated through the use of male-dominated language and little recognition of the endeavors of women. In addition, female college and university presidents must deal with the fact that they may be frowned upon by colleagues if and when they wish to take maternity leave, have gender oriented research interests, or display leadership styles that are different from the traditional male leadership styles (Twombly & Rosser). Mason (2009) discusses another phenomenon faced by females in higher education, that of the “snow woman effect.” This is explained as the “layers of missed opportunities, family obligations, and small and large slights” (p. 2) that snowball during the career of a female administrator. This ultimately slows the progress that a female is able to make through the pipeline compared to the progress a male is able to attain in administrative role. It stands to reason that women would need to be highly tenacious, just as the participants were, as they are pursuing upper level roles in higher education administration.

Mentors and Mentoring

Support systems in the form of mentors, family, and friends proved important to the participants. Professional networking and professional relationships can help to address the lack of an established pathway. However, as one participant pointed out, it is necessary for females to seek out mentors they think might be able to guide them on this

path. Yet again, we must consider the fact that due to the patriarchy that is prevalent in the workforce, many times the role of president is held by a male (American Council on Education, 2007) thus it follows that mentors for this position will also be predominantly male. Cooper (2002) pointed out that women in academe many times have less access to powerful mentors and their networks. This could potentially be debilitating to a higher education career for a female. If she is able to find a mentor, male or female, there is still no certainty that she would not be questioned when dealing with the aforementioned networks. Research has shown us in this study and others that women and their abilities are questioned when they make the crossover into a male-dominated realm. Brown (2005) found that there are implications that mentoring does aid women who aspire to the presidency. Women in higher education leadership roles have found themselves at a distinct disadvantage when playing the ever-present game of networking. Few women are able to take part in leadership development programs, despite attempts to increase their visibility in the world of higher education (Walton & McDade, 2001). This reiterates the implications of having a mentor, whether male or female. Obviously, one should consider the fact that just as the participants in this study conveyed, a strong mentor is a strong mentor, regardless of gender. However, we are left to wonder how many more women would be able to prosper in the world of higher education if they did indeed have a pool of mentors with more females from which to choose or seek out. In order for there to be more female mentors, we must have more females in higher education leadership roles, particularly that of the presidency. The participants all discussed mentors that had played a part in helping them arrive at the presidency, assisted them once they had attained the position or both. Mentors play an integral role in career progression (Steinke, 2006;

Whittier, 2006), and all of the women in this study mentioned mentors that had assisted them during their rise. Studies suggest that mentoring is extremely important to the presidency as well as a recruitment and retention tool for the role (Brown, 2005). Lane (2005) mentions that another benefit of mentorship is the chance for females to share accomplishments, as well as showcase the influence that they have had on the campus community. Though the mentors that the participants discussed were mostly men, it was apparent that the participants were of the opinion that a mentor was a mentor, regardless of gender. One president strongly urged females to seek out mentors that could advise them in their roles. In addition to mentors, the presidents also had family and friends to support them. Steinke (2006) showed that support from a spouse is an element that helps in the attainment of the presidential role.

The process of mentoring and securing mentors is one that is cyclical in nature, and thus we must begin with our current hiring practices if we are to provide an equitable pool of mentors and the subsequent mentoring opportunities for women.

Gender Still Matters

Women were once seen merely as procreators of the human race (Women's International Center, 2010). Charles Darwin espoused that females should not gain an education as using cognitive faculties could interfere with the biology of a women's body, i.e. she might not be able to bear children if she was using her brain extensively (Rosendberg, 1982 as cited in Nidiffer, 2002). Though women have made strides in higher education administration, there is still work to be done. The gender gap may not be as wide as it once was, but females in higher education administration are by no means on a level playing field with their male counterparts. As recently as 2005, former

president of Harvard University, Lawrence H. Summers spoke at a women's conference and opined that the lack of women in the fields of science could be accredited to their lack of want to balance family and career. Could he have also stated that the overrepresentation of males in the fields of science could be attributed to the fact that they do not *have* to balance the two? Summers is one of a select few who made this evil notion public and consequently has his words put in print for all to see. However, it is not only Summers who could be seen as a villain for perpetuating the misinformation that women are ultimately to blame for their lack of representation in another area of a man's world. Rather, there are still unspoken ways in which women are disenfranchised. If a search committee does not make an effort to diversify the applicant pool, women are at a distinct disadvantage. If they are considered in the applicant pool and then are able to secure the position and they still have to face the myriad other challenges- a "chilly climate," lack of understanding from the workplace in balancing work and family, few female mentors with whom to collaborate, just to name a few- then women are still left out of a dialogue that should and truly needs to have both males and females. The overwhelming message that was gleaned from the data was that in 2012, gender still matters as it has for centuries. Women have made strides and have helped in breaking the glass ceiling to the some extent. Perhaps the climate is not as chilly as it once was, but reaching the university presidency as a female is not an easy task. The participants in this study discussed a myriad of obstacles that they encountered during their rise. Though some of the participants did not explicitly say that being a woman or aspects of being a woman were barriers, they did allude to the fact that gender was important in the position

that they had. Age, physicality, and being a single mother were areas that the participants discussed as possible impediments while traveling their individual path.

How Do Female University Presidents Live the Balance Between Career and Family?

Career and Family Balance

The idea of balance and finding it were aspects of the presidents' lives that they were open to discussing. Though these participants seemed to have enough support to balance a career and family, the literature tells us that many females are not so fortunate. Some females decide not to work at research universities because the worry that they will not have the time to give to both a family and a demanding job. One of the participants discussed that she was a single mother when she was working on her bachelor's degree. She would do her homework with her children after finishing other household duties. This reiterates the literature in that many times women are held responsible for much more of the family roles than are men (Basinger, 2001; Mason, 2009).

Also in regards to balance was the fact that it was difficult to determine a clear delineation between professional and personal goals. None of the presidents mentioned wishing to leave their post, at the time of the interviews, and the three were still serving in this capacity. All of the participants discussed projects they would like to complete one day or that they are currently in the midst of completing. Many of the projects and initiatives dealt with the university and continuing to make improvements to it. Little was mentioned as to goals that dealt with some aspect outside of the university.

Balance of family and career did not seem to be as much of a challenge for these participants as the literature might suggest. This could be due in part to the fact that the

participants became presidents later in life and either their children were older or they did not have children. Even so, one of the participants mentioned other family obligations that now include taking care of grandchildren and parents, which echoes the research (Mason, 2009). If one looks back at the traditional pipeline beginning with that of a faculty member position, it is unfortunate that many women are not able to fully begin this career path. Many females choose not to attempt work at a research university for fear that they will not be able to juggle family and work. It makes sense that if one cannot start the pipeline, one cannot complete the journey that ends with the university presidency. One way that women are able to negotiate this balance is to accept positions at the community college level, which seems to be more conducive to the family (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly, 2007). For those who choose not to work at a community college, pressures from research universities still remain. The most important time to research is during tenure-track years, assuming that she has reached tenure-track status at all. Coincidentally, these pivotal career years also often occur at the time of childbearing years (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twombly). With or without children, one study reported that nearly 40% of its female respondents stated that they maintained the household (Howard-Vital & Brunson, 2006) as well as maintaining a career in higher education. The literature abounds with proof that women do have a more difficult time at striking the balance between career and family. Again, the fact that the participants in this study did not seem to have as great a difficulty as the literature would suggest could have much to do with the time in their careers that they became president. Still another possibility is the fact that the participants tenacity would not allow them to see that they might have or have ever had a challenge balancing career and family. In

fact, not recognizing or not acknowledging this difficult balance could have been a reason as to why it was so very difficult to discern a difference between personal and professional goals. Though the question was posed as two separate entities, it was problematic to tell the two sets of goals apart because there was so much overlap between the two. This suggests that perhaps there is little or no balance that can be achieved between work and family or between work and personal life or both. Even further still, this prompts one to wonder if this is because a female in the role of president is aware that the odds are stacked against her in many, if not most areas of her job and to admit that she has a lack of work-life balance could be seen as a sign of weakness. From another angle, however, it seems that women who are able to achieve some semblance of a balance have the opportunity to lead a more fulfilling life. Women are able to participate in both worlds. They can care for a family at home and tackle work in the office. Due to patriarchy, men may not be as fortunate in that it is expected that they focus the majority of time on their work rather than family life.

Spirituality

Spirituality surfaced in some form for each of the participants during the course of the interviews. The belief in fate, destiny or a higher power surfaced in the data from each of the participants. They all mentioned a belief in a higher power or some sort of belief that things happen for a reason in at least one point during the interviews. It seems that this belief in something quite intangible allowed them to be risk takers. Research has suggested that females can prosper from challenges, as did these women (Madsen, 2008). The three participants either mentioned God directly, or discussed feeling that something brought them to their position in life. Perhaps this feeling or belief system allowed them

to take risks and accept the challenge of the role of university president. Workplace spirituality is one means of coping with the demands and potential overload of any particular job (Altaf & Awan, 2011). From this study, and many of those referenced, it is easy to see that the demands of a university president could potentially be overwhelming for anyone, but especially for a female if she is indeed faced with the tightrope act that so many men do not have to follow. Spirituality also lends itself to a sense of interconnectedness and trust (Marie, 2011) with the workplace. Perhaps this interconnectedness is what we are witness to regarding a lack of discernment between work and personal life. The participants in this study all seemed to be at peace in their current roles, and quite possibly this was something they found through their spirituality. Maybe this is yet another coping mechanism for being a female in a male-dominated workplace.

What Can Ultimately Be Learned From the Paths of the Participants?

The presidents shared information about their paths and what we can learn from them. First, it is important to note that the pathway does not have to be the “male path.” Rather, females are able to use out of the box thinking and creativity to reach the presidency. Women have the unique gift of being females and thus can view situations and challenges with a different lens than that of their male counterparts. It was necessary to discover whether the participants had set out to be a university president from the beginning of their careers or developed this goal at some point throughout their careers. Traditionally, those who have reached the presidency have traveled through a certain pipeline (Burton, 2009; Hamilton, 2004; Wessel & Keim, 1994) that usually begins with a faculty position. Seemingly, all of the participants did not follow the traditional path to

the presidency. It was clear that none of the participants had set a goal of holding a university presidency. Rather, the participants took hold of opportunities that came about in their particular pathways. All of the women were able to use past job experiences, recommendations, or both to secure the post as university president. One participant mentioned that "...it was never a goal for me to be president, and in fact, I remember when they were interviewing me, because...they asked me if I would be willing to interview for it." She went on to say she was not sure if she would be a better candidate than any other, but she knew what she could offer to the position. The other two participants spoke of similar experiences regarding not having originally set the presidency as a goal.

While not aspiring to the presidency, the participants were seemingly propelled to the post by their strong professional reputations and the body of work that accompanied them. For all of the participants, the good standing that they had from prior work history either in other higher education positions or other fields ultimately aided them in securing the post as university president. The characteristic of tenacity had a multiplicity of uses for the participants. We should note that someone may take notice of this characteristic as well as one's goal oriented nature. This recognition could lead to opportunities for the future. One participant noted the presidency was her first post in a university setting and indicated she was actually asked to interview for the job. Another participant worked in higher education for a number of years in various roles including faculty member, department director, and university vice president before assuming the role of president.

Participants were asked about the gender gap in higher education administration to elicit evidence of any changes that they thought could have occurred throughout the

course of their careers. The question was also presented to see if the participants might be able to offer a particular reason as to a change, or the lack thereof, in the gender gap. The participants pointed out that they view the gap as having changed somewhat. One president said, “we have made slight gains but it’s been very minimal.” Another spoke to the fact that colleges and universities are enrolling and graduating more females than males at the present time. She reported that, “66 percent of our students are women in this university. And... that is the same story all over the place.” Nationwide, females make up over 50 percent of the total enrollment at degree-granting institutions (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). However, of all of the presidents in her university system, she is the only female. Yet another participant pointed to history as one of the factors that changed the gender gap by pointing out that during World War II, there were more females forced to join the world of working outside the home. She submitted that this eventually led to an increase in the number of women who also decided to take part in higher education (Renn, 2008). Looking at the change in the gender gap throughout the careers of the participants led to evidence of the fact that the gender gap still remains in higher education. Perhaps the most compelling evidence that a gender gap remains is the reference by the participants to the small number of females in executive leadership positions at universities. Most of the participants mentioned the fact that they were either the only female in their respective university system or one of only a small number of female presidents. These statements further speak to the unbalanced number of females taking part in higher education administration, especially in the role of president (American Council on Education, 2007).

It was evident that the gender gap does still play into the work of the participants, even though one participant stated that gender had nothing to do with her work. When asked if the gender gap played a role in her work she replied, “Not mine. At all. At all. They’re my buddies...I work very well with men, and I work very well with women...and if there was another woman president that would be great.” Upon further analysis of the transcripts from this participant, it seems that her answer was strongly based on her interpretation of the question itself. Seemingly, she thought that she was gender blind in her interactions with people. This interpretation of the question was further reiterated when she explained that she worked well with males and females, a suggestion that gender did not matter.

The presidents offered ways in which to help narrow this gap. Possible options mentioned were having the hiring committee be “gender blind” so that bias is not left as an option. Studies show recognition of the need to diversify the university presidency (Hamilton, 2004; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Turner, 2007). Another solution was that of furthering mentorship and leadership programs for those who may be interested in a university presidency (Brown, 2005). One president offered that, “part of that is for us to be more actively... developing leadership types of programs...in formal and informal ways.” Brown also discusses mentorship as an important part of not only recruiting females to the presidency but also an invaluable means of preparing them for the role. Similarly, Lane (2005) writes about the fact that mentoring allows the accomplishments of female leaders to be showcased in order to present the impact they have on school and community.

All of the participants would have changed certain aspects of their journeys for various reasons. The central idea of making changes both professionally and personally further substantiates the overlapping nature of professional and personal goals. To further explain, some participants had aspects of their personal lives that they would have changed in order to further themselves professionally. Likewise, some participants had elements of their journey that they would have changed professionally in order to move forward personally. Again, the theme of spirituality materialized. One of the presidents stated, "I know that this is God's plan for me in my life and it's all about Him and His purpose." She had the feeling that she had arrived at her position for a reason. The participants thought that even when situations whether personal or professional were not ideal, there was some reason that they occurred. "So...maybe they [job opportunities] were...put...in front of me because, you know, that was what was supposed to be," stated another. In the end, the decisions that the participants decided upon led them to the presidency so it was difficult to say that they would have unequivocally changed the paths that they took or the barriers that were placed in front of them.

It is not enough to discuss the implications of this research or any other study. Rather, as a community of scholars and those working for social justice, we must offer sound recommendations for further practice. Perhaps, those who hold the power to make decisions at the university level will take heed. Following are recommendations for future practice and further research.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Based on the themes gleaned from this data and ultimately the implications that were generated, there are several recommendations for future practice that can be made.

First, search committees should be well aware of the leadership attributes that females contribute. Females bring a skill set different than that of men. This is something that can be used to the advantage of an institution of higher education, especially since most constituents of a university are female. University governing boards should also be aware of the leadership attributes that females contribute and should actively seek out university presidents who are reflective of the universities they will represent. This is for the same reason attributed to the search committees referenced above. In addition, university administrators should make it a priority to identify females currently working in higher education as potential future candidates for a university presidency. This is especially important with the projected number of presidents who are deemed to retire in the coming years. Women aspiring to the presidency should actively seek out mentors who can help guide them while on the journey and once they are in the role. In general, however, the onus should not be put on the female as much as the institution itself. The university should be willing to seek female leaders in order to have a leader who is more representative of the student body. More importantly, the university should want to show its female population a strong woman leader so that they are not tempted to shy away from other higher education avenues because they continually see females in isolated leadership positions and decide not to take part.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings and the implications of this study, there are other studies that might possibly be conducted that would contribute even more knowledge to the field of higher education administration research. A future study could be conducted to include university presidents from all states so that a more comprehensive study might be done.

An even more focused study could revolve around female minority university presidents in Texas and across the country. If the female voice in the university presidency is silenced, then the female minority voice in the university presidency is even more inaudible

Recommendations for Women

I feel it important to note that there are certain recommendations for women, whether or not they are aspiring to the presidency. Do not fear the paradigm as you can challenge it. Do not be afraid to cultivate alternative pathways. Not everything has to be done according to a model or prescribed path. Rather than relying on a set of rules, be open to knowing what that traditional path may be, but tailor the journey to your specific goals and characteristics. The path and outcomes may be unexpected, but this can also be liberating. Think creatively and outside of what is traditional or normal. Be open to unexpected opportunities that could be waiting just around the bend in the pathway. Rejoice in the fact that you are female and though balance may be difficult to achieve, we have that unique option, to even attempt that balance.

My Future Research Agenda

One area that fascinated me throughout this research was the number of minority female university presidents in Texas, in one city in particular and continuing into South Texas. This would be an interesting study to conduct, in order to compare their collective experiences to other female university presidents in Texas.

Concluding Thoughts and Reflections

This research has been more than eye-opening for me. It has in fact been life changing, so much so that I was compelled to add an epilogue at the end of this research.

The year is 2012, and the progress that has been made for women in education is nothing to scoff at. Just as Rome was not built in a day, we must recognize that change is arduous. However, we are at a crossroads where societal and institutional changes can and must be made. If not we are at risk of losing a way of thought, a way of being that is inherently female. In earnest, I do not feel that as feminists we are asking that women take over the world. Rather, I feel that it is about leveling the playing field. It is about giving a voice to the female perspective. It is about making our culture balanced. Truly, the question is will we do it?

EPILOGUE

As I complete this literal and figurative chapter of my life, I reflect on what it is that I have learned throughout this process. I am so thankful that the participants were gracious enough to share with me their thoughts, ideas, and personal stories. What they shared with me through this study has made the research more real to me and more applicable to my life.

I am reminded of a conversation that I had with a professor and mentor while working on my Master's degree. As we discussed the next steps of my educational career, the question was posed to me, "Can't you do both?" This was in reference to my wanting to pursue a Ph.D. and other career aspirations. Though I had always thought myself to be a strong, independent, and driven female with a love for feminism and its ideals, I did not realize that at that time, I was somewhat programmed to believe that I had to choose one or the other. Similarly, as a society we impose this thinking on females not just in the area of education and career, but between career and family, education and family and many other combinations. The end result is that we do have females in a variety of positions and from different walks of life who are constantly forced to choose between something or someone, or both. As we are well into 2012, it is peculiar to me that this is something that females still have to consider as an accepted part of life. If one refers back to the section in chapter three that discusses my impetus for this research, one will find that it expresses my interest in one day becoming a part of the university system. As

stated previously, I have learned much from conducting this study. As a female working full-time in a demanding job and going to school to complete this degree, I can attest that it has not been easy. For approximately two years of this degree program, I worked three jobs and at some points took nine semester hours. I share this now because thinking of juggling the responsibilities of a university presidency coupled with a family and some semblance of a personal life it quite daunting. And my husband and I do not even have children at this point. Though I have an amazing support structure in my family, friends, and coworkers, I am not sure how I would manage a family and the job of a university presidency. More importantly, I am not sure that I would want to. Does this make me less of a woman? Does this make me more transparent as an individual in that I must be honest? Or is this just a result of my reality as a female in higher education? Have I fallen into the trap of “opting-out” of the university atmosphere because I’ve been programmed to believe that I cannot do both before I’ve even tried? Because of this study, I have perhaps been left with more personal questions than I had before I began, but I take with me a sense of empowerment. I feel that as a female, I do have the unique opportunity to be worker and family member, family member and worker. I can give myself to both entities. I am not denying that it is and will be difficult, but I feel hopeful that a balance can be achieved. I look forward to relying on my unique skill sets and creativity that are in part bestowed upon me because I am female in order to accomplish the tasks that are set before me in both worlds of family and work.

I struggled with whether or not I should include this information in my dissertation. The paranoid thoughts that entered my head included future university employers reading this work and thinking that I had thrown in the proverbial towel before

they even interviewed me. Then I worried that perhaps by not being transparent, I was doing an injustice to my research and to the three participants who so willingly took part in this study. Most importantly, I was troubled that females who are aspiring to the university presidency might not get the true picture of what this research means. I wondered if by leaving this epilogue out of the final copy, I was doing a disservice to the audience I intended to help in the first place. Those who read this work and are made more aware of the world that they are entering are my concern and stimulus for conducting this study and for these reasons, I had to be candid about the ways in which this study impacted my life. The women who participated in this study were, and are, trailblazers in the field. They overcame barriers even when they may not have always recognized that there were hurdles in their way. It is my hope that as a society we will see even more instances of females in presidential roles, to a point that we are not researching why there are so few females in these positions, but what wonderful goals they are achieving because they are there.

Quite honestly, I am not exactly sure what my future will hold. I am not sure that I still want to become a university president. Do I have what it takes? Possibly. If not, do I feel confident that I would be able to learn what I needed to hold the position? In other words, do I have the tenacity to make the journey? Probably. Do I have the important support systems in place to give me motivation? Yes. Do I have a husband who is essentially willing to be a wife and a husband so that I may pursue my career? Without a doubt. Do I have the spirituality or the faith in God that He will guide me if I do indeed arrive at this role? Certainly. Do I want to arrive at this role? I'm not sure. Only time will tell.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE OF THEMATIC MEMO

Data sources	Memo	Supportive of Theme
<p>-Curriculum vitae</p> <p>-interview questions regarding career paths</p> <p>“No. It was never a goal...I was approached...”</p> <p>“ I would say originally it was not...I really had...a goal long term to be VP of Finance...”</p> <p>“When he announced his plans to retire about 6 years ago, he asked if I was interested and I said ‘yes’.”</p> <p>“Did I ever dream that I would be a university president? Are you kidding? I would have said you guys are nuts, you know.”</p>	<p>“CV, quotes and career path info reiterate the non traditional path she took.”</p> <p>“Not in accordance with pipeline literature.”</p> <p>“Does not follow what the literature says.”</p> <p>“Somewhat different from pipeline lit.”</p> <p>“Did not seek the presidency.”</p> <p>“Presidency was not a goal.”</p>	<p>Unintentional nature of the presidency</p>

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE OF THEORETICAL MEMO

Data sources	Memo	Supportive of Theme	Correlation to Feminist Standpoint Theory
<p>-University websites quoting that she is the first female president at the respective university</p> <p>-Press releases from university and local newspapers regarding a female president</p> <p>“And I had two kids and I was by myself...”</p> <p>“...if there was another woman president...we go shopping together...”</p> <p>“Early on, my gender and my age were barriers as well as my size as I am on the petite side.”</p> <p>“...the women in those areas are much, much less percentage wise.”</p>	<p>“Gender still matters in 2011.” (year at the time of the memo)</p> <p>“Interesting- never thought of being petite as an issue.”</p> <p>“No barriers? Clearly there are...”</p> <p>“Single mother, low wages...”</p> <p>“Taking care of parents and grandchildren.”</p> <p>“Didn’t perceive as a barrier because she experienced a male-dominated field within a field.”</p>	<p>Gender</p>	<p>-Multiple standpoints equals a more complete understanding (Haraway, 2004)</p> <p>-They bring a particular worldview, reflecting on experiences (Nielson, 1991)</p> <p>-Double-consciousness (Brooks, 2007)</p> <p>-Materialization of FST in the 60s and 70s (Brooks, 2007)</p> <p>-Gender gap for minorities (Collins, 1986, 1989, & 2000)</p>

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